

The Freethinker

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IN 1955 I gave two broadcast talks on Morals without Religion, in which I suggested that Scientific Humanism was the natural successor to Christianity. The broadcasts caused some excitement: and many Christians protested, with varying degrees of vehemence, that it was a pity I did not know more about the religion I had so irresponsibly attacked.

I thought there might be something in this. Up to the time of the broadcasts, I had been interested in philosophical theism rather than in historical Christianity, about which I knew no more than the average layman who has had a nominally Christian education. So I decided to fill this gap in my knowledge.

In the last few years I have studied the Bible diligently, and now, I suspect, know a good deal more about it than the average vicar; and I have also read many books about the origins and history of the Church. This reading has altered my view profoundly.

At the time of the broadcasts, I held two assumptions that were common among the more highbrow type of sceptic. These were, (i) that Jesus, though he was deluded in believing himself to be the long-awaited Jewish Messiah, was, nevertheless, a great moral teacher, and a man of outstanding moral excellence, and (ii) that though Christianity is now rapidly being outgrown, it was a great force for good in its day. In the light of wider knowledge, both assumptions now seem to me to be false. I now incline to the view that the conversion of Europe to Christianity was one of the greatest disasters of history.

"Gentle Jesus"

To deal first with the personality of Jesus. If one reads the Gospels with a fresh mind, one gets a picture of the founder of Christianity that is quite startlingly different from the traditional "gentle Jesus". The conception of Jesus as meek and gentle may derive in part from his refusal to plead his cause before Pilate. But Jesus may well, by this time, have identified himself with the "suffering servant" of Isaiah 53 ("He is brought as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so he openeth not his mouth")—and have been consciously fulfilling the role for which he believed he was prophetically destined. In his preaching, he continually extolled loving-kindness and meekness, but, as so often happens, his practice fell short of his precepts. He was, it is true, gentle and affectionate towards his disciples and towards those who took him at his own valuation: and he was tolerant towards self-confessed sinners. But he was a fanatic; and, like most fanatics, he could not tolerate disagreement or criticism. Towards the Pharisees and others who were sceptical of his messianic pretensions, he was often savagely vindictive. Any hint of criticism, any demand that he should produce evidence for his claims, was liable to provoke a torrent of wrath and denunciation. Most of Chapter 23 of St. Matthew's Gospel, for example, is not, as we are encouraged to regard it, a lofty and dignified rebuke: it is what on any other lips would be described

as a stream of invective. "Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye are like unto whited sepulchres, which, indeed, appear beautiful outward, but are within full of dead men's bones, and of all uncleanness . . . Ye serpents, ye generation of vipers, how can ye escape the damnation of hell?" This can hardly be called loving one's enemies.

Jesus, in fact, was typical of a certain kind of fanatical young idealist: at one moment holding forth, with tears in his eyes, about the need for universal love; at the next, furiously denouncing the morons, crooks and bigots who do not see eye to eye with him. It is very natural and very human behaviour. But it is not super-

human. Many of the great men of history (for example, Socrates) have met criticism with more dignity and restraint.

Historical Christianity

To turn next to historical Christianity. It is widely assumed that organised Christianity has been a great force for good. But this view can be maintained on one assumption only: that everything good in the Christian era is a result of Christianity, and that everything bad happened in spite of it. But, as a matter of historical fact, many of the worst features of life in the ages of faith (and later) have stemmed directly from the teaching of the Church. Outstanding among these features are the doctrine of hell, intolerance and persecution, anti-intellectualism, asceticism, otherworldliness, and the condonation of slavery.

The hideous doctrine of eternal torment after death has probably caused more terror and misery, more cruelty and more violation of natural human sympathy, than any religious belief in the history of mankind. Yet this doctrine was unambiguously taught by Jesus. "The Son of Man shall send forth his angels, and they shall gather out of his kingdom all things that offend, and them which do iniquity; and shall cast them into a furnace of fire: there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth" (Matt. Ch. 14): "Then shall he say also unto them on the left hand, Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire . . . And these shall go away into everlasting punishment" (Matt. Ch. 25). "He that shall blaspheme against the Holy Ghost hath never forgiveness, but is in danger of eternal damnation" (Mark, Ch. 3).

The Roman Catholic Church still teaches the doctrine of eternal punishment, but the current tendency among Protestants is to say that Jesus's pronouncements on this subject were "symbolic". But no one has yet answered the question why, if Jesus did not intend his statements about hell to be taken literally, he made them in a form that ensured that they *would* be taken literally. Why, in other words, did he deliberately mislead his hearers? If he was God, he must surely have been able to foresee what disastrous results would follow.

Intolerance and Persecution

No other religion has such a bloodstained record as Christianity. During the ages of faith the Church argued,

VIEWS AND OPINIONS

Christianity: The Debit Account

By MARGARET KNIGHT

not illogically, that any degree of cruelty towards sinners and heretics was justified, if there was a chance that it could save them, or others, from the eternal torments of hell. Thus, in the name of the religion of love, hundreds of thousands of people were not merely killed but atrociously tortured in ways that make the gas chambers of Belsen seem humane.

Europe, also, was frequently devastated by religious wars, which destroyed a far higher proportion of the population than the global wars of the twentieth century. During the Thirty Years' War, for example, reduced the population of Germany by a third.

Anti-intellectualism

Jesus exhorted his followers to "become as little children", and the Church throughout history has extolled credulity, and feared and distrusted the free intelligence. During the Dark Ages the Church was in control of education, and for centuries scarcely anyone who was not a potential priest learned to read or write. One of the most persistent fallacies about the Christian Church is that it kept learning alive during the Dark and Middle Ages. What the Church did was to keep learning alive in the monasteries, while preventing the spread of knowledge outside them. To quote W. H. Lecky, "The period of Catholic ascendancy was on the whole one of the most deplorable in the history of the human mind . . . The spirit that shrinks from enquiry as sinful and deems a state of doubt a state of guilt, is the most enduring disease that can afflict the mind of man. Not till the education of Europe passed from the monasteries to the universities, not till Mohammedan science, and classical free thought, and industrial independence broke the sceptre of the Church, did the intellectual revival of Europe begin" (*History of European Morals*, Ch. IV.). Even as late as the beginning of the nineteenth century, however, nine-tenths of Christian Europe was illiterate.

Asceticism and Otherworldliness

Jesus was a celibate, who appeared to regard sexual love as displeasing to God. "The children of this world marry, and are given in marriage: but they which shall be accounted worthy to obtain that world, and the resurrection from the dead, neither marry nor are given in marriage" (Luke, Ch. 20). "There be eunuchs, which have made themselves eunuchs for the kingdom of heaven's sake" (Matt., Ch. 19). This tendency was even stronger in Paul. "It is good for a man not to touch a woman . . . But if they cannot contain, let them marry: for it is better to marry than to burn" (I Cor., Ch. 7). This attitude accounts in part for the strong neurotic and masochistic strain in Christianity.

Jesus believed that the Last Judgment was at hand "Verily I say unto you, ye shall not have gone over the cities of Israel until the Son of Man become" (Matt. Ch.10). "There be some standing here that shall not taste of death, till they see the Son of Man coming in his kingdom" (Matt., Ch. 16). "This generation shall not pass till all these things be fulfilled" (Matt., Ch. 24). "The kingdom of God is at hand" (Mark, Ch. 1).

Jesus's moral teaching was therefore directed mainly towards getting believers into heaven; he showed little concern for the affairs of this world. Later, the Church ceased to believe that the end of the world was imminent, but it still held that this life was no more than a momentary prelude to eternity, and of little importance except as a preparation for the life to come. Thus throughout most of its history the Church has been indifferent to social progress and social reform. It has encouraged its members to regard suffering and misery as part of the inscrutable decrees of Providence; to be patient under

wrong and oppression; to accept evil instead of resisting it: all in the certainty that things would be put right in the next world. To a privileged minority this attitude has obvious advantages, in that it helps to keep the unprivileged majority resigned to their lot, but it has retarded human progress for centuries. The emancipation of slaves and of women, and factory reform in the nineteenth century are three progressive struggles which the laity waged themselves with little or no support from the clergy.

Slavery

There is no justification for the common claim that Christianity was responsible for the abolition of slavery. The negro slave trade—a far more infamous practice than slavery in the ancient world—was initiated, carried on and defended by Christian men in Christian countries. To quote H. A. L. Fisher, "It is a terrible commentary on Christian civilisation that the longest period of slave-raiding known to history was initiated by the action of Spain and Portugal, France, Holland and Britain, after the Christian faith had for more than a thousand years been the established religion of Europe" (*History of Europe*, Chap. 23).

The abolition of slavery took its first impetus from the French Revolution. It was largely the work of unbelievers. Christians, like William Wilberforce, who opposed the slave trade were far from typical: the attitude of most of the Churches towards abolition was in America actively hostile, and in Britain (to use Wilberforce's own words) "shamefully lukewarm". The Churches, of course, had no difficulty in citing scriptural authority for their attitude. The Old Testament sanctions slavery (cf. Leviticus 25, 44-46): the New Testament contains no condemnation of it: and St. Paul told slaves to obey their masters (Colossians, 3, 22). (The Greek word for slave, *doulos*, is wrongly translated in the New Testament as "servant".)

The Establishment

The indictment against Christianity is formidable: and when Christians today grow indignant about obscurantism, intolerance and ideological persecution in Communist countries, they would do well to remember that the Church in the ages of faith had a far worse record. This is not to deny that the Church has also done much good; so, too, has Communism. But the crucial fact, surely is that, as Voltaire remarked, men who believe absurdities will commit atrocities. One of the best ways to improve men's behaviour is to enlighten their minds: and today, against the strong opposition of the Church and the Establishment, Scientific Humanism is attempting to do just that.

CHRISTIAN UNITY

THE Convocation of Canterbury, giving much time and thought yesterday to the cause of Christian unity, was not allowed to conduct its deliberations merely at the level of pious hopes or declarations of ecclesiastical intent. The Bishop of Bristol, Dr Oliver Tomkins, saw to that.

The Bishop told the Convocation on the second day of the present group of sessions, that Church unity was "something that could happen in our own lifetime".—*The Guardian* (21/1/65).

The phase in the Roman Catholic Church's ecumenical movement initiated by Pope John, and which his successor had led us to understand he would continue, was instead, closed today by Pope Paul.

In addressing his weekly audience, the Pope warned Catholics that they must not seek to minimise, or erase, controversial dogma which was unacceptable to non-Roman Catholics, "because Christianity is divine truth and is not ours to change, but only ours to ascertain and accept".—*The Guardian* (21/1/65).

Culloden's Field

By F. A. RIDLEY

It is not often that I feel inclined to praise BBC Television, for the most that can fairly be said is that it is usually rather better (and less profit-hungry on account of its governmental status) than is ITV. But I certainly must give it full marks for its recent (December 15th, 1964) splendidly produced documentary on the last battle on British soil—on Culloden Moor.

The battle took place on April 16th, 1746, and resulted in the final rout of the Jacobite army of the young Pretender, Charles Edward Stuart, and in the final ruin of the dynastic cause of the ill-fated Stuarts. As such Culloden must be held to rank as one of the decisive battles in the history, not only of Scotland but of Britain. For it guaranteed the then recent establishment of the Hanoverian dynasty and the Protestant succession, against the restoration of the absolute monarchy of the Catholic Stuarts.

Unfortunately, as appeared with terrifying clarity in the recent documentary, victory was attended by horrifying atrocities on the direct orders of the victorious Hanoverian general, the Duke of Cumberland, younger son of George II; atrocities fully comparable with those perpetrated sixty years earlier (after the last battle on English soil at Sedgemoor in 1685) at the expense of the unfortunate Somerset followers of the Duke of Monmouth.

The Battle of Culloden, as was vividly portrayed on TV, was not actually very severe from a purely military point of view for the odds were by then too obviously unequal. The Hanoverian army was not only nearly double that of the Jacobites (9,000 against 5,000), but had also an overwhelming superiority in every technical respect. One would assume that the battle's chief military importance lay in the fact that it seems to have been perhaps the first example of a modern colonial battle in which an army equipped with modern cannon and firearms utilised its technical superiority to "contain" and scientifically annihilate an army of ferociously brave, but primitively equipped barbarians—as the Highland clansmen still were who were out in the '45. "Butcher" Cumberland does not seem to have been a particularly good general for only the previous year (May 1745), he had been badly beaten on the Continent at Fontenay by the famous Polish soldier of fortune, Maurice de Saxe, commanding a French army.

But at Culloden there was too much at stake to take risks. For the Pretender (as the Hanoverians styled the legitimate heir of the Stuarts) had already shown his mettle the previous year, by overrunning Scotland in a few weeks and by invading England, when he got as far as Derby before retreating—a decision which (some historians have seriously held) cost the Stuarts the crown of England. Actually a more recent monarch of the Hanoverian line, the late King George V himself once publicly endorsed this view.

For by the time the Jacobites had reached Derby, London was in a panic; the royal family was packing to flee to Hanover and the Bank of England was paying out in sixpences in order to avoid a financial crash. (Incidentally, the present National Anthem was written during this crisis to stiffen Hanoverian morale, and its original version contains a reference to the advance of the Scottish army*.)

The Scottish Highlanders had demonstrated remarkable fighting qualities. For, in the decline of their fortunes the Stuarts had to eschew the support of the more civilised

parts of their former dominions which had been bribed by growing commercial prosperity to support the Hanoverian *status quo*. Scotland, in particular, had greatly benefited materially from her act of union with England (1707) which had thrown open the English colonies to Scottish trade. By the time the '45 started, the only reliable support available to the Stuarts lay in the poverty-stricken and still semi-barbaric Highlands—by far the most backward economic area in Great Britain. But the poverty-stricken Highlanders had one commodity in abundance—courage! A Highland charge, to the skirl of the bagpipes was often irresistible, even to regular soldiers far better drilled and equipped. Already, before 1745 the clans, and capable leaders like the Marquis of Montrose and "Bonny Dundee" (Claverhouse) had put to flight regular English armies at Killiecrankie (1690) and elsewhere. In 1745, under the inspiring leadership of Bonnie Prince Charlie and his able lieutenant, Lord George Murray (whom the documentary described as one of the most brilliant generals in the 18th century), the Highlanders had already routed two English generals leading armies equipped with far superior professional resources—Sir John Cope at Prestonpans (where one Highland charge won the battle in a quarter of an hour) and General Hanley at Falkirk.

By the time of Culloden, Charles's Highland army, ill-equipped for a prolonged campaign, was at its last gasp. Sheer starvation and lack of ammunition forced Charles (against Murray's advice apparently) to accept battle on the wind-swept moor of Culloden where lack of cover made the clansmen mere decoy ducks for the vastly superior fire-power of the royal armies. Even so, the only time the charging Highlanders could get to close quarters (a thrilling moment on TV) they had the better of it, and broke the first English line of infantry. But long-range firearms eventually decided the issue, as so often on colonial battle fields between armies on different technical levels. The eventual rout of the Jacobites was completed: the Stuarts had met their "Waterloo" and so too had the Highland clans.

Scenes of unbelievable ferocity followed, depicted in often gruesome detail in the documentary. For no quarter was given by Cumberland's express order. However, a few Jacobites managed to get away, including Charles who, after incredible adventures, got back to France, where he lived another forty-two years and eventually drank himself to death on the eve of the French Revolution (1788). His lieutenant, Lord George Murray, the real military genius, it would seem, of the '45 escaped also. Among the humbler survivors of Culloden, was one Burns, who eventually settled in Ayrshire and became the father of Scotland's national poet, Robert Burns, and one of the Macdonalds who had broken the English line at Culloden, who followed his leader to France where his son became one of Napoleon's marshals (Marshal Macdonald, Duke of Tarentum).

Naturally the BBC dealt mainly with the military aspects of Culloden, and did so with both spectacularly dramatic scenic effect and remarkably accurate documentation. But, and altogether apart from its purely military aspect, Culloden was actually a most important battle from every point of view, political, economic and religious. For it finally put paid to the Stuart pretensions, and effectively eliminated Jacobitism as a serious historical force.

(Concluded on page 36)

This Believing World

The filming of the story of Adam and Eve in the £5,000,000 Italian production of the Bible has at last been finished—thought it cost the producers an extra £5,000 to eradicate the vaccination marks off Adam's arm. It was almost as difficult to do this as it was to create Eve from one of Adam's ribs. But Adam had later to have his appendix out, and "the joke went around that they were testing his rib-cage" (*Daily Mirror*, January 11th).

★

Instead of God Almighty himself dealing with the creation of all the ready-made animals, the matter was left to a Swiss animal trainer who did his best not to frighten them. He also looked after them as they entered the Ark in (no doubt) army formation, two by two—lions, tigers, elephants, hippopotami, monkeys, eagles, and of course thousands of birds and insects. All with due reverence and humility. We shudder to think that a lion might forget itself, jump on the back of a giraffe and tear it to pieces. Think of this and similar examples of nature red in tooth and claw being given to us as specimens of the Lord's justice and infinite mercy.

★

In the "Sunday Mirror" (January 10th), Miss Anne Allen wanted to know "how on earth can we imagine that God finds either prayer or praise acceptable unless they spring spontaneously from the heart?" She was discussing "Sit down, stand up, sing a rotten hymn . . ." as a prologue to religious teaching at school, and she asked, "What has this to do with religion?" Of course it has everything to do with religion; it is in fact "corporate worship" which in all state schools, perpetuates Christianity by compulsion.

★

Jewish and Atheist parents can take advantage of the clause allowing them to remove their children from corporate worship, but the children hate this because it makes them feel "different"; it labels them as "odd". Again, some children consider "the hymns are rubbish", and "assembly is all for show". Besides, Miss Allen continues, "praying to order or thanking to rota is boring. And surely it is sacrilege to find God a bore?" But can one avoid finding God, a bore.

★

At last we have found a parson who has discovered that Jehovah's Witnesses was first organised by a Pastor Russell, and known as The Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society. It was responsible for some very weird interpretations of Holy Scripture. Russell's successor was Judge Rutherford, who went about the country lecturing to huge audiences, assuring them that "millions now living will never die", though unfortunately he himself was not one of the lucky ones.

★

All this is very old stuff but it has just been re-discovered by the Rev. D. Strudwick of Dulwich who has also found that Russell's writings are "largely ignorant nonsense" which is of course quite true. But does Mr. Strudwick himself not write and preach similar nonsense? Is not "true" Christianity with its eternal life, its miracles, its hell and heaven, just as nonsensical as that put out by Pastor Russell and his followers?

The Soul

If the ape can't be saved
From original sin
Then when did the soul
Of man begin?

K.M.

CULLODEN'S FIELD

(Concluded from page 35)

This had far-reaching implications, for a Stuart restoration with French aid would presumably have extended the "Auld Alliance" (between France and Scotland) to England and would have reduced the vigorously developing England of the generation contemporary with *Rule Britannia* (1740) and of the dawn of the Industrial Revolution to the level of a French client-state, as Scotland had been before its union with England. Such a reorientation of English status and alignments would surely have been reactionary at that time of rapid English maritime and industrial expansion.

Similarly, in the religious field, the restoration of the half-French Roman Catholic Stuarts under the protection of a France that still banned Protestantism, would surely have also put back the clock of history. For which fundamental historic reasons (and despite its revolting atrocities and our sympathy for the loyal men scattered—as the song goes—by exile and death for their hopeless loyalty to the Stuart cause) it seems certain that at least the more progressive side won at Culloden.

But surely progress can never have had more unattractive symbols than were the first four Hanoverian Georges, nor the Protestant succession a more unsavoury defender than was "Butcher" Cumberland!

*The original last verse of *God Save the King* ran as follows:
Lord grant that Marshall Wade
May by Thy mighty aid,
Deliverance bring.
May he sedition hush,
And like a torrent rush,
Rebellious Scots to crush,
God save the King.
[Wade was the Hanoverian commander before Cumberland.]

Religious Instruction on Television

"MASTER, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?" This question asked by the lawyer which prompted the parable of the good Samaritan (Luke, Ch. 10) is—according to a Middlesex headmaster—"a 20th-century question".

The headmaster was one of several teachers interviewed during the ITV inquiry into religious instruction in school (*This Week*, January 21st). Another, a woman, regarded it as a form of indoctrination which shouldn't happen in an educational establishment, and certainly not in a state school. She had come to feel that RI did "positive harm".

Playwright Harold Pinter, filmed addressing a National Secular Society meeting, considered what should replace RI if it were abolished. He suggested nothing. "If something doesn't do anything for its keep, why mourn its passing?"

The Bishop of London admitted that, in terms of producing Christian members, RI "wasn't doing very well". Why should it be taught at all? he was asked by interviewer Desmond Wilcox. Because, the Bishop answered, this is still "notionally and in a great deal of its tradition", a Christian country.

A boy and a girl (seven or eight years old) were also questioned. Asked what was heaven, the boy replied, "I ain't been up there". And the little girl shyly gave as her reason for believing in God, "because the headmistress says so".

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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

Leicester Secular Society (Secular Hall, 75 Humberstone Gate), Sunday, January 31st, 6.30 p.m.: H. J. BLACKHAM, "Human Nature".

Marble Arch Branch NSS (Carpenter's Arms, Seymour Place, London, W.1), Sunday, January 31st, 7.30 p.m.: FRED MCKAY, "Catholicism and Trade Unionism".

North Staffordshire Humanist Group (Cartwright House, Broad Street, Shelton, Stoke-on-Trent), Friday, January 29th, 7 p.m.: A Meeting.

Portsmouth Humanist Society (Friends' Meeting House, 25 Northwood Road, Hilsea, Portsmouth), Friday, January 29th, 7.30 p.m.: W. GREAVES, "Method in Thinking".

Richmond and Twickenham Humanist Group (Room 5, Community Centre, Sheen Road), Friday, January 29th, 8 p.m.: DAVID TRIBE, "Is There Brainwashing in Our Schools?"

South Place Ethical Society (Conway Hall Humanist Centre, Red Lion Square, London, W.C.1), Sunday, January 31st 11 a.m.: H. L. BEALES, "The Hazards of Affluence".

Tuesday, February 2nd, 7.30 p.m.: ARNOLD MARSH, "Clean Air".

Notes and News

OUR Views and Opinions this week, Margaret Knight's "Christianity: the Debit Account", first appeared in the historical magazine, *Past and Future*, published from 34 Hillgate Place, London, W.8. The article is reprinted by permission of the author and the editor of *Past and Future*, Francis Carr.

★

OXFAM, Elspeth Huxley said recently, "ought to devote all its resources to developing and spreading methods that will slow down this suicidal spawning". It was encouraging to learn, in a letter from Margaret Pyke, that applications on behalf of the work of two overseas family planning agencies are now being considered by Oxfam and that "prospects of a favourable decision appear good" (*Daily Telegraph*, 15/1/65). Mrs. Pyke is the Chairman

of the Steering Committee of the Family Planning International Campaign of 69 Fleet Street, London, E.C.4, which is now enlisting support for the agencies. The International Campaign is headed by a distinguished committee, including Lord McCorquodale of Newton (Chairman), Lord Brain, Viscount Chandos, Richard Crossman, Baroness Gaitskell, Cyril Kleinwort, Dr. P. B. Medawar and Sir Vincent Tewson. Perhaps Archbishop Thomas Roberts should now be asked to join.

★

THERE can certainly be nothing but praise for Archbishop Roberts's insistence that contraception and war are vital and related problems which should be "frankly faced and openly discussed". The purpose of *Objections to Roman Catholicism* (which will be reviewed next week by Margaret McIlroy) and of the Archbishop's contribution to it, was, he said (in the speech read for him at Foyle's literary luncheon at the Dorchester Hotel on January 13th) "to air problems which are of intimate concern to thousands of Catholics and, indeed, to the whole world" (*The Birmingham Post*, 14/1/65). James Mitchell of Constables, the publishers, said at the luncheon that it was "terrible" in the 1960s that there should be any question of a ban—"however nice, however remote, however well thought out—on freedom of speech". And the Chairman, Count Michael de la Bedoyere (Editor of *Objections*) referred to "people in high places who make fools of themselves".

★

THE luncheon, for the Anglican Bishop of Woolwich, provided an occasion for "sitting on the sidelines watching other people being massacred". Evelyn Waugh had declined an invitation to be present saying: "I would gladly attend an *auto da fé* at which your guests would be incinerated, I would not sit down to a meal in their company". But Christopher Hollis rightly remarked that the moves to keep Archbishop Roberts away from the luncheon had given *Objections to Roman Catholicism* a "gigantic advertisement".

★

GOVERNOR WILLIAM SCRANTON of Pennsylvania has complained about the terms being demanded by the YMCA of Harrisburg, for its building which the state is anxious to acquire. The Association is asking for the immediate payment of \$395,000, whereas two private appraisals listed the value of the property at \$281,750, and a third gave it as \$292,400 (*Church and State*, December 1964). Moreover, under the terms of the proposal, the YMCA would continue to occupy the site for nearly two years, rent free, getting interest on the \$395,000, and delaying Capitol extension plans. Small wonder that the Governor should complain!

★

"THE church was sound enough and similar to others that we have built. It was just an act of God." This was the comment of a spokesman for the builders of St Brendan's Church, Belfast, which collapsed during recent gales. But the spokesman had a rather more rational explanation of the calamity. The trouble started when the winds broke one of the windows, he said. "This caused a high-pressure funnel of air of such force that it blew the roof off" (*Belfast Telegraph*, 14/1/65). And he added the consoling thought that it would "probably be very many years before such high-force gales occur again". For the record, St. Brendan's, now a total wreck, was built two years ago at a cost of £30,000.

Race Relations and the Population Explosion

By CHARLES WILLIAMS MARSHALL

What are the causes of the so called "population explosion"? Can we explain it and if so can we act on it? Conservative traditionalist, freethinker, Catholic and Marxist will all join together and declare that death control has meant that live births are reaching maturity in increasing percentages and thus setting up the upward cycle in population figures. One should perhaps add here that nutritional improvement (where it applies) could be a marginal contributory factor in increased sexual activity, but it is doubtful whether this constitutes even a moderate cause of the population explosion.

Although conservative and radical may accept the same explanation, a growing split is taking place in the grouping composed of freethinkers and Marxists, as to what action should be instituted to deal with this phenomenon. The orthodox Marxist outlook on the world population explosion is that our planet has a potential to feed three or four times the present population (3,300 million approximately in 1964) if only mankind will create the political conditions in which an expansion of agricultural activity can take place. The main political condition demanded is an end to landlordism so that the farmer (peasant) can negotiate his surplus agricultural production freely, thus acquiring the wherewithal to mechanise and otherwise improve his holding and thus set up a chain of improvement. At present it is claimed with some justification that little incentive exists when the landlord takes sometimes 50 per cent (or even more) of the annual crop.

The freethinker should at this stage ask himself two pertinent questions: firstly will the quality of everyone's living be better if the world's population is pushed up to 7,000 million in the year 2000 (current UN estimate); and secondly, although we might have good grounds for believing at present that food production can be pushed up three or four times, are we justified in thinking that this process of per capita expansion can go on indefinitely into the future?

I am no agronomist, so I am not qualified to pass any opinion on the latter question. On the former I would say that I live in England in 1964, and that we now have a population density of some 820 persons to the square mile, which is about four times that of France and five and a half times that of China. In the town of Harlow, where I live, the Development Corporation is building dwelling units at a density of 23 to the acre. This is high by any standard and, in fact, compares very unfavourably with a density of about 10 houses to the acre that was the standard for the housing of African government clerks when I left Sierra Leone in 1955.

We now come to the moral question (with the political overtones accorded it by Catholics, liberals and Marxists) as to whether the white races have any justification in asking the black, brown and yellow races to restrict their populations. A prime piece of religious and political opportunism was put over to a symposium at the International Eucharistic Congress in Bombay recently by Professor Colin Clark the Oxford agricultural economist. He declared that demands for a population limitation in Africa and Asia contained a strong element of racialism (*Daily Worker*, November 28th, 1964).

Professor Clark may have had something here if he had not (purposely?) overlooked the demand which has built up in Britain since the last war that we too (the white races) should also take part in this voluntary restric-

tion of population growth. Britain is already vastly overcrowded and has a terribly precarious economy, especially agriculturally. This writer for one does not believe that the world owes Britain any obligation to feed the 20 million or so of its population that it cannot at present feed itself. On this reckoning need the freethinker, the liberal or the Marxist be embarrassed to face up to the need to propagate this viewpoint and the general question as to whether Britain can take in other countries' surplus populations, be the latter white, black, yellow or brown? Is it not more morally courageous to fight the stultifying conditions of poverty in one's own country than to be a means of affording the genuine racist his opportunities for misrepresentation and hate by emigrating to a country where an even greater potential for economic misfortune already exists? Did not the Russians themselves in the inter-war years turn back potential immigrants at their borders telling them "Go and fight for the revolution in your own country"?

Some people doubt the truth of the old adage that history repeats itself. Let such persons look up the chapter on Irish immigration into Britain in Frederick Engels's *Condition of the Working Class in England in 1844*. Let him compare the lot of the Carribean, Indian and Pakistani immigrant in Britain today with that of the downtrodden and ill-used Irishman of 1844. And let him, after due reflection, consider whether the liberal forces in the world will make any genuine progress if they follow the present opportunistic machinations of political Catholicism and today's bastardised Marxism.

There is a Marxist aphorism: "a problem only arises when the conditions for its solution are already present in society". There exists in the world today a problem of overpopulation in the sense that current output cannot cater for the needs of the population. The rational conditions for the solution of this problem are twofold. Firstly, we must take immediate steps to utilise current biological knowledge to restrict further growth of population whether in East or West or North or South, and secondly we must immediately set about the task through social and agrarian revolution of bringing output up to the levels required for the proper sustentation of the human population of this planet.

It is my contention that both these steps must go together. Freethinkers must be wary of falling into the Catholic trap of equating demographic control with racialism. If we accept this we tie our own hands, and they will remain tied until the ensuing world chaos and suffering brings to power those whose philosophy relegates individual suffering to the glory of the eventual success of their cause.

A TERRIBLE QUESTION

A mother told me recently that when her child was born, she and her husband were informed that he was very very tiny and that his chance of survival was slight.

"My husband and I prayed together," she said, "and as the weeks went by it seemed our prayer had been answered for the child lived."

When he reached four months, they were able to take the baby home but gradually they realised how very mentally retarded he was. "Did we do right to pray?" she asked.

Excerpt from a letter in the *Birmingham Post* (19/1/65).

Points from New Books

WHY do the faithful kiss the Pope's toe? According to Roger Peyrefitte, St. Leo the Great, while on the throne of St. Peter, cut off his own hand to punish it for a carnal gesture provoked by a good-looking woman who had kissed it. However, many of the Popes felt more like shaking hands with themselves when they had successfully demonstrated their virility. Pope Gregory XIII was the first to legitimate his son, although other Popes had heaped their offspring with honours. The son reciprocated the honour and solemnly presented his father with twelve chamber-pots for the papal chamber. So Gregory XIII was shocked when it was reported to him that Prince Vincenzo Gonzaga was impotent. He ordered the Prince to prove his manhood by taking a virgin's maidenhood before witnesses. All partners to this strange ceremony were to be freed from any censure of sin.

This scandal, a true one, is recorded by M. Peyrefitte in *The Prince's Person* (Secker & Warburg, 18s.), and the author's manifest erudition never obscures the wit and happy ribaldry of the story telling. The affair is indeed prodigious. As the author says in his foreword: "The portrayal of the morals of extinct noble families cannot shock us. But it does make us wonder at the destiny of a Church which has weathered such storms." For, of course, it was impossible to keep the scabrous matter secret, and the world whispered about the cardinals and their rapt interest in the prince's private anatomy. And Roger Peyrefitte does not miss a point.

Her life, she said, lost its meaning after Napoleon's death; and it is true that she was capricious and aimless and that, had she not been a Buonparte, she would not have merited a biography. But Sir Pierson Dixon, as British Ambassador in Paris, lived in the house she loved and where she took her milk baths and washed away the milk odour under a shower of clear water from buckets poured through an aperture in the ceiling by a negro: and so he felt inspired to write *Pauline: Napoleon's Favourite Sister* (Collins, 30s.). Pauline's days of glory were numbered when Napoleon was banished to St. Helena, and she fled to Rome where Napoleon's mother was insisting that angels had wafted the Emperor from his prison to some other country where his health was excellent. The awful thing is that the poor demented woman was encouraged in this belief by Cardinal Fesh, who was so eager to back-up any miracle that he concealed letters received from St. Helena and said their absence proved heaven's intervention! Yet another example of what may happen when one puts one's trust in clerics!

George Bernard Shaw said: "To know nothing is to forgive nothing". Lawrence Langner, author of *G.B.S. And The Lunatic* (Hutchinson, 40s.), reminds us that Shaw made this luminous remark in the stage directions for *Getting Married*. He also reminds us how angry Shaw became in Italy when the Pope forbade women to enter churches in dresses without sleeves and skirts which did not cover their ankles. Shaw argued that any man who attempts to decide that one style of clothing is seductive while another is not must know something about the art of being seductive. Some of the Popes, M. Peyrefitte might have assured Shaw, could have given the playwright a very tart answer! Meanwhile, Mr. Langner's book is a mine of facts about American productions of Shaw.

Amanda Cross has been compared to Michael Innes; and in her detective story, *In The Last Analysis* (Gollancz, 15s.), there are a number of amusing academic Freudian references and a delightful story of a Japanese gentleman and the Trinity. The Japanese scholar says: "Honorable

Father, very good; Honorable Son, very good; but Honorable Bird I do not understand at all".

OSWELL BLAKESTON

The Family Preservation Bill

ON December 4th last the Family Preservation Bill was presented to the House of Commons, read a first time, and ordered to be printed.

It is a short measure, designed, as its sponsor has said, to prevent the dissemination of domestically disruptive doctrines allegedly taught by the Exclusive Brethren, a Christian sect. This body has been severely criticised in the popular press and is reported to have broken up homes and marriages and caused much domestic and social unhappiness by its teachings.

The object of the bill is (as officially stated) to penalise teaching or instruction calculated to encourage the breach of marital obligations or the withdrawal of the love and affection of a parent or guardian from a young child. Fines up to £25 can be awarded for a first offence and £100 for a second.

It is notable that, although the Exclusive Brethren were said to be the target, they are not mentioned in the bill, nor, for that matter, is Christianity as such. The offence is committed when the proscribed teaching is given "solely under the guise of religion". Christians, Roman Catholics and Protestants alike; Jews: and, in fact, all who teach religion of any kind are in danger. But not, curiously enough, an atheist whatever he teaches. The Catholic priest who teaches that the children of a "mixed" marriage not contracted in a Roman Catholic church are bastards; the Christian who promulgates the more anti-social sayings of Christ may well be caught up by the bill. Who would dare to quote Luke 14, 26: "If a man come to me and hate not his father and mother and wife and children and brethren and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple". Or Luke 12, 51 *et seq*: "Suppose ye that I am come to give peace on earth? I tell you, Nay: but rather division. For from henceforth there shall be five in one house divided, three against two and two against three. The father shall be divided against the son and the son against the father: the mother against the daughter and the daughter against the mother: the mother-in-law against her daughter-in-law and daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law." Dangerous New Testament propositions!

This bill is a curious and footling example of heresy-hunting in reverse. The more doctrinaire the teacher the greater his danger. But here Christians are to persecute rather than persecute their fellow Christians with penalties that are modest and financial. No inquisition, no thumb-screw, no rack, no pillory, no stake, no dungeon. All is skimmed milk and water!

The bill will not, of course, reach the Statute Book. It is so badly conceived, so futile, and its consequences so ill-appreciated, that many Christian members will not support it, indeed, may actually oppose it.

To the Freethinker, however, a debate on the bill, if one takes place, is bound to be amusing and could be hilarious. I say this, even though the conduct of the Exclusive Brethren may be considered anti-social and reprehensible. In this sense they can never emulate, much less excel, the Christians of the past who so bloodily demonstrated man's inhumanity to man.

The second reading of the bill is on February 4th when I, for one, look forward to seeing Christian members, both for and against, skating gingerly on very thin ice. Swift's "Big-endians" and "Little-endians" come to life!

C. FRANKLIN

CORRESPONDENCE

KAUTSKY AND CHRISTIAN ORIGINS

If your recent correspondent, Mr. R. Smith, will take the trouble to read *The Role of the Individual in History* by G. V. Plekhanov (a colleague of Karl Kautsky in the Second International) he will perhaps become able in future to criticise Kautsky—and perhaps even me—more intelligently in these columns.

For as this famous Russian (pre-1917) Marxist adequately demonstrates, Marxism (and Kautsky), do not of course deny *in toto* the influence of the individual in and on the processes of historic evolution. Exceptional men like Calvin or Marx himself, obviously influence world history. All that Marxism insists is that their personal influence is in direct proportion to the degree in which they reflect the latent ideas of their epochs. They represent the articulate voices of their contemporaries.

That this was conspicuously so in the case of early Christianity, has been strikingly confirmed since the publication (in 1908) of Kautsky's classic analysis by the post-war discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls, in which prior to the appearance of Christianity as a distinctive cult, we find all its original ideas, the martyred messiah who will return in glory etc., etc. All that Jesus, Paul and company, had to do was to exploit ideas already very much in the air.

In that sense, the Christian cult was the ultimate creation, not of any individual Christ, but of the religious evolution of contemporary Palestine.

F. A. RIDLEY

PS. May I express my appreciation of Dr. Zeitlin's scholarly articles; for no examination of Christian origins can possibly be regarded as adequate which ignores the Jewish traditions themselves, which this eminent scholar summarises so admirably.

F.A.R.

CHRISTIAN CHRISTMAS

I am glad atheists and Christians can agree on at least one point, and that is the celebration of Christmas by those who are not practising Christians. This festival should be abolished for all else, when, I suggest, it would cease to be "outrageous and farcical", for contrary to what Mr. B. Clifton would suggest, there are some people who in all sincerity celebrate the birth of Jesus. I doubt if monopoly capital would fare very well on a truly Christian Christmas.

F. M. NEAL (Miss)

ATHEISTS AND AGNOSTICS

I would like to welcome the statement from Mr. D. L. Humphries (THE FREETHINKER, 15/1/65) that "the two terms are not mutually exclusive but rather complementary or supplementary".

At a recent meeting of the Dundee Humanist Group I addressed young members amongst others under the title "Why you should not believe in God". This meeting proved to be one of the most enthusiastic that we have had and at least two young people joined as a result.

I treated the two terms in question as follows. I said that humanists were fundamentally agnostic, as all reliable democrats must be, in the sense that they willingly admitted that they did not know what life is really all about. However, their own agnosticism at this fundamental level of thinking had the effect of enabling them to say positively that they (the humanists) were sure that nobody who has ever lived could say any different. This included all the popes who had ever lived and all the messiahs and prophets as well!

Having established this fact of being agnostics I then went on to say that the humanists were atheists as well insofar as the published "premiss" of the group in Dundee is that "human problems must be faced in terms of human intellectual and moral resources, without invoking supernatural authority".

I explained that this premiss meant that "we did not accept the Christian nonsense about 'God' or 'the Devil', or angels, or heavenly hosts, or fairies, or ghosts, or spirits, or any of the other things that are brought out to explain certain happenings around us".

I said that humanists were truth-seekers who, like all true scientists, were determined to let no worries about the existence of supernatural beings or influences or forces come between them and the task of understanding the universe in terms of purely natural causes and interactions of natural forces and processes.

I also repeated what I said at the talk I gave to the Glasgow Secular Society in connection with the idea that we had to reject the established theory that the British state was founded on the assumption that the citizens of Britain were expected "to serve God, King and Country". I said that logical humanists

would substitute for these ideas the following alternatives, "Humanity, Democracy and the World".

E. G. MACFARLANE

PEN PAL WANTED

Would any Freethinker be interested in having me for a pen pal? I should love to hear from somebody in London. I am 38 years old.

(Miss) RUTH KRAUSE (New York)
c/o THE FREETHINKER

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