

# The Freethinker

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READERS of ecclesiastical news in the press, whether at the level of the national dailies or of the smallest local paper, can hardly be unaware that there was recently a week of prayer for Christian reunion. Again and again, we have been informed that Anglicans and Methodists are preparing the way for a merger. Joint services are the order of the day. Even the hitherto exclusive Roman Catholic Church has been well to the fore. Roman Catholic priests have spoken at non-Roman churches. Meetings have been addressed on Anglican premises by Fr. Corbishey, SJ and others. Some Roman Catholics, as in Croydon, have put on services especially designed for the attendance of their non-Roman neighbours. From whatever point of view the whole subject be approached, it is clear that at the social level, future considerations must be with the Churches as a single local group rather than with a series of separate denominations. Old sayings that unity is strength come to mind and lead the freethinker to ponder. A unified grouping of this kind could exercise far greater political pressure than could a number of separate units, themselves parted by internal antagonisms. If the present wave of unity continues, ecclesiastical action, especially at the local government level, may recover not a little of its potency.

## Roman Catholic Church

At first sight, it is difficult to see what is happening or to understand its implications. There would seem to have been little unsaying of past doctrinal divisions. The Roman Catholic Church has made various changes as a result of the present Vatican Council. One or two cardinals have made relatively liberal theological speeches. But none of the so-called reforms go to the roots of doctrine. With regard to the mass, it is the essential doctrinal teaching underlying the rite which matters. It cannot matter finally whether the rite be carried out in Latin or in English. Clerical celibacy is nothing more nor less than a mere matter of discipline. Any projected reform leaves the Roman Catholic Church as sacerdotal in conception as it ever was. There are no signs whatever that it is yielding to the inroads of modern biblical scholarship. Even the much-discussed *Objections to Catholicism* appears to be little more than *jeu d'esprit*. The Roman Catholic Church has a long history of reform and self-criticism. Both the medieval Conciliar movement and the sixteenth century Counter-Reformation will spring to mind. Paul V, as pope of the Counter-Reformation, was to the fore in purging away the secularising influences of the Renaissance. But each reforming movement has left the doctrinal basis consolidated and clarified. There is not the least sign that, at the present time, the decrees of the Council of Trent will be undone. On the contrary, it may well be that they will be strengthened in all essential matters.

## Nonconformists

Nonconformity has clearly been losing ground for several generations. It was essentially the creed of the Victorian middle-classes and, as a result of the evangelical revival,

attained a new impetus. Its forms of church government provided a natural alliance with liberalism in politics. An individualist ethic of salvation fitted in well with the individualism of the contemporary social and economic scene. The same type of mind which had produced the nineteenth century stress upon thrift extended itself to such questions as gambling, teetotalism and their natural weapon of Sunday observance. Hence, the chapel-goer adopted a negative attitude towards these matters quite unknown to the Roman Catholic Church which, as Dean Inge once remarked, had far too long a heritage of mental culture to fall into snags of this type. But these moral demands became articles of faith to the

Methodist or the Baptist. It would be interesting to know whether they have been put to the fore in the present crusade for unity any more than, on the same occasions, nonconformist lips have been unsealed and have proclaimed the four centuries of Protestant witness against sacramentalism and sacerdotalism. Perhaps it is not ungenerous to imagine that these would prove to be embarrassing topics at a meeting or service devoted to denominational reunion.

## Church of England

In the same way, one imagines that the Anglican representative at any such gathering has not had his peace of mind violently disturbed by reference to the ejected Puritan ministers of 1662. He himself represents a position of compromise. On the one hand, his Church has retained many of the traditional forms as well as the manner of episcopal government. He likes to think, with a doubtful historical accuracy, of the continuity of his Church with that of the Middle Ages, and to claim that it is he who really represents the Catholic Church in England. A close relationship with the state has bound him up with existing social orders. His ethics have become assimilated to the progress of industrial capitalism and embodied into a somewhat romantic Toryism in politics. Doctrinally, he belongs to a Church which has tolerated a wide compromise in these matters. It contains those whose views are indistinguishable generally from Roman Catholicism. But it also contains a diminishing wing who represent an Elizabethan version of the doctrines springing forth from the Geneva of John Calvin. Again, it contains likewise the Bishop of Woolwich and the heirs of an extreme modernism which the Roman Catholic Church has rejected by papal decree. For the Anglican, the ethical and anti-sacerdotal enthusiasms of the Protestant must be distasteful. They reveal a crudity of approach and are set within an unaesthetic ugliness which will jar on his sensitivities. In the same way, the Roman Catholic Church is both foreign and Irish. To him, it is an unknown territory which his forefathers rejected.

## Divergencies

At first sight, it is difficult to understand what has brought these widely divergent groupings together at the parochial level. Their votaries would like it to be believed

## VIEWS AND OPINIONS

### Reunion All Round

By F. H. AMPHLETT MICKLEWRIGHT

that the feeling for unity springs from nothing less than a contemporary recognition of a common Christianity. But, in fact, they have had some centuries in which to attain this realisation and have failed to do so, a difficult problem despite the claims of the believer. Indeed, a glance at their divergencies may well suggest that the common Christianity is a very wide generalisation and that, when details come to be considered, the divergencies themselves almost suggest different religions. It is difficult to accept the assurance of the devotees, and explanations have to be sought elsewhere. Clearly, the social and economic fields provide the necessary answers.

#### Secular Progress

It has not been too good a time for the Churches. Secularity has more and more pervaded common life in a variety of spheres. There has been a drifting away, and a tendency to disregard the various ecclesiastical demands made upon the social order. Even in such matters as divorce law reform or state educational organisation, secularity can record at least some marks of progress. Non-conformity has withered away. It no longer counts for the vast majority of the population and its Puritan ethic has become something generally disregarded. Its story has been one of recession, whilst its historical identification with the Liberal Party in politics has become something of a popular embarrassment in recent years. The Church of England has been forced to record falling numbers and a lessening grip upon the population, although it has been buttressed by very considerable financial resources and the many benefits of state establishment. It has been these factors which have made it a powerful social force and have led nonconformist eyes to look enviously upon the prospects of reunion.

#### Catholic Influence in Education

At the same time, the Roman Catholic Church has undergone a large increase in numbers. It may be that its aim for the conversion of England is as distant as ever, so far as English people are concerned, and that the newly acquired recruits are drawn from the swollen ranks of Irish and Continental immigrants. But it must never be forgotten that these elements become speedily assimilated into the social system. They become voters with the full rights of citizens, and the Roman Catholic influence is extended thereby within the social sphere. It must indeed have been worm and gallwood to the Anglican episcopate in recent years to find their personal influence within state education diminishing just as a new influence, the Roman Catholic hierarchy, was beginning to make its weight felt in this very field.

#### Vested Interests

Within such circumstances, each has something to gain from the existing strength of the other. Anglican and Non-conformist alike can probably sit lightly to doctrine if it be social and economic interests which are in peril. Some sort of merger or take-over bid is the obvious twentieth century answer to the problem and it is this which is now taking place. But it is this fact which should lead the freethinker to look with concern upon the present situation. From an organisational viewpoint, his movement is small and divided. All that he says about the discrediting of theology may well be true, yet it may be the theological institutions which will beat him by sheer force of numbers and social pressure. They have by-passed biblical criticism and they will as assuredly by-pass any other intellectual problem which arises, even—as the *Honest to God* controversy has shown—the nature of theism itself. But they will stand as institutions representing vested interests in church and state.

The vital battles of the future will not only take place in

the study but in Parliament, in the local council chamber or on the hustings themselves. A freethought movement, aware of the underlying motivations in present-day movements towards ecclesiastical reunion, must be ready to challenge at each of these levels. In fact, its activities must cut far deeper than the very desirable attainment of a wider publicity for the freethought viewpoint. The next vital step is the building up of a movement socially operative and capable of meeting the Churches in their new sphere of reunited activity. Unless it can do this, it may well fail. But, if it can succeed, it may find that it has struck a vital blow, and that the age of rationality and tolerance is not too far away. The issue is not only a battle of belief, it is a clash of social interest; and it is to this end that an emerging freethought movement must now bend its activities in terms of a disinterested service which can alone bring it success.

## The Seal of Confession

By NAN FLANAGAN

SOME people apparently still believe in the seal of confession. I'd like to tell you a few of my experiences of this matter. I was a Catholic till I was twenty-seven and my experience was that the priest broke the seal of confession very easily.

When teaching at Hackney Catholic school I used to take a poor child home with me for the weekend. I soon realised that the headmistress was receiving weekly information of my "misdemeanours". I said to the child who was last with me, "Have you told anyone that we didn't go to mass on Sunday and that I had a boy friend who visited me on Saturday and Sunday?" "I only told the priest in confession and he couldn't repeat it as he forgets everything you tell him immediately", I'll never forget the child's face when I told her what had been happening.

When I was twenty-three, I fell in love. My marriage was opposed by my family because the boy was a Protestant. When I went to confession, I saw at once from the questions the priest asked me that my mother and eldest sister had been before me.

A gardener I knew in Madeira, working for three shillings a day, stole six bananas for his hungry children. As his conscience was pricking him, he confessed to the priest. His master sacked him the next day. A girl I knew there told me that when she became pregnant she confessed to the priest, said her penance, and came out into the road to hear the priest recounting her story to four workmen.

When I was a young girl of sixteen, I went to confession in the convent sacristy. The priest confessing me put his hand inside my blouse and began fondling my breast. I hastily pushed him away and left in distress. Sister who must have been watching from some peephole, caught me and taking me up to my cubicle said: "Strip to the waist, your breasts are developing so much that they are a temptation to the men". She then got a long strip of linen and, winding it round my bosom, flattened my breasts as flat as a pancake. It was instilled into us that if a priest or any man "made free" with us it was our own fault, as we had tempted them. Women were serpents. Years later, I was at an Irish club and a young man said to me, "What lovely breasts you have!" I rushed home for the bandage and hastened to put it on, determined not to be the means of sin to the man.

## The Sunday Debate

SIR FRANK SOSKICE, the Home Secretary, moving a resolution to take note of the report of a departmental committee on Sunday observance legislation (the Crathorne Report) in the House of Commons on February 15th, said that laws dating back to 1448 were of little practical application today. The fact was that Sunday observance law was not easy to fit into twentieth-century conditions. The act of 1625 prohibited "meetings, assemblies, or courses of people out of their parishes on the Lord's Day for any sport or pastime whatsoever." Acts of 1627 and 1677 which prohibited certain forms of travelling and working were also virtually dead letters.

The effective statute which regulated Sunday entertainment and sport was, said the Home Secretary, the Sunday Observance Act, 1780, as amended by the act of 1932. "It is this statute which forbids to this day the opening of public theatres, music, and dance halls, and the holding of sporting events when charges are made for admission."

The departmental committee had recommended that there should be considerable relaxation of the restrictions imposed by the 1780 act. It had proposed that public performances at cinemas and circuses and public dances should be allowed after 12.30 p.m. on Sunday. The same recommendation had been made for sports meetings with the exception of contests where players or participants were paid for taking part.

In proposing a restriction on the opening of theatres, cinemas, and dance halls until after 12.30 p.m., the committee was seeking not specifically to encourage church attendance but to maintain the special character of Sunday as a day which preserved some measure of freedom from compulsory work.

### Few Letters

Only a few letters had been received from the general public. These mainly criticised the relaxations proposed by the committee from the standpoint of sabbatarian principles. The Church of England Board of Social Responsibility had not completed consideration of the recommendations, and it might be a little time before they knew the Church's views.

The committee are clearly of opinion that in modern conditions the teaching of Christian doctrine, and religious observance, cannot be secured by law.

It seems that the Church itself does not desire any such direct assistance, and that activities which were once regarded as profane are no longer so regarded, except by a small minority.

What people can do in their leisure hours on Sunday is governed by statutes enacted to achieve purposes no longer regarded as within the proper function of government, but there is a considerable body of opinion which believes that Sunday should be, in some way, different from the rest of the week.

There may be no objection to participation in recreation and entertainment on that day, but proper regard should be had to the need for adequate opportunity for leisure and worship.

Mr. Richard Sharples (Conservative, Sutton and Cheam) was struck by the "very small amount of controversy" that had been aroused by the report. He pointed out a number of anomalies in the present law and described it as "a complete mess" with regard to Sunday entertainment and sport.

### Lord's Day Observance Society

Mr. Tom Driberg (Labour, Barking) advised the Government not to pay too much attention to the Lord's Day Observance Society. The noise it made was out of all proportion to its weight. He quoted from one of the

Society's pamphlets (*The Lord's Day in Modern Times*):

One wonders at the long suffering of God. As in the days of Methuselah, He is waiting for His people to turn again. Signs have been given to awake the nation out of its lethargy: floods like that at Lynmouth and Canvey Island, train disasters, air and motor racing accidents—because God is still chastening us as children. Let it be our prayer that He will continue and not give us up to our weaknesses.

Mr. Driberg commented:

In other words, the society want there to be more road accidents, more men, women and children killed in road accidents, air crashes, and so on, and believes it is the will of God that human fallibility should lead to these accidents. Could anything be more blasphemous?

The popular identification of some of the Churches with the present "largely oppressive" Sunday was extremely damaging to the cause of Christianity itself, he added. And: the so-called Continental Sunday was actually less Godless than the dreary English Sunday. It was "*par excellence* a family day" in the Latin countries.

### The Committee's View

Mr. Charles Doughty (C. Surrey East), a member of the committee, said that the law was out of date, uncertain, and difficult to enforce. It had no public support, and was little understood or respected. One of the concerns of the committee was that there should be a minimum amount of extra employment on Sundays. One had only to think what would happen if all sports were allowed. Extra police, extra transport workers and so on would be needed.

The committee had, Mr. Doughty said, brought up to date the chaotic law on Sunday opening of shops. The House should make up its mind on the opening of cinemas and theatres.

### The Christian Sunday

Sir Cyril Black (C. Wimbledon) said that the position of those who on general grounds opposed relaxation in the Sunday law had been "woefully misunderstood" by some who had spoken in the debate. "I am not a Sabbatarian, extreme or otherwise," he said. He never kept the Sabbath or advised others to keep it. But he belonged to "a not inconsiderable body of people" who believed that there were sanctions that should be recognised and accepted in connection with the Christian Sunday and its observance. "We are not and we do not regard ourselves as being enemies of individual liberty. We regard ourselves as upholders of liberty in its true and best sense."

Practically every recommendation for relaxation of the Sunday laws involved the employment of people who did not at present work on Sundays, Sir Cyril said.

We have a duty as a House to protect the right of these people, which we wish to preserve for ourselves, to observe Sunday in the way in which they wish to observe it.

Other people should not selfishly require people to work on their behalf on Sundays, for their convenience or entertainment, except, of course, in the case of works of necessity.

He did not understand the committee's case for abolition of the option on the Sunday opening of cinemas. "I believe it would be a tremendous injustice to enforce, by act of this House, the Sunday opening of cinemas in districts where time and time again the people in the locality have voted for their closing."

Sir Winston Churchill, with his great facility for expressing things in a lucid and telling way, had once said: "The Lord's Day is a divine and priceless institution, the birth-right of every British subject". The Christian Sunday as  
(Concluded on page 68)

## This Believing World

We do not know whether "muscular Christianity" exists, but a "multi-denominational group called the Mongrels" (London *Evening Standard*, February 8th) appears to have risen "pheonix-like from the ashes of two defunct theological associations" ready to do battle "on Christian unity" (among other things). Well, why don't they? We are always being told about such organisations, yet never hear of any of them meeting the only people who can give them a run for their money—the Freethinkers of Britain? \*

Of course there is a reason. As the newspaper *Insight* of Christ Church College, Canterbury, sadly admits, it is "apathy". This training college cost £1,000,000 to build and the students share "a brick wall of apathy". Even when the college held its annual meeting with a jazz band in attendance, only nine students danced, and it took another hour for three more to join. \*

The Church of England and chapel attendances are certainly not what they used to be in those happy days of Victorian England depicted so vividly for us by Anthony Trollope. For example, there is the chapel at Grittenham, Wiltshire, where the attendance has dropped from near 100 to 3—a lady and her two daughters. The preacher gives his sermons, hymns follow, and also the collection. The lady herself found it all "very distressing", a rather pathetic understatement. And all this in Protestant England in 1965. We cannot help wondering who will fill our churches and chapels in 2065. Roman Catholics? \*

It seems that divinity students are so anxious to study at Cambridge that they take books from the library and forget to return them. These books form the highest proportion of those missing, the *Evening Standard* informs us (February 6th). \*

The two things which have probably aroused most opposition—more than even the infidel Jews—in the Roman Church are birth control and the marriage of priests, so we can understand why the Vatican has just banned Fr. Pierre Hermand's book, *The Priesthood—Marriage or Celibacy?* Fr. Pierre in fact has been sacked (*The People*, January 31st) for pleading, "Let priests in love marry". The book was first submitted in the usual way to the hierarchy for permission to print, and was "roundly condemned", and Fr. Pierre is now working in a French hospital. \*

According to him, priests live unnaturally; they have affairs, and are forced to live double lives. And they are angry that they cannot marry in a Church which disowns them! But the vast majority of priests are against Fr. Hermand, even if they have a mistress on the sly. So "sex must continue to be taboo". Not many priests have the courage of Joseph McCabe or Emmett McLoughlin who were however lucky enough to "find the Church out" in time, left and got married. McCabe's twelve years in a monastery helped to make him a notable scholar—and a forthright Freethinker. Mr. McLoughlin, now superintendent of a hospital in Phoenix, Arizona, devotes most of his spare time to exposing and fighting Catholic inroads into American life and institutions. \*

Henry Fielding, lively columnist of the "Sun" told this story (February 12th) of a breathless girl who asked John Bird (of *Not So Much a Programme*) after his marriage to the New York actress Anne Stockdale in Chelsea:

"What's it like being married on the same day as Ringo Starr?" Said Bird: "I don't have any religious feelings". "Amen", said Mr. Fielding.

### MEDIUMS AND MURDERERS

IN response to our challenge in *This Believing World* on February 5th, that no medium has ever been responsible for bringing a murderer to justice, we have received a cutting from *Weekend* of January 20-26th. Maurice Barbanell, the Editor of *Psychic News*, who kindly sent us the cutting—and who apparently supplied some of the data for the *Weekend* article—suggests that we should "find another tree to bark up". The article alleges that "many crimes have been solved by clairvoyance" and "Now police believe that 'second sight' could be a powerful new ally". Actually, it seems to have taken the police a long time to come to this conclusion, since the cases cited are about 20 or 30 years old. Indeed, the one that Mr. Barbanell marks for our special attention (the murder of a young Scottish typist, Irene Munro) happened as long ago as 1920.

It would clearly be difficult to check up on such a case now, even granting Scotland Yard permission (which is unlikely) and it is hopeless to give any solution on the scanty data available. Unless, of course, one is a Spiritualist, when the case is closed from the start. Really Mr. Barbanell, we cannot accept hearsay "evidence" of this kind.

### THE SUNDAY DEBATE

(Concluded from page 67)

a day of rest and worship had played a great and glorious part in our history, said Sir Cyril.

It runs like a golden strand through our long national story. It has made a priceless contribution to the character of our people. Many of those outside this House who seek to destroy the legal safeguards of the Lord's Day do so on the pretext of wishing to cater for people's needs. But I think that they would be more frank if they admitted that the real objective and motive of their efforts is the desire to make profits on seven days instead of six.

Mr. W. R. Rees-Davies (C. Isle of Thanet) said that on Sunday nights there were bigger crowds dancing in Dreamland at Margate than on any other day of the week, and the view of magistrates was that they would rather boys and girls went dancing or listened to the Beatles on Sunday nights than be on the streets.

Mr. David Ensor (Lab. Bury and Radcliffe) said all were agreed that we wanted Britain to be a Christian country, but churchgoing could not be got by the passing of acts of Parliament. "The only result of that has been religious bigotry, the Spanish Inquisition, and the appalling atrocities on both the Roman and the Protestant sides after the Reformation."

Sir Edward Boyle (C. Handsworth): "The illogicalities in the recommendations of the report are very considerably less than the present illogicalities in our Sunday laws."

Mr. George Thomas, Under Secretary at the Home Office, said the Government was not ready with proposals. The subject would not be put into cold storage, but the question of Sunday was not one on which any Government could act hurriedly or impetuously "We are going to look at this matter".

Sir Edward Boyle intervened to ask if he was to understand that there was a good chance of the Government introducing legislation on the subject, and Mr. Thomas replied: "The Government will not shirk its duty. But I can only say at present that we will obviously consider what has been said."

The motion was approved.

# THE FREETHINKER

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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, February 28th, 6.30 p.m.: PERCY DOWNEY, "The Wholeness of Life".
- Marble Arch Branch NSS (Carpenter's Arms, Seymour Place, London, W.1), Sunday, February 28th, 7.30 p.m.: Mrs. GILLIAN HOLROYD (Secretary, Agnostics Adoption Society), A Lecture.
- North Staffordshire Humanist Group (Cartright House, Broad Street, Shelton, Stoke-on-Trent), Friday, February 26th, 7 p.m.: A Meeting.
- Portsmouth Humanist Society (Friends' Meeting House, 25 Northwood Road, Hilsa, Portsmouth), Friday, February 26th, 7.30 p.m.: A. BURALL, "Humanism, Morals and Censorship".
- South Place Ethical Society (Conway Hall Humanist Centre, Red Lion Square, London, W.C.1), Sunday, February 28th, 11 a.m.: Professor T. H. PEAR, "First Impressions of a Person—Individual and Social Factors".
- Tuesday, March 2nd, 7.30 p.m.: WILLIAM GREGORY, "Public Opinion Polls".

## Notes and News

THE expected Oxfam decision to extend aid to family planning (Notes & News, 29/1/65) is none the less welcome. The latest bulletin recognises that the hunger problem cannot be solved as long as population is allowed to increase unchecked. It also contains an article on Chile by the Indian High Commissioner reporting that "back-street abortions occurred in 35-40 per cent of all pregnancies in Chile and that 40 per cent of all maternal deaths in the country were caused by abortion". It is this problem, the High Commissioner said, "which has given impetus to the vigorous family planning movement in Chile and other South American countries".

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MANY unfair criticisms are made of the United Nations, wrote Lena Jeger, when welcoming the Oxfam decision (*The Guardian*, 16/2/65), but "one fair matter for regret" has been the UN's continuing refusal to associate family planning with any of its aid schemes". The Roman Catholic countries—as Mrs. Jeger remarked—have blocked every

effort to enlarge the work of the World Health Organisation in this practical way. But there were "two hopeful facts": a UN population conference to be held at Belgrade in August, and the growing interest in family planning in Catholic countries like those of South America. There was no reason why a woman should have a baby every year if she didn't want it, said Mrs. Jeger. A woman's right to "some control over her own reproductivity" was also a question of her own health and status. Mrs. Jeger had found this well illustrated in China, "where demographic arguments fell on deaf ears, but where there was a growing practice of family planning on health grounds, especially among professional women". The International Planned Parenthood Federation now has 38 countries affiliated to it, and in addition over 40 organisations overseas are receiving grants.

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AFTER what the *Scotsman* described (15/2/65) as "hours of iconoclastic but generally good-humoured debate" in the Church of Scotland's Assembly Hall in Edinburgh, the Scottish Christian Youth Assembly decided that the present system of Christian education was "unsuitable and inadequate". While acknowledging that "Christianity can only partially be taught" the Assembly called attention to the "lack of sufficiently trained Christian teachers, unsuitable teaching material, insufficient finance for equipment, and the lack of participation on the part of many parents, office-bearers, and members of the Church". But there was, so far as we know, no reference to unsuitable material to teach.

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THE Right Rev. Dr. Kenneth M. Carey, Bishop of the Edinburgh diocese of the Episcopal Church told the Assembly that it was still possible to come to believe in God and Christ by the use of reason. "The old arguments may appear a bit fly-blown in the light of modern philosophy" he said, "but it seems to me that the arguments for atheism are more difficult to accept than the arguments for theism". If Dr. Carey reviewed the respective arguments, the *Glasgow Herald* (15/2/65) neglected to report them. He had referred earlier, however, to the "horror, cruelty, wickedness or disaster" that can happen anywhere in the world, and the increasing difficulty of discovering "a guiding purpose behind it all". "And yet", he continued, "we should be ungrateful fools if we did not also recognise our tremendous privilege in being alive at this time: a time more thrilling, more exciting, more full of opportunities and more dangerous than any previous age in the history of mankind".

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THE same issue of the *Glasgow Herald* reported Professor Ritchie Calder's speech at Dundee on February 13th. Two-thirds of the world, he said, were worse off today than in 1945. Yet enjoying the "tremendous privilege" of being alive in this exciting time no doubt!

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THE *Sun* prides itself on being a modern newspaper with a new look (the only one born of the age we live in and so forth). It is in fact very much the mixture as before, even including a column on the stars. Glancing at this on February 12th, we noted that the technique was likewise the same as ever. "It's not hypochondriac to watch your health, to take weather and risks into calculation", our wife was told; while we learnt that "People and fields you have previously neglected offer best opportunities". "Not"—the advice continued—"that you can forget routine: make time for both". And are you Leo (July 21st-August 21st)? If so, there is "no need to lead a dull life, but avoid physical risks".

# Does God Exist? An Unfinished Argument

By DOUGLAS BRAMWELL

SITTING on the fence—being an agnostic—is perhaps the most comfortable position in the arguments between atheists and believers. Feeling that reason cannot give an answer to the controversy, the agnostic can easily excuse himself from the trouble of pushing the arguments to their limits.

But are there any rational arguments for the existence of God that have not been refuted? Is there any conception of God that is not at odds with scientific rationalism?

There are three basic arguments for the existence of God: (1) the ontological argument, that the mere idea of a perfect being implies that one exists; (2) the cosmological argument, that because all things are caused there must, to avoid an infinite regress, be a first cause; and (3) the argument from design, that because the world exhibits some order there must be an intelligent creator. Only the cosmological argument retains any signs of life, and in its conventional form it must be regarded as invalid by anyone who does not object to infinite causal regresses. But there are variations.

Naturalistic metaphysics finds difficulty in explaining the appearance of new qualities in the world. In Lloyd Morgan's philosophy of emergent evolution it is held that when matter becomes arranged in new ways it begins to show new qualities, and that these new qualities are unpredictable. They "pop up" without any basis in the previous state of the world.

The explanation offered by Marxism is that after an accumulation of quantitative changes a sudden jump occurs and a qualitative change appears. It does not take much of a philosopher to pick holes in these two theories.

An interesting approach to this metaphysical problem is contained in the philosophy of Alfred North Whitehead. His answer is a variation of the cosmological argument in which God is postulated as the cause of new qualities. It is worth a closer look.

There is no inert matter in Whitehead's universe; it consists wholly of self-creating centres of experience. Each of these centres of experience, or actual entities as Whitehead calls them, creates itself out of its environment. Each experiences the qualities of the environment and builds them into its subjective self in a pattern of relatedness. This pattern is determined by aims which the entity entertains for its own future.

So far there is no explanation of the way entities acquire qualities not already in their environment. Whitehead refuses to let them "pop up"; he postulates the existence of a primary entity in whom all possibilities for the world are already actual. This primary entity Whitehead calls God.

Such an approach to the problem of new qualities cannot be incorporated into any philosophy which regards matter, at any level of organisation, to be inert. Whitehead's concept of self-creation applies to elementary particles as well as to complex organic wholes such as man. Subjective experience in a particle is, of course, rudimentary in the extreme.

This radical point of view avoids two hoary metaphysical problems. Firstly, for materialists, at what stage of organisation does matter begin to experience? Secondly, for dualists, how do mind and body interact? In Whitehead's scheme each centre of experience appears to others as a material object; to itself it appears as an experiencing mind (or a low grade equivalent). Mind and matter are the

subjective and objective aspects of actual entities.

How does Whitehead's God compare with the God of Christianity?

The most important difference is that the former is in no sense an all-powerful creator; the only way in which he can influence the world is by offering new possibilities which may or may not be accepted into the aims of actual entities. God cannot interfere with the workings of natural processes; miracles are impossible; petitionary prayer is a waste of time.

Also, if God is not omnipotent the problem of evil is avoided. Christian theology has never satisfactorily answered the argument that if God created the world then he is responsible for the unpleasantness in it. Whitehead's God is not the creator of the world; the world is self-creating: God offers possibilities for improvement; the decision to use them rests with the world. The vision of the Kingdom of Heaven is given by God; the task of building it falls to Man.

We are close now to religious feeling in its most positive form—"world loyalty" as Whitehead called it. Naturalists tend to put such experiences in the same category as those of the neurotic visionary, and to dismiss the whole lot as being without objective significance. Within the framework of Whitehead's theology such cavalier treatment can be avoided.

God is that function in the world by reason of which our purposes are directed to ends which in our own consciousness are impartial as to our own interests. He is that element in virtue of which our purposes extend beyond values for ourselves to values for others. He is that element in virtue of which the attainment of such a value for others transfers itself into value for ourselves.

World loyalty, together with awareness of possibilities for the betterment of the world, are the prerequisites for human progress. These qualities are not confined to those who believe—even if God is their source. Hence, belief is not a necessary condition for the salvation of the world. It is safe to ignore the problem of God's existence while we get on with the politics.

But certain minds are made to ask metaphysical questions, and they will continue to ask whether God exists. Although the agnostic on the fence may be right in saying that there can be no final answer, argument is worthwhile if it serves to show us new relationships among old beliefs.

Humanists and rationalists rightly attack the religions for the unscientific beliefs in miracles and superstition. That the idea of God need not be accompanied by these beliefs has at least been made clear by Whitehead's metaphysical arguments.

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## Teaching in Texas

ONE of the exciting things about teaching at the University of Texas, according to Roger Shattuck, Professor of Romance Languages, is that "Austin is a political and academic town with forces pulling both ways" (*The Observer* colour supplement 14/2/65). Two years ago the Texas State Legislature tried to pass a law requiring teachers "to acknowledge—on the dotted line—the existence of a Supreme Being". And if that had gone through, said the Professor (who argued against it before a legislative committee) "this university would have been blown apart".

## On the Venerable Bede

By H. CUTNER

AKIBA'S article (THE FREETHINKER, December 18th, 1964), on one of the most famous Christians in England's ecclesiastical history, sent me to some notes I made a year or so back on the venerable old monk as proof of the way we have been hoaxed on the beginnings of the Christian religion in England.

Let me however make clear that I have not read Bede's "masterpiece"—and I hate discussing any work I have not read. What I can do instead is to show in a small way what our "ecclesiastical" authorities and historians have to say about it, and let the reader judge for himself the precise worth of Bede's "history".

One of the histories of England I have always admired is the *Comprehensive History of England* edited by the Rev. T. Thomson, published in four huge volumes in 1865. It is a highly detailed survey of our history on civil, military, religious, intellectual, and social matters, from the earliest period, and therefore should have used Bede's famous *Ecclesiastical History* which covered a period of about 700 or 800 years pretty extensively. Yet the only mention of Bede in it is a very short note on Jarrow, where he spent most of his life, and a very short account of him and his works; though the reference to him is that he was "illustrious", and that his writings are as "fresh in the present, as ever they were in past ages".

Compare this with the account Green gives in his *History of the English People* (1877). Let me give a few extracts from the long account devoted to Bede:—

The whole learning of the age seemed to be summed up in a Northumbrian scholar . . . [Baeda's] long tranquil life was wholly spent in an offshoot of Benedict's house which was founded by his friend Ceolfrid. [Baeda] never stirred from Jarrow . . . Little by little the young scholar made himself master of the whole range of the science of his time . . . Burke rightly styled him "the father of English learning". The tradition of the older classic culture was first revived for England in his quotations of Plato and Aristotle, of Seneca and Cicero, of Lucretius and Ovid . . . His work was done with small aid from others . . . In text books for his scholars, Baeda threw together all that the world had then accumulated in astronomy and meteorology, in physics and music, in philosophy, grammar, rhetoric, arithmetic, medicine.

Green does not end Bede's wonderful accomplishments here. Nor does he give any authorities for any of them. That a monk called Bede lived in Jarrow nearly all his life need not be disputed. Nor need we dispute that he left some literary remains. But Green wants much more than this. He was "first among English scholars, first among English theologians, first among English historians," and it is in "the monk of Jarrow that English literature strikes its roots". Moreover, "Baeda was a statesman as well as a scholar". In fact, I doubt that in the world-history of man's accomplishments, Green could have found any other man who comes anywhere near equalling Bede, let alone surpassing him. And the tragic thing about it all is we are given no authorities for any of Green's tremendous eulogies. As far as I can speculate, he got them all from Bede's own "works".

What is the truth? It is simply, in the first place, we know next to nothing about him. In Harmsworth's *Universal Encyclopedia*, we are told that "the facts taken from his own writings are almost all that is known of his life"—which contrasts in a remarkable way with Green's panegyrics. Did Bede claim he was "the first" in everything? Did he say he was "a statesman" as well as a great scholar? And so on?

Bede's great work is his *Historia Ecclesiastica* "one of

the main authorities for the history of England in early Saxon times down to 1731", says HUE. And the question, these days, comes up at once—what or who are the "authorities" for his long history? And the answer is we do not know. How could a monk, hardly ever travelling more than a few miles from his monastery in Jarrow, possibly write an authoritative history of Christianity in England in Roman and early Saxon times? The answer is he could not. It is true that the *Encyclopedia Britannica* claims that he collected "his information from the best available sources" without, naturally, naming one of these sources. The statement was probably made by a Catholic writer who knows no more about any of Bede's "authorities" than I do. (The same writer tells us that Bede "knew Greek and probably some Hebrew". Considering that no language under the sun was hated by the Catholic Church as much as Hebrew, that it destroyed every Hebrew book it could find, and that during 700 AD, learning in England was perhaps at the lowest intellectual level of any country in Europe, where or how could Bede learn Hebrew? Did he have Hebrew books? Were there any at all in England? I sometimes doubt if there were any in the Vatican.)

The reader should turn to the late Lord Raglan's brilliant study in "debunking", *The Hero*, and see what his piercing analytical mind has to say about Bede and his "masterpiece". It is, he says, "almost sacrilegious to doubt him . . ." Yet, he adds, "it is difficult to understand why a monk of Durham, who never left his monastery, should be regarded as an unquestionable authority for events which happened several hundreds of miles away, and two or three centuries before his time . . ."

At school, we all were taught the story of Hengist and Horsa; yet it is nothing but a myth. We now know that Saxons were in England long before the two "famous" brothers whose story has long since been debunked—though in books difficult to get in an average bookshop. Raglan points out that, though Bede is the great "authority" for Hengist and Horsa, his accounts of events in England during the fifth and sixth centuries are not merely unreliable but untrue. And what does Alexander Del Mar say in his *Ancient Britain Revisited* (1899)? Bede's information concerning the Anglo-Saxons is "hopelessly wrong and defective" and the story of Hengist and Horsa "an idle tale".

Many other myths, and many miracles, and scores of other "idle tales" are likewise vouched for by Bede. Yet his appears to be the only kind of history we have (except in a very few cases) of what happened in England before and just after Christianity was first introduced—if even any account of this can be authenticated. The period of Bede's activities is known as the Dark Ages, and no wonder. It really is shrouded in darkness.

### NATIONAL SECULAR SOCIETY 59th ANNUAL DINNER

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## CORRESPONDENCE

## A DELICATE TOPIC

Further to Mr. Whiting's letter (THE FREETHINKER, 5/2/65) I have frequently been amazed at the utter lack of response by Christians to challenging and provocative letters in the press by Humanists and Freethinkers. This has been my experience several times. One finds it difficult—ungenerous even—to believe that there are not at least one or two who are willing and able to reply.

Could this coyness be a definite policy of avoiding public debate and thus giving wider publicity to "dangerous" anti-Christian views?

Mr. Whiting spoke of religions as "a great and mysterious thing only to be mentioned with humility . . .". He could have said the same for the other two members of the holy trinity of sacred cows—God, King and Country. Some, it is true, have dared to advocate publicly that the time has come for us to consider abandoning much if not all of our national sovereignty for the greater good of international unity, with world government as the ultimate aim—but they are widely regarded as dangerous, if not treasonable cranks. But who would dare to say publicly that, in a modern democracy, a monarch, perched on the top of a system of hereditary aristocracy, is a complete anachronism and it is high time we realised it?

It just isn't done!

D. H. MALAN.

## THE ECUMENICAL CONSCIENCE

The fact that the indications of the "conscience" are often wrong suggests that conscience is not a simple but a complex part of our nature. According to Freud, conscience is not always and everywhere a moral or spiritual guide to right action. "Our behaviour," he said, "is only partly governed by morality or reason or will. In each of us, far below awareness, rages the underworld of instinctual energy—savage lusts, primitive greeds, criminal aggressions—from which conscience is formed."

From this viewpoint, some knowledge of the following sciences might be helpful when faced with the problem of removing conflicting dogmas, doctrinal strifes and religious tensions: anthropology, that is, the cultural life and religious ideas of primitive peoples; Egyptian and Pagan mythology; and comparative religion, including of course the science of Christology itself.

If we wish to get a clearer perspective of the conditions which generate the problem of "religious freedom" for man, we must look into our earliest experiences with the human environment, from infant baptism to conversion and confirmation, as well as the deprivations and restrictions imposed by parents and teachers in the ordinary process of growing up. However much we are unfettered by social constraints, or however much we are privileged to exercise the right to worship as our conscience dictates,

we cannot do so outside our own "conditioned personality," so long as these childish fears, inhibitions and coercions remain submerged in the unconscious.

H. F. HAAS

## OLD BOGEY

Mr. R. Smith appears to be up against his old bogey, Marxian dialectics, the reconciliation of opposites! Even Mr. Ridley's lucid explanation of an isolated example apparently fails to penetrate. It would seem obvious, that a Calvin today would merely become a competent county councillor, the material conditions not being present for his leadership of a great reformation movement. Without the circumstances of a 1933 Germany, Hitler would not have become führer. I do not accept either Plekhanov's or Ridley's thesis myself, or the policy of assassination would be the logical answer to tyranny. While accepting that only material circumstances can throw up the "individual", I do not think it proven that circumstances do not inevitably find the individual. I fancy that there were a number of Fascist maniacs in 1933 who could have led that deluded nation into its criminal path.

Mr. Ridley's theory that chance, i.e., accident, plays an appreciable part in historical development is more easily acceptable. Had Katherine of Arragon produced a living son, Protestantism in England would have had a different history. The "role of the individual" cannot be excluded if one accepts chance as an historical factor.

EVA EBURY.

## "THE RATIONALIST ANNUAL"

Some of D.C. Chapman's comments on some of the writers of the *Rationalist Annual* 1965 are indeed unworthy of a rationalist. In dealing with R. C. Churchill's essay on the problem of pain, he makes the ridiculous assertion of pain fitting in quite understandably with a rationalistic view of the world. If misery is widespread as he himself claims it is, how can it fit in with a rationalistic view of the world unless, of course, you accept some optimistic system to explain it away?

We all know pain is of some value and is necessary to life. It is the immense amount of it and the intensity of it which is the problem, and this cannot be explained away by Christians or optimistic rationalists.

I should like also to say that Mr. Chapman's comments on Sartre should be taken with a pinch of salt. I just wonder if Mr. Chapman read Sartre's unreadable *Critique de la Raison Dialectique*, or did he just take Maurice Cranston's word for it?

R. SMITH.

## WITHOUT COMMENT

Although religious thinkers no longer think of God as a God of vengeance, they do not fail to realise that sin brings punishment today just as it did in the time of Elijah.

—Letter in the *Yorkshire Post* (12/2/65)

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