

The Freethinker

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MANY years ago when I was a theological student (and as such, a prospective Dr. Robinson!) I remember a well-known Oxford Anglo-Catholic theologian addressing us on the awe-inspiring subject of God the Creator, God the Father, the almighty Creator of all, and Himself created by none. When compared with this omniscient and ubiquitous Being, everything and everyone shrank into complete insignificance, said the divine, an insignificance that extended even to the most exalted personages of the celestial hierarchy. Mary and Michael the archangel are far more exalted than anyone whom you can imagine, but Mary and Michael are nothing when compared with God the Father, he concluded impressively.

Almighty God

Such was the traditional theology of the Christian Church only half a century ago before the scientific revolution had caused those lusty "winds of change" that today, are blowing so vigorously that even the cloisters are shaken.

In this era when (as Cardinal Heenan recently admitted in a pastoral letter) "every man is his own theologian and startling opinions are frequently expressed"—no doubt an oblique allusion to his episcopal colleague, Archbishop Roberts—how stands the traditional theology of the Christian Churches, as expressed in the formula of the so-called Apostles' Creed: "I believe in God the Father Almighty, maker of Heaven and earth"? For it seems clear that the God-formula is decidedly shaky in an epoch of apparently complete theological confusion, when Anglican bishops deny that God is a person at all and when the most famous Catholic philosopher of the century, Teilhard de Chardin, SJ, puts forward views of future human integration that appear to rule out completely the immortality of the individual human soul.

It would, I imagine, be far from an easy matter to find a theologian today (even in Oxford, that traditional home of lost causes) who would repeat with equal confidence the simple belief in God's omnipotence so naively taken for granted by his aforementioned predecessor half a century ago.

God the Creator

The traditional theology of the Christian Churches, was authoritatively stated during the 4th and 5th centuries. St. Augustine of Hippo (355-430) was probably its most important individual architect, and the Athanasian Creed—its most elaborately pseudo-scientific formula—seems to have been the work of one of his followers.

In which connection it must be noted, that if our own age can be accurately denominated as the age of the scientific revolution (in which, we have recently been informed, 90 per cent of all the scientists who have ever lived and worked in this world, are still alive and at work today) the era (roughly equivalent to the 4th and 5th centuries) in which Christian theology found its definitive formulation, was perhaps the least scientific since mankind

emerged from barbarism. For during this long drawn-out era of the decline and fall both of the Roman Empire and of the classical civilisation of antiquity, the remarkable scientific renaissance inaugurated by the Ancient Greeks was falling into complete oblivion. No one *knew* anything about the actual heavens and earth, that God was supposed to have created, nor did the theologians care. Did not St. Ambrose of Milan, a doctor of the Universal Church and the master of St. Augustine himself, go on record with the notable declarations that: "The motions of the sun and moon are of no concern for our salvation", and "It is not by logical reason that God has planned our salvation"?

VIEWS AND OPINIONS

Juggling with God

By F. A. RIDLEY

Actually, the nearest approach to a scientific thinker in the early Christian Church was St. Augustine, who anticipated Einstein in his definition of time, and asked the notable question (surely an awkward one for a theologian) "What was God doing before he made the universe?"

It is, I would suggest, precisely because modern science has revealed to us the *real* nature of "the heavens and earth" which God was supposed to have created, that theism is discarded. A universe in which life is only an isolated "accident" is not at all the sort of universe that any being of presumably normal intelligence and/or morality let alone an almighty and morally perfect being could conceivably have created. Schopenhauer once declared that only a criminal lunatic could have made the universe of human knowledge and experience!

The Dilemma of Theism

The scientific revolution is the first and sufficient cause of the present theological chaos that has nowadays spilled over from its professional confines into the indignity of the popular press. As the more intelligent Christian intellectuals of our day (such as Teilhard de Chardin, Bishop Robinson and his South Bank colleagues, and Archbishop Roberts and his co-abettors) have seen, the old theology is in rags and ruins. Those theological giants of former days, Augustine, Aquinas *et al*, have become ancient monuments.

The fundamental dilemma of theism today could, I suggest, be stated today in these terms: the known phenomena of the universe, including man, are completely incompatible with the traditional concepts of theism. However, since *some* form of theism *ipso facto* constitutes the inseparable foundation of religion, atheism, pure and simple does not represent a possible theological solution. There is, in fact, only one possible line for Christian theology to take in the future: to juggle with God; that is to try to modify the traditional conceptions of theism so as to try to bring it into line with modern science.

Varieties of Theism

This is, of course, precisely what Christian modernists are at present busily engaged in doing, and the Bishop of Woolwich seems to be, if not the most successful at least the most publicised theological juggler. Actually these often ingenious, but really never very

convincing apologists who are trying to square the circle by making theology scientific, have really only got a very limited field for their verbal manoeuvres. They can argue for some kind of a limited God who would like to do better but can't. Theologically the best-known form of this kind of cutting God down to size—and credibility—was the Manichean (Persian) Albigensian theory that there were actually two gods, a good one and an evil one, who mutually cancel each other out. Otherwise, like Bishop Robinson, one boldly denies personality to God, thus

converting him into a kind of life force like that somewhat nebulous one so eloquently—if hardly convincingly preached by Bergson and by George Bernard Shaw in *Back to Methuselah* (though G.B.S. seems to have originally got the idea from Samuel Butler, a far more original thinker than he was himself).

Juggling with God can be ingenious and amusing. But whilst it will, no doubt, share the headlines of the popular press with more mundane curiosities, I do not anticipate any genuine theological renaissance.

A Catholic View of the Baptists

By GILLIAN HAWTIN

I HAVE in front of me a booklet of some 111 pages, *Our Separated Brethren*, by the Rev. David Woodard, published by the Catholic Truth Society, giving a brief history and summary of the chief features of Anglicanism, Presbyterianism, Congregationalism, the Baptists, the Society of Friends, Unitarianism, Methodism, the Salvation Army and several smaller sects. The treatment of each is rounded off by a section entitled "our apologetic". Naturally, in these ecumenical days, the author does not breathe fire and brimstone against the wicked heresies of the sects, and their adherents. On the contrary, it acts as a *vade mecum* for Catholics among the jungle of Protestant discord, with the object of leading strayed sheep back to the "one true fold". He is at pains to stress points of similarity and appeal, while in no way glossing over the basic departures from Catholic practice and belief.

The booklet is prefaced by a very revealing set of statistics, for each of the decades of this century, of Catholic priests, Church of England incumbents, and Non-conformist ministers. Once more they illustrate the growth of the Catholic Church in this country. It will suffice to compare the two columns for 1900 and 1950 (the latest given):—

	1900	1950
Catholic priests, secular and religious ...	2,812	6,610
Church of England incumbents ...	13,894	12,890
Congregational ministers ...	2,890	2,593
Baptist ministers ...	1,992	1,953
Unitarian ministers ...	366	243
Methodist ministers ...	4,221	4,602
Salvationist officers (men and women)—a figure rising steadily to ...		2,500

From this it clearly emerges that whereas at the beginning of the century the ratio of Catholic priests to Anglican clergy was approximately 1 to 5, it is now approximately 1 to 2! Moreover, except for a slight increase among the Methodists, and a steady increase among the Salvationists, the other denominations have not only not maintained their figures but have even lost, though, except for the Unitarians, not remarkably so.

Nearly half the book comprises the author's treatment of Anglicanism. It is therefore not possible within the scope of this article adequately to give an account of it in detail, or, for that matter, of any of the other sections. I want, instead, to make some comment on his remarks upon the Baptists, among whom, the author says "The ancient type of Protestantism will probably still be found". The opportunity will be taken, Fr. Woodard adds to "mention some of those difficulties which keep on recurring and are suggested in the mind of the English inquirer of whatever nominal belief".

These remarks constitute two pages only of his pamphlet, but I think they are extremely important in that they certainly give a very fair picture of the average Englishman's idea of Catholicism. Fr. Woodard's synopsis

is, of course, written to give Catholics some idea of what, to them, from an entrenched and unified view, seems an appalling chaos. But it is not less worthy of a serious analysis by Freethinkers. For, unless we also understand Protestant ignorance of Catholicism, we cannot effectually combat the creeping mushroom growth of the Catholic Church among the Protestants, who suddenly find all these stories are untrue, or inept, or distorted, and thus, for this reason, succumb to the claims of Rome. "Know thine enemy," is a maxim good for both Protestants and Freethinkers.

"Still," writes Fr. Woodard, "the scandalous tales of Maria Monk, Pope Joan and the Renaissance Popes are reiterated." No knowledgeable Freethinker can fail to observe that if this reflects the truth of the case, the Baptists live in a little backwater of their own. The first two bits of "horror fiction" have been effectively exploded long since, and while this cannot be said to be true of the morals and activities of Renaissance popes, it seems a great pity that Protestant attention is thus diverted from the far more significant present-day activities of their successors! I consider, however, Fr. Woodard's next remarks the most important. Things common enough to Catholics he says, "are thought by them [the Baptists] to be obsolete and they have never considered their existence in the post-Tridentine Church: the index, monasteries, and convents, the Jesuits, the College of Cardinals, hierarchical government, seminaries, canonisations, indulgences, and even the Pope himself are regarded as things of a past age only, although they see them mentioned in the secular press from time to time."

Of course, Fr. Woodard does not mean that Baptists think these things do not exist; merely that, like other Protestants, the Baptists suppose them to be only living on into the modern world as anachronisms, and soon likely to pass away altogether. Exactly, and that is just the attitude of mind which Freethinkers too are up against when they seek to draw attention to the dangers of reunion, or strive to enliven their friends to the imperialistic claims of militant Catholicism. A little investigation proves that if the Church of Rome is dead in this country, it certainly does not recognise the fact, but has grown without ceasing over the past 135 years. This booklet is an attempt to show individual Catholics how to extend its influence even further. It costs only 1s. 6d. and has sold 30 thousand copies.

CHURCH LOSSES IN GLASGOW

THE Church of Scotland has—we read in the *Times* (11/3/65)—lost 4,500 members in Glasgow in the past year. This continues a trend over five years during which time the 245 churches in the city have lost totals of between 2,000 and 5,000 a year.

Hugh MacDiarmid

By JOHN L. BROOM

WHEN any mention is made of Scottish poetry, the majority of people tend immediately to think of Robert Burns. Yet, great though Burns was, his work was the culmination of a long line of fine poets in Scotland, and after over a century of stagnation, there emerged in the twenties of this century a literary movement of tremendous energy and power. The Scottish literary renaissance has produced many fine poets, but by far the greatest of these, and, in the opinion of many the greatest Scottish poet who has ever lived, is the subject of this article.

Christopher Murray Grieve was born in the border town of Langholm in Dumfriesshire in 1892. This most ardent of Scottish Nationalists thus escaped being an Englishman by only six miles, but as he himself says, he thereby acquired "the frontier spirit". After service in the RAMC during the Great War he became a reporter on the *Montrose Review*.

His first book a collection of essays *Annals of the Five Senses* appeared in 1923, but it was the appearance of *Sangschaw* (1925) and *Penny Wheep* (1926) which established "Hugh MacDiarmid" (he adopted his famous pseudonym in 1922) as a force to be reckoned with in the history of modern Scottish literature. These collections embody some of the finest lyrics in Scots ever written, for example "The Watergaw", "The Bonnie Bronkit Bairn", "Country Life", "The Eemis Stane" and "Crowdieknowe". Some critics have claimed that because these early poems are in dialect, they have only a restricted appeal. But this is nonsense. Little effort is required by the average reader to master the unfamiliar words, and once this has been achieved, it is seen that the sentiments could have been expressed in no other language but Scottish. Take, for example, the exquisite and profound "Watergaw" which could never successfully be translated into English.

Ac weet forenicht i' the yow-trummle,¹
I saw yon antrim² thing,
A watergaw³ wi' its chitterin⁴ licht
Ayont the on-ding⁵;
An' I thoct o' the last wild look ye gied
Afore ye deed!
There was nae reek i' the laverock's hoose⁶
That nicht—an nane i' mine;
But I hae thoct o' that foolish licht
Ever sin syne;
An' I think that mebbe at last I ken
What your look meant then.

The prolonged and often bitter controversy over the use of Scots by Scottish poets is largely beside the point. Poets should employ whatever language they feel best conveys their thoughts or emotions, and MacDiarmid himself turned to English in his later "world-view" poems.

In 1926, MacDiarmid published "A Drunk Man looks at the Thistle" which many critics regard as his masterpiece. This great poem is a series of reflections on Scotland (the thistle) and mankind in general by an observer whose vision has been clarified rather than clouded by alcohol. In it we see MacDiarmid's passionate belief in the duty of every individual to follow his own light wherever it may lead him with utter disregard of popular conventions or beliefs. You all must show, he cries:—

Contempt o' ilka⁷ goal
Ilka goal save ane alane
To be yoursel' whatever that may be . . .

And the drunk man proudly proclaims his credo:

I'll hae nae hauf-way hoose but aye⁸ be whaur
Extremes meet—it's the only way I ken⁹
To dodge the curst conceit o' bein' richt
That damns the vast majority o' men.

MacDiarmid's goal is nothing less than the liberation of humanity from all soul-destroying agencies including man's own stultifying beliefs and prejudices. The poet's Utopia (as expressed in *Annals of the Five Senses*) is a place:

Where the members of each group of workers should find in their work the development of their characters and the consecration of their powers, where each citizen would know and be strengthened by the knowledge that he laboured not for himself only, not for his family, not for his country, but for eternal good. So long as there is fear between man and man, so long as there are looks askance, there can be no communion. The new city must be a city of friends and lovers.

Many criticisms have been levelled against MacDiarmid's successive and apparently often perverse political allegiances. At present he is a member of the Communist Party, which he paradoxically but characteristically rejoined after the Hungarian Revolution in 1956 (he was expelled before the war for "nationalist deviation") because as he said "in times of trouble one must cleave to one's friends". He told the present writer recently that he is moving now towards anarchism, but however that may be, it must be realised that all the political ideologies to which he has at various times given his support, are for MacDiarmid only means to the creation of his perfect society of free men. Nevertheless he believes that these ideologies must be socialistic in one form or another, and although he despises material success and prosperity, he realises that men cannot begin to fulfil their potentialities until they enjoy the basic necessities. This is from his "Second Hymn to Lenin":

Oh, its nonsense nonsense nonsense,
Nonsense at this time o' day
That breid and butter problems
S'ud be in ony man's way.
They s'ud be like the tails we tint¹⁰
On leavin' the monkey stage
A' maist folk fash¹¹ about's alike
Primaeval to oor age
We've grown up folk that haena yet
Put bairnly things aside
—A' that's material an' moral—
An' oor new state descried.

Nevertheless MacDiarmid is the highbrow par excellence and teaches that there must be no pandering or talking down to the masses. He has nothing but contempt mingled with pity for the "ordinary working man" gazing mindlessly at the telly, filling in his football coupon or discussing the probable winner of the 3.30. He wants:

Nae simple rhymes for silly folk
But the haill art as Lenin gied.

And he inveighs again and again against the debasement of the people by a corrupt press, educational system and church:

I cannot content myself with this miserable blind life that the majority of mankind is at present leading, and I do not see any reason for it. Moreover I do not see anything really worth doing but to show men the way to a better life. If our philosophy our science and our art do not contribute to that, what are they worth?

Lucky Poet (his autobiography)

The right to ignorance, the avoidance of the excruciatingly painful business of thinking, cannot be conceded by anyone concerned with the interests of the masses of mankind . . . The cultural issue is the crucial and all important one and is the end in the light of which everything else must be regarded simply as means

—"Joyce is Hard, but so is Life" article in the
Daily Worker.

(Concluded on page 103)

1 "ewe-tremble"—the cold spell after the shearing; 2 rare, unusual; 3 indistinct rainbow; 4 shivering; 5 downpour; 6 "There was no smoke in the lark's house" i.e. it was a dark and stormy night; 7 every; 8 always; 9 know; 10 lost; 11 worry.

This Believing World

IN SPITE of the expressed wish of the Pope for silence on birth control, supported by the pathetic plea from Cardinal Heenan, the ITV programme *This Week* gave us a very good documentary on the problem on March 11th, with Catholic women bravely defying both the Pope and Cardinal Heenan. The women made it plain that, while they wanted children, there was a limit—and that limit can only be attained these days with the use of artificial contraceptives.

★

A PRIEST did his best to defend the Church's ban on contraceptive devices, but could say little more than that "it was against God's law". Needless to say he produced no argument whatever that it was God's law. How did he know? His was a painful exhibition of "babbling" nonsense. Here were a number of women with many children who would endanger their own health and lives by having more, being told by a celibate priest that it was "God's law" that they should not prevent conception. God, it seems, doesn't care two hoots about the poor mother.

★

"SHOULD THE BBC ever make fun of religion?" is the profound question posed by the *Sunday Express* (7/3/65), and not answered by the paper. Instead, we were given answers by members of the public, most of whom were very religious, and therefore horrified that anything so sacred as religion should be attacked. A point to note is that "religion" always means the Christian religion. You can be as hilarious as you like over witch-doctors, but you must never laugh at the "fishes' heads" archbishops are obliged to wear when conducting divine service. But it is interesting to note that while lay people protest, one clergyman was plucky enough to say, "I think bad religion should be a target for satirical exposure". He was the Rev. S. H. Taylor, and he added that "in Proverbs even God laughs at the silly contradictions of mankind".

★

BUT WHAT a pity that Mr. Taylor did not more clearly define what he meant by "bad" religion. Some of us think that this description fits Christianity in general and not just the more fundamentalist sects. Indeed, even the tremendous opportunities given Christianity by the radio and TV do not seem to have prevented it from being both bad and silly.

★

WE HAVE often wondered whether in fact TV was such a positive advantage to religion. One answer comes from the Rev. G. Neely of the Church of the Epiphany Rotherhithe, who declares in the London *Evening Standard* (15/2/65) that at least some of his parishioners "preferred Ena Sharples", the heroine of Coronation Street, to him. Ena, it is true, does look after a mission, but the only song we heard her play on the organ—and she plays very well—was "I'll be your sweetheart".

★

AS EVERYBODY knows—or was told—the ship's band, when the *Titanic* was sinking, played "Nearer my God to thee", and it was sung both courageously and reverently. Later however, this story was debunked. And certainly many survivors were glad to be saved from getting any nearer to God. But the famous hymn is again in the news now that a new Anglican hymn book is shortly to be published—without it! It "encourages an altogether too maunderingly dependent attitude", said the literary adviser, Mr. Pollard.

Two Letters to the *New Statesman*

DR. ANNE BIEZANEK proposes (according to a letter in the *New Statesman*, 12/3/65), "to establish a haven, in the Merseyside area, for 'Priests under Pressure', such as Fathers McMahon and Cocker—a place free from ecclesiastical pressure of any kind where priests can reflect peacefully and come to a completely free decision on their own future, and, should they decide to return to the secular state, where first steps towards rehabilitation can be taken". The letter was in the name of John-Francis Phipps of 67 Bathgate Road, London, S.W.19.

The following letter by the American columnist John Crosby, appeared in the same issue of the *New Statesman*:—

I'm disturbed by the uproar over the BBC sketch about a Roman Catholic priest and birth control. Sketches on the BBC don't usually get demands for an apology in the House of Commons. The Catholic Church demands a special position. This is a form of Catholic terrorism that has paralysed, the United States. I'm saddened to see Britain yield to it. The Catholic technique is simply to kick up such a storm that next time the writers, the editors, will be too terrified to comment or criticise anything Catholic. This works very well in America. The Catholics criticise our books, our plays, our movies, our birth control. Catholic books, plays or actions may not be criticised or commented about at all. I speak, incidentally, from very recent experience. A column I wrote discussing, very mildly, the effects of Catholicism in Ireland was suppressed. I can and do denounce advertisers who pay my paper's bills. Catholics, no.

Extremely important social and scientific advances are held up by throttling discussion. In America, Catholic pressure has totally suppressed discussion of the Aid to Education Bill, the most important piece of social legislation since the abolition of slavery. I'm not objecting, you understand, to the fact that Catholic opposition has stopped passage of the bill. Lots of bills, including very good ones, have got stopped. What Catholics have done is stopped discussion of the bill except on their terms. The Catholic position is fully printed in all newspapers. The Catholic position is that a Catholic supports a state school system he doesn't send his children to. Why shouldn't he get tax money for his Catholic parochial school system? Sounds reasonable. But the main reason he doesn't get tax money to support his religious schools is that it's unconstitutional. Only President Kennedy, a Catholic, had enough guts to say it and because he was President it got printed in the press. It hasn't, so far as I can see, been printed since.

The Protestant argument never gets printed. Their argument, a cogent one, is that they support the state schools too, and also a public school system, and a magnificent one. Yale and Harvard, to mention only two universities, and Exeter and Andover, probably the two finest preparatory schools in America (a preparatory school is what we would call Eton) were all originally religious schools, started and run by clergymen and supported by Protestants. They are all enormously rich because of Protestant generosity. They are also marvellous schools. The Catholic parochial schools in America (as any liberal Catholic will tell you) are not only flat broke but they are the worst schools we have, far worse than our state schools (and some of those are pretty bad). President Kennedy, our only Catholic President, went to a series of Protestant schools. Most rich Catholics go to good Protestant schools and universities.

I think that priests are so ill-equipped as teachers that they should be prevented by law from teaching children simply as a matter of public policy. I think also that priests should be prevented by law from preaching birth control. Birth control is a public health matter, and, again, priests are not competent to deal with it. When you come right down to it, that's what that disputed sketch was about. The function of satire is to cleanse. But suppression has always been the technique of the Catholics. What the Catholics object to is opinion. They have been legally restrained from torture which they practised so skilfully in the Inquisition. Now they are practising a sort of editorial Inquisition. Criticise us, make fun of us, discuss us in any but our terms and we will torture you editorially; we will see to it that you are sacked from your jobs; we will see to it that it is not printed or, if it is, it is denounced in the House of Commons.

JOHN CROSBY

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and other essays

By MARGARET KNIGHT

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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

Bristol Humanist Group (Kelmscott, 4 Portland Street, Clifton), Sunday, March 28th, 7.30 p.m.: E. HAILSTONE and others, "Abortion".

Leicester Secular Society (Secular Hall, 75 Humberstone Gate), Sunday, March 28th, 6.30 p.m.: A. J. STATHAM, "Rights and Reason—The Contribution of Thomas Paine".

Marble Arch Branch NSS (Carpenter's Arms, Seymour Place, London, W.1), Sunday, March 28th, 7.30 p.m.: PETER TYRELL, "Blessing, Bashing and Beads".

North Staffordshire Humanist Group (Cartwright House, Broad Street, Shelton, Stoke-on-Trent), Friday, March 26th, 7 p.m.: A meeting.

Portsmouth Humanist Society (Friends' Meeting House, 25 Northwood Road, Hilsea), Friday, March 26th, 7.30 p.m.: REV. D. STIRMAN, "Is Humanism Outmoded?".

South Place Ethical Society (Conway Hall Humanist Centre, Red Lion Square, London, W.C.1), Sunday, March 28th, 11 a.m.: Dr. JOHN LEWIS, "Freedom in the Welfare State".

Tuesday, March 30th, 7.30 p.m.: LESLIE ALDOUS, "The United Nations".

Sarbiton and Malden & Coombe and Kingston Branches NSS (The White Hart, Kingston Bridge, Hampton Wick), Friday, March 26th, 8 p.m.: A meeting.

Worthing Humanist Group (Morelands Hotel, Marine Parade), Sunday, March 28th, 5.30 p.m.: HECTOR HAWTON, "What Humanism Can Offer".

Notes and News

ALTHOUGH the avant-garde of the clergy were often criticised for undermining the simple faith of simple people, said Canon John Collins in St. Paul's Cathedral on March 14th, there were many cases where to undermine a simple faith that was untenable would do much more good than to leave it standing. Theological colleges were "hot-houses" for the care of the professional ministry. They concentrated, the Canon said, on the ordination examination, giving little time for other interests (*The Guardian*, 15/3/65). They did not train men for the modern world. "They do not train them to be questioning men, questioning everything, including their own theology." Throughout the Church of England there was a great lack of intellectual integrity.

THE BBC was accused of "a panic flight from decent values", "coarse taste" and "vulgarity" in a *Times* leader on March 6th, this presumably being the view of the Editor, ex-BBC Director-General Sir William Haley. The tone of the present Director-General, Sir Hugh Carleton Greene (in an interview in the *Sunday Times* the following day) was contrastingly intelligent and responsible. "There may be those of us who would have preferred the BBC not to have apologised at all to outraged Catholics", commented *New Statesman* critic John Holmstrom (12/3/65), but "Greene's wording was sober and reserved the right of free speech. It's clear from his interview that he's not rattled and won't let the BBC creep back into the Auntysism which he's done so much to drag it clear of . . . With a man like Greene, we needn't worry about refreezing into the prim old image."

★

It was good to note—and must have been encouraging to Sir Hugh Carleton Greene—how enlightened MPs rose to the defence of the BBC's right to screen satirical attacks on any "worthy and important persons and institutions" without the risk of public or ministerial interference. A motion tabled by Tom Driberg and supported by Michael Foot and Reginald Paget (of Bradlaugh's old constituency, Northampton) deplored the "public displays of intemperate anger" over the now notorious birth control sketch; pointed out that a Roman Catholic MP, Norman St. John Stevas was able to condemn it on the same programme at the time; and congratulated the Director-General on "the generally high standard of the more serious BBC programmes". Mr. Driberg's motion urged Sir Hugh "to extend the producers' freedom to experiment, and while allowing reasonable time to minority interests and opinions, to ignore organised attacks by minority pressure groups." Television programmes which "shock and offend nobody" were, the motion suggested, "artistically and educationally worthless". And, it reminded the public—and the Catholics—that viewing was not compulsory. One could always switch off.

★

NORMAN ST. JOHN STEVAS defended what he called the "civilising notions" of heaven and hell in another appearance on BBC's *Not So Much A Programme* . . . The idea of rewarding good and punishing evil was beneficial, he argued. Agnostic Peter Hall of the Royal Shakespeare Theatre demurred on the grounds that concentration on a future life distracted responsibility from here and now. Novelist John Bowen, who said he had lived without God for some years, touched on the modern view of heaven and hell: the one the continued presence and the other the continued absence of God. And if he had to choose between them Mr. Bowen would choose hell.

★

MEMBERS of the Rationalist Association of South Africa received the news of the ban on their Chairman, Professor Edward Roux with "deep indignation" and "strong resentment". They know that he never in any way "promoted Communism" and that his activities in the Association had always been perfectly lawful. They record their warm appreciation of Dr. Roux's splendid services to the rationalist cause. The ban is obviously a heavy blow to the Association, but the members declare their "collective determination to carry on the work". That assurance, they believe, is "the best tribute and thanks" they can offer him.

★

THE first (March) issue of *Heresy*, the duplicated magazine of the Richmond and Twickenham Humanist Group, is well written and produced. The Editor is Nigel Sinnott, 80 Forest Road, Kew, Richmond, Surrey.

The Shudder before Death

By R. SMITH

"ONLY the dead have no fear," runs an old Spanish saying, and we may add, no care or anxiety either. A man is surely something of a corpse if he cannot shiver. And in that sense Heidegger is right in proclaiming that anxiety is rooted in the fear of death.

Mr. Colin McCall says, in so far as he is aware, he is not "squeamish" about death. That may be so in his case, but it is very questionable if he is entirely free of anxiety regarding his own death. Freethinkers may discuss their own deaths rationally and make what provision they can for their dependants, but this is in no way a full proof antidote to abolish the despair and anguish which dying entails. It is perhaps cleaner and more genuine, as Leo Chestov said, to expire like a dog in a ditch than, even, like Socrates discoursing, with forced calm, among his friends.

"Consciousness of death need not entail anguish and despair," says Mr. McCall. But we all know that it does, and therefore it is futile to argue otherwise. Most people can hardly face up to life without drinks or drugs or some other sugar pill, let alone face up to death authentically. Sublimating death by religious decorum, or cheapening it by hygienic rationalism is only another way of concealing and fleeing from death.

Mr. McCall thinks it is quite invalid to label an Epicurean or a Spinozan view of death, "superficial". He is of course quite entitled to think so, just as one is quite entitled not to take the question of death seriously at all.

I would say the Epicurean view of death is superficial because it is just another way of refusing to treat the subject of death seriously. What mother is not concerned with the dying and death of her child? The Epicurean view, "Death does not concern us," is not only superficial, but also callous.

Spinoza's view regarding death, it must be remembered, springs from his Pantheism, and I don't think Mr. McCall is a pantheist. It is indeed questionable if the "free man" that Spinoza writes about really exists. If he does he is an exception to the rule because man is forced to live with the knowledge that he is fastened to a dying animal. No theology or theodicy of death can overcome that fact.

The "free man" of Spinoza is aware of death, but his wordly wisdom is superficial from the point of view of what dying entails. Wordly wisdom must spring from the knowledge of death and the fear of death, for without it all living things would soon cease to exist. Mr. McCall also thinks my mistake is to treat death as the fact, when it is merely a fact along with many others. He forgets here that death is the major factor in life, and we give significance and profundity to it because it concerns us all.

My pessimism obviously does not suit the temperament and attitude of Mr. McCall, as he seems to think it somewhat of a bugbear, whereas I think the bugbear lies with the optimistic rationalist who will not face up fairly and squarely to the tragic conditions of the human predicament. It may do well for Mr. McCall and his friends who think like him to remember the words Oscar Wilde said in prison: "The supreme vice is shallowness". Wilde had to enter prison before he began to properly understand the world, something he could never have done in the Café Royal. The same thing applies to despair and dying, for it is here we get the knowledge of the grim reality which dispels all our illusions, and not just a contingent fact.

Heidegger is quite right to bring death to the forefront

in philosophy. In fact to dismiss death from philosophy, is like dismissing the Prince of Denmark from Shakespeare's Hamlet.

REPLY

MR. SMITH should try his hand at horror stories sometime; I am sure he would do well. I fear, however, that he has no head for logic. Take his first paragraph. We may agree that a man is "something of a corpse if he cannot shiver", but I trust that we should recognise it as a metaphorical statement and see that there is no justification for deducing from it that "anxiety is rooted in the fear of death"—whether or not the latter proclamation be true.

He questions if I am entirely free from anxiety regarding my own death. I prefer to say—because it better describes the position—that I enjoy living and therefore don't want to die. How I shall feel when I am old and decrepit is another matter. But it is a big leap from doubting entire freedom from anxiety to asserting despair and anguish. It is a leap, nevertheless, that Mr. Smith takes with no compunction. Likewise, in his final paragraph, he implies that the only alternative to bringing death to the "fore-front" is to dismiss it. I can only repeat what I said in my last contribution to this discussion: that death is a fact but not *the* fact.

It is perhaps cleaner and more genuine, Mr. Smith cites Leo Chestov as saying, to expire like a dog in a ditch than like Socrates, discoursing with forced calm. However much emphasis is placed on the qualifying "perhaps", this remark is absurd. "Cleaner" has no relevance and "genuine" no meaning. If we wish to discuss the question at all, it must obviously be in relation to Socrates, and who is to say that a calm death was not "genuine" in his case?

It will be noticed that Mr. Smith hurls his "genuines" and "authentic", his "profounds" and "significants"—and of course his contrasting "superficials" and "shallows"—around alarmingly. Spinoza's wisdom is superficial, we are told, "from the point of view of what dying entails". The Epicurean view is "not only superficial, but callous". But what *does* dying "entail"? Mr. Smith doesn't tell us.

What he does is betray a muddled, emotional form of dualism. Man is not, as Mr. Smith suggests, "fastened to a dying animal": man is a living animal who, sooner or later, will die. In fact, the person who so often links free-thinking with Christianity is himself much closer to the latter—especially in its Calvinistic form (it may be significant that he is a Scot). Life is horrible, death hideous. One would feel sorry for him were he not so arrogant.

I should leave Mr. Smith in his awful dilemma were it not for his misrepresentation of Epicurus. It is not true that the Greek philosopher refused to treat the subject of death seriously. On the contrary he recognised religion and death (or what followed it) as the great causes of fear in man. He set out, therefore, to try to remove these (connected) fears rationally and, as he himself endured pain with fortitude, his was not purely a theoretical argument. And in his will he provided for the children of one of his dead disciples, Metrodorous. If I had to summarise Epicurus's basic teaching, it was the prudent pursuit of pleasure or avoidance of pain, and it is still a good basic guide to living.

Finally—and surely fitting Mr. Smith's case—here are

a few words from that great Epicurean poet, Lucretius (in the Penguin translation by Ronald Latham): "When you find a man treating it as a grievance that after death he will either moulder in the grave or fall a prey to flames or to the jaws of predatory beasts, be sure that his utterance does not ring true. Subconsciously his heart is stabbed by a secret dread, however loudly the man himself may disavow the belief that after death he will still experience sensation . . . When a living man confronts the thought that after death his body will be mauled by birds and beasts of prey, he is filled with self-pity. He does not banish himself from the scene nor distinguish sharply enough between himself and that abandoned carcass. He visualises that object as himself and infects it with his own feelings as an onlooker."

COLIN MCCALL

HUGH MACDAIRMID*(Concluded from page 99)*

As he approached middle-age, MacDiarmid all but abandoned the lyrical vein and began to write long discursive philosophical poems ("In Memoriam James Joyce", "The Kind of Poetry I Want", "The Battle Continues") in which he attempted the immense task of synthesising all knowledge and creating as he put it "a seamless garment, a poetry of fact and science". Endless allusions from recondite systems of thought and countless quotations in many different languages are hurled at the reader. But MacDiarmid refused to be deflected from his purpose by the complaints of admirers of his former verse.

I am forty-six, of tenacious long-lived country folk
Fools regret my poetic change, from my "enchanted early lyrics"

But I have found in Marxism all that I need . . .
It only remains to perfect myself in this new mode

That is the poetry I want—all
I can regard now as poetry of the past
As poetry of today not of the past

A Communist poetry . . .

—"The Kind of Poetry I Want".

I used to write sic bonny sangs
A'body wi' pleasure and profit could read
Even yet a bit discipline's a' that I need
To mak' myself ane o' the greatest poets
Puir Scotland's ever managed to breed.
Why dae I turn my back on a' that
And write this horrible rubbish instead?
—Sustain me, spirit o' God that I pay
These seductive voices nae heed.

—"Stony Limits", 1934.

In spite of their complexity, there are many passages of tremendous power and beauty in the later poems. At times he is depressed by the moronic emptiness of mind and non-understanding of his fellow-Scots:

Anywhere you go in Scotland today
You can hear the people
Economising consciousness.
Struggling to think and feel as little as possible
Just as you can hear a countryside in winter
Crepitating in the grip of an increasing frost.

—"The Battle Continues."

But he derives hope and comfort from the fact that all major reforms have been achieved by a minority, a mere handful of dedicated individuals. He believes rather optimistically perhaps in the emergence of "a new mutation in the soul of man, as a result of which his consciousness will be so enlarged as to be capable of conceiving and pursuing ends commensurate with his technical mastery of means". At any rate, MacDiarmid is determined:

Never to be turned into a strong silenced man
For I am corn and not chaff and will neither
Be blown away by the wind, nor burst with the flail
But will abide them both
And in the end prevail
For I am like Zamyatin: I must be a Bolshevik
Before the Revolution, but I'll cease to be one quick

When Communism comes to rule the roost
For real literature can exist only when it's produced
By madmen, hermits, heretics,
Dreamers, rebels, sceptics,
And such a door of utterance has been given to me
As none may close, whosoever they be.

MacDiarmid is essentially an intellectual poet, and has an intense dislike of all prophets of unreason whether they be of the left or the right. At the famous Writers' Conference at the Edinburgh Festival in 1962, he attacked violently "writers who believe that the central issues of life today with which literature should deal are sexual perversion, and the vicious habits of beatniks and layabouts". Obviously, MacDiarmid is not "with it", though in some of his poems, for example "A glass of pure water", he comes very near to the attitude of those modern Zen "hipsters", Kerouac and Burroughs.

MacDiarmid has always been an out-and-out atheist. Moreover, his atheism is of the extreme militant type. He thoroughly dislikes the term humanism because of its association with humanitarianism—anything suggestive of softness or sentimentality is anathema to him. (In an extravagant outburst he once exclaimed: "I have no use for humanity but only for the highest brain centres. I would sacrifice a million people any day for one immortal lyric".) Christianity, he rejects outright. As Mr. Duncan Glen says in his recent biography (*Hugh MacDiarmid and the Scottish Literary Renaissance*—by far the fullest and best account of the poet's life and work yet produced): "An acceptance of Christian beliefs and dogmas is for MacDiarmid not freedom but slavery to fear and superstition. He equates Sunday Schools and religious instruction with brain washing and subliminal propaganda . . . he believes it to be necessary to break out from the comfortable and confining refuge of the Christian religion into the difficult but free world of unfettered intellectual thought".

Scotland has treated her greatest modern son disgracefully. For years he lived in penury (when he moved to a cottage in the Shetland Isles in 1933, his wife had to make the furniture out of orange boxes) and even today, he is far from well off, his present small home having been fitted with running water and electricity only recently. His *Collected Poems* (1962) were originally published by Macmillan of New York as no Scottish publishing firm would handle them! But at long last he is now being universally recognised as one of the foremost literary figures of the twentieth century, worthy as a poet to stand alongside, Eliot, Yeats and Pound. By his genius, he restored and strengthened the proud Scottish image which had been tarnished and degraded by the sentimental vapourings of the "Kailyard School", the egregious Harry Lauder and all the haggis and bagpipe brigade. Let us leave him ever seeking for his "city on the hill".

The unsearchable masterpiece, the music of the spheres.
Alpha and Omega, the omnific Word.

CHURCH TAX EXEMPTION CASE DISMISSED

A LAWSUIT originally brought by Mrs. Madalyn Murray (who now resides in Hawaii) challenging tax exemption in Baltimore has been dismissed by the Maryland Circuit Court. Attorney Leonard Kerpelman, who successfully argued the Murray Bible-reading and prayer case before the US Supreme Court, has said that he will appeal against the ruling of Judge Wilson Barnes. Mr. Kerpelman estimated (according to *Church and State*, February 1965) that in Baltimore alone, exemption for churches resulted in an annual loss of \$76 million in tax revenue. Such an exemption was, he argued, a violation of the First and Fourteenth Amendments of the US Constitution.

Philosophy of Science—Some Facets

1—LAWS OF NATURE AND LAWS OF STATE

By DOUGLAS BRAMWELL

THE word "law" is a good example of the way confusion can arise when the same word is used, with different meanings, in everyday language and by specialists. "Law", in ordinary use, means a limitation on human behaviour laid down by a ruler or government; and that meaning implies an element of compulsion or restraint. A law of the state is a "prescriptive" law.

When a scientist talks of the "laws of science" or the "laws of nature" it is easy to let ideas of restraint and compulsion creep into our understanding of what he means. But the laws of nature are not compulsive or restraining; they merely describe certain regularities in the happenings of nature. They are not "prescriptive"; they are "descriptive".

Take one of Kepler's laws of planetary motion as an example: it says that a line joining a planet to its sun sweeps over equal areas in equal times. This is not a statement of rule laid down by some cosmic monarch and obeyed by the planets; it merely describes how the planets, in fact, behave. It may be objected that the planets are indeed restrained in their motions—by the forces of gravity which act on them. But the gravitational laws themselves are only a description of one of the ways in which pieces of matter influence each other. In their turn the laws of gravity are explained by the more general descriptive laws of relative theory, which in their turn will no doubt one day be explained by some still broader descriptive law.

This procedure of explaining each law by a more general one could only be brought to an end by the discovery of one complete description of how all matter behaves, and from which all the less general laws could be derived. And there would be nothing compelling matter to behave in accordance with this widest of laws; matter behaves as it does because it is what it is. Its nature determines its behaviour.

Confusion between laws of state and laws of science has led people to argue that because the former have a law-giver, so do the latter. In other words natural laws are used as an argument for the existence of God. But we have seen that scientific or natural laws are not rules but merely descriptions, and they cannot be used to support the idea of a mighty legislator.

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CORRESPONDENCE

"THE WANDERING JEW"

I have just finished reading *The Wandering Jew*. The print is the smallest and the turgidity of Sue's style is, to say the least, difficult. But it was worth the effort. It is the most rewarding book I've read in years. Why I never heard about it until recently I don't know. But it does raise the point that we younger Freethinkers have missed quite a lot, I mean in respect of what we can, surely regard as anti-religious classics like this.

I shall certainly do my best to get younger Freethinkers to read this book. It is a pity it can't be reprinted—and, perhaps, abridged to suit modern readers.

P. KEARNEY.

MARXISM AND THE INDIVIDUAL

Mirabile dictu! Even Mr. R. Smith, our exponent of Will, willy-nilly flowing, now admits the possibility of historical determinism. I will withdraw the word "chance" and substitute "circumstances", if it so pleases him. I do not think that the correct word has yet been coined, language being also subject to historical determinism. I used the word "chance" to indicate events outside the sociological processes which nevertheless influence those processes.

For instance, coast erosion; Dunwich, once a flourishing port with 50 churches, is now half a street and one perilous pub. The course of Dunwich history has been altered by a geographical condition. Or, for instance, the exact angle at which the arrow flew which pierced Harold Godwin's eye and ensured the success of the Norman invasion.

One can argue endlessly on the role of the individual in history just because it is impossible of proof. What is certain is, that the greatest intellect of antiquity could not have split the atom, though today a moron can do so by simply pushing the right button.

EVA EBURY.

[This correspondence is now closed.—ED.]

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