

The Freethinker

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IN THE by now remote age prior to 1914, hereditary monarchy was the rule and republics the exception throughout the European continent. France, Switzerland and Portugal (only since 1910) were, I think, the only European republics. However, the First World War resulted in a royal exodus on an international scale beginning with the Russian Revolution of 1917. Today, monarchy is reduced to a rare exception; for on the European continent it exists on the old pattern only in Scandinavia and the Benelux countries and (thanks solely to Winston Churchill's intervention at the end of the last war) in Greece.

However, one still major European state now resolutely retains what an old Republican once described as the "Royal Circus". This is England—or rather since the Act of Union in 1707—Great Britain; a Great Britain which has often been described as "the conservative land in Europe".

The Evolution of the Monarchy

Viewed from a sociological standpoint the evolution of the monarchy in Great Britain has represented an evolutionary process punctuated by two sharp consecutive revolutionary crises: crises represented respectively by the two major English revolutions in 1649-60 and 1688-9. Paradoxically but undeniably, the monarchy, like most of the other non-revolutionary institutions in these islands owes its modern development, and probably even its existence, to the revolutionary sequence during the 17th century.

For it appears probable that had not the Puritan (Calvinist) minority—which seized power after the Civil War had ended with the destruction of the Stuart monarchy—overplayed its hand under Cromwell, the Commonwealth officially established in Great Britain between 1649 and 1660 would have proved permanent. As it turned out, the sequel justified the prediction made by Cromwell's Secretary of State, John Thurloe on the Protector's death on September 3rd, 1658: "Not his own strength, but our divisions will bring Charles Stuart back."

This prediction was fulfilled by the restoration of the Stuarts in 1660. The Stuarts, however, with their belief in divine right and their French notions of absolute monarchy on the Continental model proved intractable. These relatives of the "Sun King" Louis XIV were not willing to accept the permanent role of merovingian figureheads. It took another revolution, the self-styled "Glorious Revolution" of 1688-9 to shift them. But this time, taught by the radical excesses of the earlier revolution, the ruling class in Great Britain were not prepared again to risk the experiment of a republic which might again unloose subversive forces, dangerous to church and state, such as the Levellers, Diggers and Fifth Monarchy men had been during the Cromwellian era.

In 1689, the heroes of the "Glorious Revolution" decided upon a limited or constitutional monarchy in which "the king reigns but does not govern". After some political somersaults divertingly described by the contemporary anonymous author of *The Vicar of Bray*, the then

Whig rulers of England—later to be denominated by Disraeli as the "Venetian Oligarchy"—found an ideal figurehead in the Elector of Hanover, George I (1714-27), perhaps the most conspicuous of whose political virtues was that he did not speak a word of English and was thus compelled to leave the conduct of affairs entirely in the hands of his English advisers, Walpole *et al.*

From that now remote date "when George in pudding time came o'er", the English monarchy has remained a fairly stable institution only temporarily endangered by megalomania on the part of King George III and his Tory "friends", who between them provoked another revolution, but this time, fortunately

for the king and his satellites, in America and not England. Again the evolution of the House of Hanover itself can be divided into two periods, prior to 1870 and subsequently. For throughout the first of these consecutive periods, the monarchy was unpopular as an institution and despised generally on account of the often contemptible personal character of its royal representatives: of George IV (1820-30) in particular "the First Gentleman in Europe". The proletariat, newly evolved by the nascent industrial revolution read their Paine and sympathised with the French Revolution and no doubt relished Charles Bradlaugh's description of their German-imported dynasty as "small breast-bested wanderers". Nor were the bourgeoisie themselves much more favourably disposed towards their extravagant and lecherous monarchs.

The Four Georges

Thomas Carlyle described with obvious contempt, the coronation of William IV (1830-37) upon whose demise the *Times* acidly commented: "To the great majority of his subjects, the late King represented an object of mixed pity and contempt, the greater the pity the greater the contempt". Whilst ten years earlier, upon the demise of George IV, the same paper made the even more unkind comment: "If there is in these islands a single man or a single woman who has a good word to say of the late King, his or her name has not yet reached us".

In his *Four Georges*, Thackeray summed up the Georgian era as it appeared to its more enlightened contemporaries:

George the First, you know, was vile,
Viler, George the Second,
Has anyone ever heard
Of anyone like George the Third?
When George the Fourth to hell descended,
Then God be praised, the Georges ended.

Imperialism and the Monarchy

When the young Victoria succeeded to the throne in 1837, England appeared to be on the very brink of a social revolution on the model of the French; for the revolutionary Chartist movement was then at its zenith. But Clio, the muse of history has a fine sense of irony and revels in the unexpected! For Victoria's long reign proved eventually to represent the "golden century", both of the

VIEWS AND OPINIONS

The Future of the Monarchy

By F. A. RIDLEY

English monarchy and of the world empire over which it then presided.

For from about 1870, the creed of Imperialism took over, and the Empire needed a symbolic figurehead. Victoria, who in private life would have made an ideal and ideally conventional Victorian landlady in Folkestone or Bournemouth (had her "wicked uncles" the sons of George III only practised Victorian morality and begat *legitimate* children capable of succeeding to the throne, she would never have become queen) made an ideal imperial mascot. Disraeli crowned her as Empress of India (1875) and Rudyard Kipling, the Laureate *par excellence* of Empire and of its imperialist creed, sang the praises of "the Widow of Windsor". The republican agitation of Victoria's early years died away and the monarchy entered upon its "second spring".

This lasted down to the last decades which have seen the effective decomposition of the old Anglo-British Empire. Throughout this era of imperialism, the reigning monarch "by the Grace of God, King, Emperor of India" etc., was an unchallenged figurehead, and the institution of monarchy itself took on a unique character almost as sacrosanct as the holy oil which is still used to consecrate our monarchs. But one must not be deceived by appearances; for there was substance behind this show! For our modern monarchy, if still medieval in form, is imperialist in substance. Whilst the monarchy remained the symbol of Empire, it still remained strong. As recently as 1936, it survived the abdication of Edward VIII.

One must accordingly ask the question—in this post-imperialist era when the age of Palmerston, Disraeli and Kipling, is as dead as the dodo, or as Queen Anne—is there any future at all for the monarchy in Great Britain? It appears increasingly doubtful. The last few years have witnessed a growing volume of public criticism of this until-recently sacrosanct institution. Are these the proverbial straws which show the way the wind is blowing? Be that as it may, it would appear unlikely that this century of the common man will continue to tolerate the medieval atmosphere that inevitably clings to the pre-historic institution of kingship. Another generation of democratic evolution could well witness the end of Bradlaugh's House of Brunswick. For the historic causes that combined to shore up the then tottering Hanoverian dynasty after Victoria's succession, no longer operate today.

SOUTH AFRICAN RATIONALISTS HONOUR DR. ROUX

THE April issue of the South African *Rationalist* reports that Dr. Edward Roux was elected Honorary Life President of the Rationalist Association of South Africa and Chairman in absentia pending the Minister of Justice's permission for him to attend meetings. A unanimous vote of all present approved the sending of a letter to the Secretary of the Department of Justice requesting that the Minister permit Dr. Roux to continue as active Chairman of the Association.

Dr. Roux, Head of the Department of Botany at the University of the Witwatersrand, has been forbidden for the next five years to enter the premises of the University or any other educational institution in South Africa; to teach or instruct anyone except his own children in any subject (Dr. Roux's daughter is married); to enter any location or township reserved for Africans, Coloureds or Asians, or any factory; to attend any gathering—even a purely social one—or any meeting; to publish or prepare for publication in any form anything he writes on any subject; to attend any court of law unless required as a witness; to talk or write to any other banned person. He has also been confined to the Johannesburg magisterial area.

Philosophy of Science—Some Facets

9—MORE THAN DESCRIPTION

By DOUGLAS BRAMWELL

IT is now widely accepted that scientific laws are descriptive in the sense discussed in the first article of this series. This implies that the job of science is merely to describe how the world behaves.

Some philosophers hold that human knowledge can never get beyond this descriptive phase and that we can never learn the ultimate nature of the world. Theories about the nature of things, they say, are metaphysical, cannot be verified and hence are pointless.

Before arguing this point let us ask whether science itself never passes beyond the strictly descriptive. The answer to this question appears to be "No", for scientists daily use known laws to predict patterns of events not yet observed. In fact, no scientist with a theory is ever regarded as quite respectable unless he can predict such unobserved events as a consequence of his theory.

For example, a water pipe is seen to fracture when its contents freeze. From this observed fact a budding scientist might put forward the theory that the fracture is due to the water expanding as it freezes. This theory can now be used to predict that, owing to this expansion a reduction of density will occur and that, as a consequence, when a fish pond freezes the ice will form at the surface rather than at the bottom. If our young theorist then goes to a fish pond in winter he will find his theory confirmed.

An observed pipe fracture has led to a theory about change of density, and the theory has been confirmed by an observed fishpond. The theorist has gone beyond his observation and description for, not having weighed the water and ice, he has not observed a change of density. By weighing he could, of course, check his theory directly. But there are more difficult cases.

A nuclear physicist has never seen a neutron, or an electron, or a gamma ray. What he has seen are a whole array of instrument readings and, perhaps, some results of the "experiments" at Hiroshima. But these readings and results are indirect confirmation of theories about neutrons, electrons and gammas which were put forward on the basis of earlier observed readings. As in the case of the theory about the density of ice, an unobserved phenomenon is invented as a bridge from one set of observations to another.

What is more interesting is that, unlike theories about ice, theories about particles are unlikely ever to be directly confirmed. No one will ever see an electron. The physicist has gone far beyond description. Is he talking metaphysics?

THE CHURCH OF SCOTLAND AND FREEMASONRY

SOME members of a Church of Scotland panel on doctrine take the view that total obedience to Christ precludes joining any such organisation as the masonic movement. It appeared to them, after a year's inquiry into the subject, that the initiate was required to commit himself to freemasonry in the way that a Christian should only commit himself to Christ (*The Guardian*, 10/5/65). As a whole, the panel agreed that the Church should remind those of its members who were freemasons that their masonic vows were not intended to be in any way at variance with their more solemn vows of membership in the Body of Christ.

How I Became a Humanist

By PHYLLIS GRAHAM

I SEEM to have been preoccupied with the idea of God for as long as I can remember. Even as a very small child my thought and emotions concerning Him were decidedly mixed! I can recall working out a kind of formula—perhaps at the age of between five and six—which went thus: Jesus is very nice, and the Holy Ghost isn't bad—but God the Father is simply horrid! From which I can only presume that I was haunted from the beginning by the archetypal Father-Figure in its most unpleasant form, and at the same time attracted by the magico-poetic mask that Christianity turns towards the innocent.

However, I managed to reconcile this split-image of the Deity with my own frantic need to create a dream-world, a shelter from the real world without, which always appeared to me hostile, cruel, painful and terrifying. I knew I was quite inadequate to cope with it. So I set up my poetic and mystical image of God on the altar of my fantasy-world, wove an intense "inner life" around it and founded a sanctuary there from the horridness and bitterness of life as I saw it. The sanctuary was not altogether inviolate, but it served me through the critical period of adolescence and probably saved me from disaster!

At the age of fourteen I came into contact—through a schoolfriend—with the Roman Catholic Church. It burst upon my imagination with all the glory of a transformation scene! It seemed the translation to reality of my own private world of poetic dreams and soothing security! I made up my mind at once to "enter the fold" and become one with the communion of saints. The Catholic world was as teeming with unseen presences, exciting possibilities, signs and wonders, as the Greek Golden Age of gods and nature-spirits, or the equally fascinating pages of Grimm's fairy tales—both of which I adored!

After a battle with my parents lasting two years, and a certain amount of lighthearted persecution from my schoolfellows, I was received into the Church on the day before Christmas Eve. I made my First Communion at the Midnight Mass, resplendent in white dress and veil and fêted with a grand "white supper" afterwards by my Catholic friends. It was all very enchanting and magnificent and I felt like a princess in a fairy tale, and the world no longer seemed hostile and terrible, but a warm, cosy place watched over by beneficent angels and saints, no corner of it untouched by the glory they reflected from God.

In this happy state I remained for four years and three months. In many ways life was as unkind to me as ever, but what did it matter? The only real world was the world of the spirit; I had only to abide there faithfully and I was invincible. Besides, was there not Heaven to come? Life was but a period of trial; its sorrows would end, and the joys of the spirit world would blossom into happiness that was eternal.

True, there was that fantastically incredible and horrifying dogma of eternal punishment, which didn't seem to fit into the general cosiness and benevolence. I knew, years later, that I had never really assented to it. But at that time it only nagged at me spasmodically like a hollow tooth, and I could quickly get relief from such sedatives as contemplating the infinite mercy of God, or being assured in soothing tones by priests or fellow-Catholics, "You don't need to think about Hell, it's not for you.

Think only of the love of God and leave the rest to His infinite goodness."

The Catholic atmosphere in which I now lived, moved and had my being was as sweet and luscious and satisfying as the honey in a fly-trap . . . and just as deadly. But this latter fact I had no idea of, and with my fellow-flies I wallowed happily, as deluded as they that I was feeding on the honey of Paradise, the manna of the angels. More deluded, in fact, than most of them, for the desire was growing in me to be utterly immersed, lost and immolated in the sticky sweetness. I wanted to become a nun!

Lots of girls did at that time, owing to the widespread popularity of the famous *Autobiography* of Sainte Thérèse, the so-called "Little Flower of Jesus", the young French girl who became a Carmelite nun at the age of fifteen. We all chattered incessantly about the wonder and importance of being specially "called and chosen" by God, and exchanged our pious dreams and imaginary visions, and hinted darkly at hidden personal penances such as chains, hairshirts, disciplines, etcetera. All this was greatly encouraged by the devout but rather callow young priest who was our Director, and who called and signed himself "The Slave of Mary". He had, in fact, a pure and touching solicitude for the female sex, which didn't endear him to our bluff and down-to-earth Irish rector, who had no patience whatever with what may be called the fancy trimmings of religion, and very little for the curate and his faithful troop of devout virgins. We, however, thought he was simply wonderful, and called ourselves, like him, the "Slaves of Mary", and treasured with the greatest devotion the lists of mortifications he dished out to us. We used to discuss earnestly how many of these we had practised, and I remember one girl being in floods of tears, gasping out that she'd done something too awful to contemplate . . . it turned out she'd lost her list of mortifications coming over the heath! Whoever picked it up must have been either mystified, horrified or plain tickled to death!

But all this came to an end with drastic suddenness. Two weeks after my twenty-first birthday I entered as a postulant in the Order of Our Lady of Mount Carmel. It was the earliest moment I could have done so, for naturally my parents were dead against it, and I could not obtain their permission. I left home—as I thought then for ever—knowing they were broken hearted, and that in all probability I should not even see them again. It is a moment of my life that even now I cannot bear to dwell upon, though the details of that parting on an April Sunday afternoon are burnt into my memory.

The great enclosure doors of the convent swung open to admit me; four faceless dark figures stood awaiting me in the dark enclosure square. For a moment I was petrified. It was a plunge into the black unknown . . . Only pride kept me from turning tail and dashing back to the familiar sweetness of my honey-pot! And indeed if I had known then how ruthlessly and utterly that sweetness was to be denied to me from henceforth and for ever, and replaced by unmitigated bitterness, I should have turned back without hesitation. The next twenty years of my life, at any rate, would have been vastly different!

But I did not know. The moment of terror was succeeded by a moment of elation. The faceless ones had lifted the black veils that covered them. The doors shut

(Continued on page 166)

This Believing World

THAT trenchant critic of everything he does not like—rightly or wrongly—Mr. Bernard Levin, in the *Daily Mail* (5/5/65), says, "I am definitely the last man left alive who knows that Voltaire did not say, 'I disapprove of what you say, but I will defend to the death your right to say it' or anything remotely comparable". If Mr. Levin had read THE FREETHINKER regularly, he might have noticed that the truth was repeatedly pointed out—even by the present writer—who is still alive!

★

VOLTAIRE always felt that a live dog was better than a dead lion, and he would never have been so foolish as to defend to the death the right to utter rubbish. But if Mr. Levin thinks a mere denial of the famous aphorism will kill it, we're afraid he'll have to think again.

★

A DAY later in the book section of the same journal, was the heading, "Who the devil is Fowler any way?" The question was answered with a fine appreciation of one of the most famous men who has ever helped us to write English, the author of *Modern English Usage*; and there can be few writers who would not acknowledge their indebtedness to this remarkable work. But what we noticed in the article was that the *Daily Mail* was not afraid to point out that Fowler was an Agnostic, a fact which few of his readers were likely to know.

★

IF THE "Saturday Reflection" were to come to an end in the *London Evening News*, we would certainly miss our weekly treat of religious imbecility. Its latest discovery (1/5/65) is that "the earliest Christians, the members of the infant Church . . . knew at first only one fact about Christ: that he had risen from death on the third day . . .". It is "the keystone of the soaring arch of the Christian faith". This was "the stupendous truth" to which the Christian Church owes its existence. And yet, as Gibbon pointed out, the story is quite untrue, for the existence of the Church was purely "secular" and had no more to do with anything "divine" than a custard tart.

★

WE NOTE that in the magazine of the South London Industrial Mission, Dr. M. Lane, a lecturer in chemistry as well as a Methodist preacher, claims that, "the modern so-called materialism is merely a means of making it possible to uphold the values of Christianity." How right he is! Bradlaugh's *Plea for Atheism* must have been an invaluable adjunct in promoting "true" Christianity, while Paine's *Age of Reason* really supports the Bible and should be read by all Christians, particularly teenagers. Does Dr. Lane maintain such sentiments in the pulpit?

★

IN THAT happy land once packed with Christianity, Scotland, a deep note of pessimism has, alas, crept in. According to the *Daily Express* (3/5/65) the very Rev. G. Macleod, a former Moderator, sadly declared, "The old bastions are falling down . . . The established Churches of Scotland and England are losing about 15,000 members a year . . . The figure tends annually to increase." But the gem of his doleful pessimism is "Any layman or any parson can believe precisely what he likes." But surely the precious Word of God stands firmly as the Rock of all Ages?

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THE Rev. K. B. Cresswell, rector of St. John the Baptist Church, Longton, Stoke-on-Trent, has made himself very unpopular with Spiritualists by accusing them of a "refined form of ancestor worship". Spiritualism tries, Mr. Cress-

well wrote in his parish magazine, "to satisfy personal cravings for certainty in spiritual things". And he described it as "Christianity without the Cross", a "materialistic religion which tells nothing about God". Medium Gordon Higginson, head of Longton's strong Spiritualist church accused Mr. Cresswell of ignorance and envy. The rector did not know what he was talking about. "He has probably written this," Mr. Higginson said, "because our church is full every week and his is not".

Sister Angela's Night of Terror

By OSWELL BLAKESTON

"The beasts!" Sister Charity hissed, "why don't the young men offer us their places?"

Sister Angela shuddered. "I prefer", she said coldly, "to stand—when men are about".

Sister Charity was all agog. "Oh please tell me . . ."

Hanging from the strap, like some unwashable thing, Sister Angela told of the night at Bamford station. Half an hour to wait on the dark platform with whatever else might be hiding there! "One reads", Sister Angela intoned, "so many stories!"

Her inspiration had been that for one penny a lady might buy privacy and protection. Stiff and patient she had stood in her penny sanctuary, her eyes on the luminous dial of her watch.

A minute and a half to go—not much margin for a misfortune. Why, she even heard the train. Time to go out. And Sister Angela had struggled with the catch of the door, and the train had rattled and roared. In the strong reek of the sulphurous smoke, the door had stuck fast.

A porter was shouting, milk cans banging, and Sister Angela was beginning to scream. It wasn't dignified but . . . yes, she screamed louder. Like a parrot yelling in a hall of mirrors. Chug-chug! the train was moving, leaving the station, leaving Sister Angela shut in her sanctuary.

Sister Charity touched Sister Angela's arm. "You poor darling . . ."

Sister Angela's eyes clouded. "I just couldn't stop—shouting I mean. I went on and on; and then, when everything was quiet, the one porter heard me".

Sister Charity wanted to know the nature of the beast—a sniggler?

"Thank God!" Sister Angela exclaimed, "an honest countryman. He tried to make it easier for me by pretending to be interested only in the . . . er . . . technicalities of the case. He got the door open and tactfully talked fast about springs and levers and so on. He showed me what had gone wrong with the lock?"

"And so?"

"And so we both got locked in! Imagine the horror of it! No prospect of rescue till the first train in the morning. Yet the porter was one of Nature's gentlemen. He wanted me to sit down . . . I mean, you do understand, dear Sister, why I'm the one woman in the world who's grateful for a strap?"

RELIGIOUS HOWLERS

The following howlers were related by an RI teacher in a secondary modern school:

1. Moses's mother saw to it that he was brought up as a Christian.
2. Paul went to Damascus to persecute the Protestants.
3. Jewish law lays down that boys and girls must be circumcised.
4. (Asked for two or three of the Ten Commandments) "Thou shalt not admit adultery".
5. The Archangel Gabriel told Mary that he would be Jesus's father.

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Lecture Notices, Etc.

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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

Richmond and Twickenham Humanist Group Community Centre, Sheen Road, Richmond, Thursday, May 27th, 8 p.m.: GEORGE E. GORMAN, "The Faith and Practice of the Quakers".

South Place Ethical Society (Conway Hall Humanist Centre, Red Lion Square, London, W.C.1), Sunday, May 23rd, 11 a.m.: H. L. BEALES, "The Mainsprings of Social Policy".

Notes and News

PHYLLIS K. GRAHAM, author of "How I Became a Humanist"—the first part of which appears this week—spent twenty years as a nun in a strictly enclosed order. Miss Graham, who first delivered her paper to the newly-formed Worthing Humanist Group, hopes further to use her literary talents for the advancement of Freethought and Humanism.

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DR. COGGAN, the Archbishop of York, brought Anglican greetings to the annual assembly of the Baptist Union of Great Britain and Ireland which was held this year in Leeds. And naturally enough his theme was Christian unity. If ever there was a time to close ranks and "only do separately what we simply cannot do together, it is today", he said (*The Guardian*, 7/5/65). God was summoning Christians to unity and "we dare not shut our eyes to that summons". Why? Because secularism and materialism were attacking the Churches and the world right, left and centre. Dr. Coggan's visit—the first by an Archbishop for 14 years—was "warmly received".

★

THIS week the two Convocations of the Church of England were meeting in joint session to consider the views of the dioceses, collected over the past two years, on proposals for reunion with the other dominant Free Church, Methodism. And it was announced by the Methodist press office that early results of voting in 34 synods showed overwhelming acceptance of closer relations with the Anglican Church. The latter, too, could report "strong evidence" from the dioceses of "a widespread desire in the Church to find a way to union with the Methodists". But there was (according to the Church Information Office publication, *Relations between the Church of England and the Methodist Church*)

"no clear mandate . . . which would justify our recommending to the Convocations that the proposals in the *Report of Conversations* should be accepted without elucidation and amplification". The *Report of Conversations*, incidentally, were the inter-Church talks of 1956-63.

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A Roman Catholic writer on unity, the Rev. Michael Gallon, was unkind enough to declare, however, that the Churches of the Reformation were "spent forces"; and that for the uncommitted the alternatives were "either Catholicism or agnostic Humanism". Father Gallon (in an editorial in the *Catholic Gazette*, quoted in the *Catholic Herald*, 30/4/65) was at pains to point out that he made these statements in a "spirit of charity and ecumenism"; indeed, he consoled the Protestants with the news that through ecumenism they could be saved by the Church of Rome. But Father Gallon's brutal frankness was not all directed at the Protestants. It was easy, he said, to overestimate the state of his own Church's health when one saw "quite a number of new churches, schools and parishes". But there were thousands of non-practising Catholics all over the country, and many thousands who were staying away from the Sacraments. There had also recently been a steady decline in the number of vocations to the priesthood—all the more serious when the "nominal roll" of Catholics had gone up by a million.

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NOR was this the end of the sorry story. The convert rate which, Father Gallon admitted, was "paltry enough compared with the lapsation rate", seemed to be on the decline. In fact, enthusiasm for the conversion of England, which had been prominent after the war and had given birth to the Catholic Enquiry Centre, seemed to have "vanished". A "certain disillusionment" had set in.

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POPE John's encyclicals were based explicitly on an appeal to natural law, the Rev. Cahal B. Daly, Reader in Scholastic Philosophy at Queen's University, Belfast, told the *Christus Rex* conference held in Cahir, Tipperary recently. It was also in virtue of the same natural law that Pope John (in *Mater et Magistra*) had condemned contraception as a means of population control, Father Daly added (*Catholic Herald*, 30/4/65). The transmission of human life, the late Pope had pointed out, was "subject to the all-holy, inviolable and immutable laws of God which a man ignores and disobeys to his cost". And Father Daly recalled the words of Cardinal Suenens in 1962. What was condemned as intrinsically immoral yesterday will not become moral tomorrow", the Cardinal had said. "No one should entertain any confused doubt or false hope on the point. The Church has not decided that these [contraceptive] practices are immoral; she has merely confirmed what the moral law already said about them".

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FATHER Daly then quoted the Bishop of Exeter, Dr. R. C. Mortimer, who also regarded the use of contraceptives as wrong "though conceding, with unconcealed reluctance" that "it is also really probable that in some abnormal circumstances they may be right". This distinctly "relative" interpretation of the allegedly rigid natural moral law in no way deterred Father Daly, who hailed Dr. Mortimer as "One of the greatest of living Anglican theologians". What was significant, we were told, was that Dr. Mortimer by no means shared the "apparent enthusiasm for contraceptives which seems to characterise some recent writing by Catholics". Those Catholics are, we suggest, rather more sensitive to the sufferings of Catholic wives than the confirmed celibate Reader in scholastic Philosophy at Queen's.

How I Became a Humanist

(continued from page 163)

behind me with a sullen clang, but the faces that smiled at me were welcoming and beautiful, and they bent to kiss me . . . I felt I was received into the company of angels. As I was taken through the long, sunlit cloisters to the cell appointed for my use, I saw trees and lawns and flowers through the graceful windows. The pear blossom was in bloom . . .

Then numbness descended upon me, and I went through all the strange experiences that followed as if I were someone else: none of it seemed real, but only parts of a disjointed dream. And indeed the world in which I found myself was more fantastic than any dream-world I could have imagined. A Carmelite prioress had once told me that life in Carmel was "topsy-turveydom", and certainly it was rather like viewing one's familiar world standing on one's head. All the ordinary actions of living had to be learned anew: eating, drinking, sleeping, walking, conversing, working—everything was done in an entirely different way and looked at from an entirely different point of view. But above all, prayer, and everything that had intimately to do with the service of God, was to be learned from the beginning as an infant learns to live. All this naturally forced one back to the weakness and dependence of infancy . . . it was the inception of the lifelong process of the monastic ideal . . . the crushing of intellect and will into utter submission to the Will of God, through perfect obedience to superiors and complete acceptance of every detail of religious life. It is the Roman Church's conception of the fullest meaning of Christ's words: "Unless ye become as little children ye cannot enter into the Kingdom of God." And it is, of course, though in a less perfect and absolute degree, the selfsame submission to authority which she demands from *all* her members.

In those days of my complete ignorance I accepted this as the ideal I wished to attain; I was afraid, certainly, and dismayed by my own weakness; but I was not appalled, as I am today. I had no notion whatever of the terrible power this complete domination places in the hands of the Roman Church, and the terrible weapons she manufactures from it to gain still more and more ascendancy over the minds and souls of men, over nations and governments, over world affairs and every department of politics, over the intimacies of family life and the fate of the individual. I did not see myself then as a tiny cog in a vast machine that straddles the whole earth, working in secret ways of which most men are quite unconscious, though every human existence is in some degree affected, and most of us are more involved than we shall ever know.

And of course I did not know *myself*. I thought that I was in love with God, and that all the childish anger and disapproval I had once felt against Him were cast out for ever by the power of faith. I knew that life for me was difficult, and always would be; that I was difficult myself and would probably have a harder struggle than most to persevere; but I did not know that I was an inveterate rebel to whom submission was impossible. I did not know that my intellect would refuse to be silenced, drugged, starved into final acquiescence. That it would torment me with its questioning, day in, day out, through sleepless nights, over and above the anguish and labour of trying to submit my will, and the enduring of all the pains and privations of an austere and solitary life.

And the life in Carmel was austere and solitary in a very extreme way. Not only the joys of the sense and the pleasures of life, but the consolations of religion itself,

were utterly and ruthlessly withdrawn. We spent our long hours of meditation and chanting of the Divine Office, not in an ornate church with a flower-decked altar and a comforting red sanctuary lamp and many objects of piety to console us, but in the bare, long, barn-like room that ran sideways from the sanctuary of the public chapel, cut off from it and the altar by a double iron grille and a black gauze curtain, and on our side by heavy black shutters that were never opened except during Mass and Benediction. That blank, black wall continually before our eyes was indeed symbolic of the frightful gulf of emptiness into which mind, heart and soul were plunged. There was no music to soften the desperation of it; we intoned the office on two notes only, and all instrumental music was forbidden.

This dark night of the senses was equalled by a dark night of the soul, for we had no sermons or retreats to help us in our solitude. We were cut off, finally and absolutely, not only from all contact with the exterior world, but even from the lawful consolations of spiritual life. I believe it was the most extreme form of renunciation possible to humanity, because it cut down to the very roots of being and there was no outlet whatsoever, no means of escape from the inner and ultimate desolation.

In fact, this particular form of extreme spiritual austerity was not altogether approved by the Church authorities. I believe it has since been modified, after long years of warfare between the various schools of opinion within the order and the ecclesiastical courts. This dissension was going on all the time I was in the convent, which did not add to my peace of mind. It also gave me my first inkling of the intrigue perpetually seething under the surface of the Roman Church, at all times and in every place of her dominion. It appears to be inherent in her nature.

What I have described hitherto was common suffering to every member of the community, in more or less degree of intensity. But each one had her own particular difficulties to cope with, and these became evident very swiftly once the doors of enclosure had clanged to on the outside world, leaving the human soul alone with itself. In my own case, once I had mastered the routine and more or less adapted my physical life to conditions of hardship and strain, and harnessed my will as best I could to the demands of religious obedience, the demon of thought and questioning awoke and sprang up stronger than ever. And it was primarily concerned with that old, ill-digested, secretly refuted problem of Hell and eternal punishment. Since, according to Saint Teresa of Avila, our foundress, we had placed ourselves in the mouth of Hell as buffers between sinners and the avenging wrath of God, the problem could hardly be evaded! And beyond lay the whole torturing enigma of the Origin of Evil . . . more and more impossible to reconcile with the image of an All-Good and Omnipotent God presented to us for our love and adoration.

(To be concluded)

NATIONAL SECULAR SOCIETY ANNUAL CONFERENCE

New Victoria Hotel, Corporation Street, Birmingham
Reception in the New Victoria Hotel on
Saturday, June 5th at 7 p.m.

THE CONFERENCE (for Members only)

will be held on Sunday, June 6th in two sessions:
10 a.m.—12.30 p.m. and 2 p.m.—4.30 p.m.

Walls of Prejudice

By F. H. SNOW

VERY few people are without prejudices, and few are aware that they have them. Most, in fact, believe themselves to have unbiased minds in their assessment of policies and persons. Few people see the necessity to probe for flaws in their views, in order to amend them should honesty demand it. The great majority prejudice systems of thought and ways of life alien to theirs. Instead of subjecting them to the scrutiny of normal reason, they condemn them in ratio to the degree of nonconformity with their own traditions. A wall of prejudice stands between them and intelligent consideration of contrasting creeds and ideologies—and, be it said with equal truth, of their own.

Most religious folk, for instance, if happening to read this article, would not even try to follow my train of reasoning. Catholics would shy at the mere suggestion that they should endeavour to look at their Church and its dogma through the mental lens of a Freethinker or Protestant. To try to understand the way of thinking of such persons would be going off the strict path laid down for them. It would be deviating from the pre-judgment of things non-Catholic, contrived for them by their priesthood, lest they might conceive in them a grain of reason which could weaken the fabric of their faith.

They will, if challenged, and if not too ignorant or illiterate, declare that they are not forbidden to use their reasoning powers concerning the validity of their doctrines or the divine appointment of their Church. Did not Thomas Aquinas, that great medieval saint and pillar of holy wisdom, use the very weapon of reason to demonstrate the truth of belief in a Divine Creator, and, *ipso facto*, of belief in the authenticity of the Church He had appointed to instruct humanity? Was not St. Thomas's argument that the earth and its inhabitants could not have existed without a First Cause, and that only God could be that First Cause, the very essence of reason? The Church had fully endorsed Aquinas, and sanctioned appeal to reason as well as assurance through faith.

But Catholics are only free to appeal to the reasoning approved by their Church. Their mode of thought is predetermined however reluctant they may be to recognise it. To doubt "sacred truths" is sinful and imperils eternal welfare. The faithful may discuss Catholic dogma but not question it. They may reason about it, but not entertain the slightest doubt of it. They have liberty to exercise their reasoning capacities in support of the faith but not against it. In other words, a great wall of prejudice has been constructed that virtually insulates them from the germ of critical thought on the subject of their religious belief. What chance, then, has any freethought article of being read by Roman Catholics with honest effort to discern something of reason in its premises? What chance has the normal, emotionally-submissive Catholic of gaining a rational view of his world and the gods of human fancy?

Has the Jehovah's Witness, the Salvationist, the Muslim, any better prospect of glimpsing the falsity of religious belief? Minus the spurious liberty to reason that Catholics are permitted, they nevertheless refuse to admit even the semblance of common sense to creep into their evaluation of what they have been taught are sacred truths. The Salvationist and Witness advance their religious ecstasies as all-sufficient evidence of God believing them to be vouchsafings of his holy spirit. Other evidence is need-

less and the secular case and all contrasting creeds are ruled out of consideration by the prejudgment resulting from the perfectly logical exaltations of religion-steeped minds. The "great goodness" feeling obtrudes a rampart of prejudice between them and independent thought on the subject of their faith.

Muslim and Judaic zealots, and other non-Christian religionists are, in general, immunised against rational thought concerning their beliefs through lifelong subjection to the discipline of ritual, the unthinkable of disregarding which renders unthinkable any questioning of the *bona fides* of the religion it integrates. A mindless loyalty shelters from the contagion of reason all but an infinitesimal minority of the ritual-dominated.

In the political sphere, the case is not very different. Here too, the closed mind is evident. Traditional loyalties and narrow self-interests mar the instinct for fair-play—the virtues of giving credit where that is palpably due—of acknowledging whatever merit should be conceded to political adversary or party. Sweet reason seldom gets a hearing. The minds of both religious and political partisans rarely strive against the bias that binds them to set views.

On the face of it the humanist ideal of a rational world society has small chance of realisation. Freethinkers might well despair, but for the great decline, in ratio to the earth's population, of both political and religious zealots. Our hopes must rest on the acceleration of that decline, and the consequent expansion of liberal thinking amongst the uncommitted. We should work ardently for this, and the reduction to a negligible force of the paramount prejudices that antagonise mankind, prior to their eventual demise.

Can the Freethinker himself, pledged to oppose all forms of fettered thought, be prey to that which he condemns? He can indeed be untrue to his label, and unfit to tilt at the bias-steeped, by omitting to probe his own views with ruthless scrutiny, and failing to observe the basic freethought principle of according to opponents the greatest possible advantage consistent with reason. As Rationalists, we need to unfailingly guard against the fault that bedevils the vast majority of human beings, and shuts them from the light of objective truth behind walls of prejudice.

Two Humanist Newsletters

IN an April newsletter, the first it is hoped of many giving an up-to-date report of the progress being made towards encouraging Humanists to work in youth clubs and, ultimately, to promoting the formation of Humanist youth organisations, the Humanist Youth Service Committee says that, while it is making valiant efforts to meet the needs of young people, it still suffers from lack of full-time youth leaders, voluntary helpers and experimental projects.

The Committee believes that it is generally felt within the Humanist movement that "Humanists have an important role to play in relation to young people". We can easily forget, it says, "only a minority of youngsters enjoy further education and that many homes fail to provide the stimulus and guidance which are necessary if a young person is to develop to the full his or her potentialities. In this situation, Humanists have a clear responsibility to play their part in improving the position either by

offering their services to local youth clubs, or initiating the formation of youth clubs with the help of other Humanists”.

It is certain, the newsletter continues, that many young people would find Humanism “refreshing and meaningful” after “the nebulous mysticism of Christianity which is offered to them at school and in Church youth clubs”. It must be admitted, however, that the Churches have provided clubs where previously no such facilities existed. Indeed, in areas where the local authorities have not started their own youth clubs, the Churches have a monopoly. If Humanists care about young people, they too must play their part.

There is plenty of scope for voluntary work of all kinds, and the Humanist Youth Service Committee will be pleased to hear from anyone who is interested. The address is: c/o 13 Prince of Wales Terrace, London, W.8.

Another April newsletter, from the Dundee Humanist Group is addressed to those in the area who may not find it congenial or convenient to attend meetings or take part in organisational duties. It expresses the hope that those who have ideas or news of events likely to interest Humanists will send them whenever they can and thus provide the necessary material for the publication. Those who are active in the Group and regard its existence as important or, indeed, imperative for the advance of Humanist ideas are willing to undertake the work of publication.

It cannot be too strongly stressed, the newsletter says, that “the local and national press are by no means on our side”. It was here that the justification was found for attempting a publication. “We would be unreasonable to expect papers with an outlook rooted in Establishment concepts enthusiastically to help us pursue our very different purposes. What publicity we can get through them must be expected to be scanty and grudging”. Freedom of publication could, however, be exploited to advantage and readers were called on to make the newsletter a viable and permanent feature of the Dundee scene. The editor is E. G. Macfarlane, 11 Harefield Road, Dundee.

CORRESPONDENCE

A BRICK

Recently THE FREETHINKER has devoted much space to articles on the mythical Christian founder Jesus Christ which would be more appropriate to some religious broadsheets. We have had Solomon Zeitlin's views from the point of view of Judaism, Paul Winter's from Christianity. How about Cardinal Heenan's?

Not a week's issue passes without some reference to the Christian god (attributed with a capital G in THE FREETHINKER) and discussing, controverting points of theology and similar rubbish. It has been said that the denier of gods recognises the existence of gods by his very denial of it. It would seem that the contributors to THE FREETHINKER substantiate this.

Can we have less preoccupation with the Christian's god and their holy book and demonstrate atheism positively by opening THE FREETHINKER to articles on cosmology, up to date advances in psychology and psychiatry, and an examination of atheistic advances in the fields of education, medicine and sociology?

Or is THE FREETHINKER stuck for all time with Bradlaugh's matrix of polemicising—justifiable in his days.

B. J. CLIFTON.

A BOUQUET

Allow me to congratulate Mr. G. R. Goodman on his splendid article of April 30th.

This is a feature for which there is real need, its value increased by simplicity of presentation and brevity! We appear to be getting “geared up” in our opposition to religion. Mr. Goodman performs a sterling service to atheism and freethought by equipping our young adherents with the salient essentials for the demolition of the theologians' case, and the ultimate creation of a constitution based on secularism and freethought!

Most sincere thanks to Mr. Goodman for his splendid article, may we have more of them!

H. FAIRHURST.

THE PROBLEM OF PAIN

Mr. R. Smith in THE FREETHINKER (7/5/65) says that “the problem of pain is as much a problem for the Rationalist as it is for the Christian”. Surely there is a vast difference between the outlook of the Rationalist and that of the Christian on the question of suffering. The Christian has to try and reconcile two irreconcilables—an omnipotent, almighty God Who is Love and the terrible suffering of many who have done nothing themselves to bring about this agony and pain. The Rationalist, on the other hand, can point to definite causes for this pain such as the action of a drunken driver in crippling a little child.

What matters however to a person in intense agony is not the cause of the pain but its removal. If I am told that I am suffering from an incurable cancer I shall not be interested in a scientific disquisition on the causes of cancer. What will matter to me is that one little word—“incurable”.

While we are fortunate enough not to be saddled with an incurable disease we should both enjoy life and try and help those—as far as we can—who either have to face great physical suffering themselves or have to see those whom they love in great pain or are beset with mental problems.

Mrs. Kit Mouat is not an escapist—she is a true realist in her affirmation that we “must be pro-life all the way”.

The note of optimism she sounds is surely the expression of a true Humanist outlook on life.

RONALD ADKINS.

In reply to R. Smith (7/5/65), I would remind him that “sin” is ineradicable in the nature of imperfect beings, and that he is thus implying that we should abandon cancer research; which would be even less consoling to a cancer victim!

If R. Smith's views on cancer are correct, then will he please tell me how I, an Atheist, ought to thank God for making me so free from sin that I have not currently got cancer?

Rationalists are not afraid of the concept or discussion of death and destruction. Life, however, is short, and during our brief glimmer upon the stage, we would do better to make happier our audiences, than to measure coffin-worms.

ERIC S. BARKER.

ATHEISM ON AMERICAN TV

I feel sure that it will be of interest to the readers of THE FREETHINKER to learn that, on April 25th of this year, I made a twenty-five minute rebuttal telecast of an attack on atheism and against Atheists which, early this year, had been made by a Roman Catholic priest, a Father Ellwood E. Keiser of the Paulist Fathers. I made the rebuttal over TV Station KPIX, the leading television station in the San Francisco Bay area. On the following day (April 26th) I made a videotape at the same station which was a ten-minute talk in support of atheism and a short interview. This is to be broadcast on May 2nd. Late in May or early June I am scheduled to make a thirty-minute talk over KPIX in support of atheism as a point of view and as a way of life.

By making all this broadcast-time available to me, free of charge, the management of Station KPIX has set a good example for the other broadcasting stations of the United States to follow, and certainly the management of KPIX deserves a lot of credit for doing so.

TV Guide, America's leading television periodical, publicised my rebuttal of April 25th, referred to above.

ROBERT H. SCOTT.

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