

# The Freethinker

Volume LXXXV—No. 23

Founded 1881 by G. W. Foote

Price Sixpence

VIEWS AND OPINIONS

## Agnostic Adoption

By DAVID TRIBE

BEFORE the connection between sexual intercourse and childbirth was recognised, there was no conception of paternity, the leading divinity was a mother goddess, and the adults of the tribe undertook joint responsibility for the upbringing of children. Understanding of paternity tended to make the family group smaller, if not monogamous; while the growth of civilisation, technology, economics and population size brought about emphasis on property inheritance and "legitimacy". "Illegitimate" children were—and in most societies still are—penalised for the "sins of the fathers". Sporadic attempts have from time to time been made in the Soviet Union to undermine the monogamous family unit on the grounds that it fosters acquisitiveness, nepotism, racialism and social injustice. While these arguments have never satisfactorily been answered, it has been found in practice that there are overwhelming emotional reasons why people cling to the traditional family pattern. Not only do the great majority of parents who practise contraception—and a large proportion even of those who do not—want to bring up their own children, but the experience of children's homes is not encouraging. While no longer redolent of *Oliver Twist*, *Brave New World* or 1984, and in most cases performing a valuable social service for those unattached infants, usually coloured, who find it difficult to secure adopters, children's homes tend to produce "institutional" infants. Somehow the atmosphere of changing faces "on" and "off" duty and the confusion of changing faces seem to disturb or inhibit the developing child mind. Such infants can often be recognised by emotional and intellectual retardation and a tendency to melancholy or apathy. Professional assessment agrees with lay intuition that children are likely to feel more secure if brought up in individual loving households.

### Present Difficulties

Paid foster parents can be and are widely used and perform a useful service, but there is always a danger that this arrangement may become purely a commercial proposition. There are, however, many couples who desperately want children but for medical reasons are unable to have their own, who are waiting to undertake the expense and emotional commitment of supporting adoptees and give them full legal status. But they do not always find it easy to become adopters.

There are many reasons for disappointment. Applicants may be too old, or too poor, or too ill, or too neurotic for social workers to undertake responsibility for entrusting children to their care. But there are large numbers of prospective parents admirable by criteria of age, income, health and character, who are unable to obtain babies because they do not profess a religious belief.

This anomaly is one of many inherited from the days when virtually the entire population professed—and probably in most cases really believed in—Christianity. It is difficult to say what the proportion is today, but only about ten per cent of the population attends even Easter

communion. Yet the great agnostic or apathetic majority are still expected to profess a religion and often obtain endorsement from a clergyman who doesn't know them—to the intense irritation of all concerned—before adoption can be considered.

Many factors have led to the present difficulties. Most of the older adoption societies are denominational. This is a relic of the days when the Churches, notably the Established Church of England, opposed the formation of a secular welfare state and insisted that whatever inadequate social services there were remain exclusively in their own hands. In this way social sanctions could reinforce the law in the maintenance of religious

belief. Understandably enough, these denominational adoption societies still want to or legally have to find adopters of their own persuasion.

There are however ostensibly "undenominational" adoption societies which do not mind what sect an applicant belongs to so long as it is religious. The National Adoption Society, a charity registered as a benevolent society "under the Friendly Societies' Act", is officially established to help children "to be adopted by suitable and respectable persons of established positions in life". Yet in practice it does "insist that applicants should profess some religion and we ask for a reference from their priest, vicar, or pastor . . . We do not accept atheists or agnostics". There can be no question about whether many agnostic and atheist couples are "of established position in life". It must be assumed that they are not deemed "suitable and respectable". Presumably this view derives from the traditional assumption that religion is the only basis for morals and that an irreligious person is *ipso facto* immoral.

This conclusion is in flat opposition to that drawn from criminal statistics, but it is at least logical. The Society has however said, "Although we have nothing against agnostics, we are unable to help them". Similarly, the National Children Adoption Association "does not undertake the responsibility of placing children with those who are atheists . . . We do wish to know that people belong to a specific faith (we are undenominational) and practise their religion . . . at least to a reasonable degree . . . Because of the rules of this Association, we will be unable to help the applicant adopters who describe themselves as Humanists. We feel sure that they would be people who would live good lives and have nothing personal against them, but as we have told you, we do not place our children where there is no religion in the home". In this context religion is little more than a social cachet, but a very important one for prospective adopters who are too honest to affect a religion which they don't believe in.

Some local authorities have set up adoption societies, that are also in theory undenominational, and supported by all the ratepayers in the area. Yet many of them are no more helpful to Agnostics or Atheists than sectarian societies. Sometimes this policy results from ecclesiastical politics on the council, sometimes from the attitude of the

children's officers concerned. Appointment within the social services is still very much under church influence and the number of acknowledged Agnostics or Atheists is infinitesimal. Thus piety or hypocrisy perpetuates itself.

There is another difficulty. Even where an adoption society is sympathetic it cannot provide babies which do not exist. Under the 1958 Adoption Act "The consent of any person to the making of an adoption order in pursuance of any application (not being the consent of the infant) may be given (either unconditionally or subject to conditions with respect to the religious persuasion in which the infant is proposed to be brought up) without knowing the identity of the applicant for the order". This is identical with a clause in the 1950 Adoption Act, save for the curious replacement of "religious persuasion in which the infant is proposed to be brought up" for "religious persuasion in which the infant is to be brought up". Standards of honesty seem to have declined in the short space of eight years.

Except in special circumstances, before a baby can be adopted the consent of its parents or guardian—often the natural mother—is required by the court, i.e. the local juvenile court (two-thirds of all cases), the county court or the High Court. This consent form reads: 1. I understand that the effect of an adoption order will be to deprive me permanently of my rights as a parent/guardian and to transfer them to the applicant(s) . . . 4. I hereby consent to the making of an adoption order/a provisional order in pursuance of the application (on condition that the religious persuasion in which the infant is proposed to be brought up is . . . )".

If the parent is an unmarried mother she may have spent the past few months in a mother and baby home which, for reasons outlined above in connection with adoption societies, is often a religious foundation. She is thus under strong real or moral pressure to enter on the form the denomination of the home. Or a welfare worker of the local authority persuades her to give her baby a religion. Or the court or outside a JP asks "What is your religious persuasion?" in a tone which suggests a positive answer, if it be only an ancestral memory. An unmarried mother is likely to have guilt feelings and do everything possible to placate authority and not appear to be "depriving" her child of religion or lacking in contrition. Where there is no parent or guardian to give consent courts habitually write "C of E". Once the baby has been given a religious label there is a legal obligation to find adopting parents of the same persuasion.

There are two important practical results. For religious and social reasons, Roman Catholic families tend to be large and a disproportionate number of unmarried mothers Catholic. There is thus a greater supply of "Catholic" babies than adopters available, with the necessary credal qualification. At the same time there are twelve times as many applicants as babies to hand in the non-Catholic population.

The long range national solution is to amend the 1958 Adoption Act and greatly expand local authority adoption societies with purely secular terms of reference. It is an extraordinary anomaly in the present system that natural parents or guardians must permanently renounce their "rights as a parent/guardian and not even know the identity of the adopters and yet be able to dictate the credal upbringing of their children. Practical criteria and consideration of moral worth should be the only determinants of suitability as adopters, while all babies should be given every chance of being adopted. They should not acquire the inhibiting label of "Catholic", while coloured infants, who are found to be generally more accept-

able to non-religious than to religious applicants, should not be deprived of a home whose potential parents are ideological "unsuitable".

For the indefinite future, however, Agnostic or Atheist prospective adopters (and unmarried mothers) are not without help. An Agnostic Adoption Bureau was set up in September 1963. In February 1965 it was recognised as an adoption society by the London County Council and as a charity by the Charity Commissioners. Its aims are adoption and helping unmarried mothers to find accommodation during pregnancy. Applicants will be judged on social and ethical merit and will not be subject to credal tests, though naturally preference will be given to Agnostics and Atheists as they are generally denied other facilities. Though it is certainly more accurate to describe a baby as "agnostic" or "atheist" than religious, the society regards the labelling of babies at all as faintly ludicrous and hopes that parents, whether religious or non-religious, will not try to impose their beliefs on their children. As it is a charity it is unable to work for changes in the present law, but hopes that these will speedily come.

### THOMAS PAINE

WAY back in 1809—on June 8th—Thomas Paine died in New York. Here is a small garland of quotations from his writings as a tribute to a man, whose brain was accurately attuned to the times he lived in, yet whose works still carry a powerful message in the modern world.

Government is not a trade which any man, or any body of men, has a right to set up and exercise for his own emolument, but is altogether a trust in right of those by whom the trust is delegated, and by whom it is always resumable. It has of itself no rights; they are altogether duties.—*Rights of Man*.

War involves in its progress such a strain of unforeseen and supposed circumstances, such as a combination of foreign matters, that no human wisdom can calculate the end. It has but one thing certain, and that is increase in taxes.—*Prospects on the Rubicon*.

Science, the partisan of no country, but the beneficent patroness of all, has liberally opened a temple where all may meet. Her influence on the mind, like the sun on the chilled earth, has long been preparing it for higher cultivation, and further improvement. The Philosopher of one country, sees not an enemy in the Philosopher of another: He takes his seat in the temple of Science, and asks not who sits beside him. *Letter to the Abbé Raynal on the Affairs of North America*.

Whenever we read obscene stories, the voluptuous debaucheries, the cruel and torturous executions, the unrelenting vindictiveness with which more than half the Bible is filled, it would be more consistent that we call it the word of a demon than the word of God. It is a history of wickedness, that has served to corrupt and brutalise mankind; and, for my own part, I sincerely detest it, as I detest everything that is cruel.—*The Age of Reason*.

I love the man that can smile in trouble—that can gather strength from distress, and grow brave by reflection. It is the business of little minds to shrink; but he, whose heart is firm, and whose conscience approves his conduct, will pursue his principles unto death.—*American Crisis*.

CHRISTOPHER BRUNEL.

### F. A. HORNIBROOK MEMORIAL APPEAL

Fred Hornibrook who died on March 31st, aged 88 was an active worker for Freethought all his life. He was regarded with deep affection and admiration by those who knew him, and he possessed those qualities that the unthinking often claim to be the monopoly of "true Christians".

Certainly he had all the qualities of those true men and women who have dedicated themselves down the ages to causes sometimes unpopular, but always honourable. And at all times he had the unstinting support and encouragement of his wife Nina.

We feel that his many friends will welcome the opportunity of contributing to an appeal for Mrs. Hornibrook which we are privileged to sponsor. Cheques, postal orders etc. should be made payable to the "F. A. Hornibrook Memorial Appeal Committee", and sent to the Hon. Treasurer at 103 Borough High Street, London, S.E.1. All donations will be acknowledged.

William Collins, Richard Condon, Peter Cotes, William Griffiths, William McIlroy and David Tribe.

## “Killing no Murder”

By F. A. RIDLEY

A FEW weeks ago in an article, “The Ethics of Assassination”, I cited the famous pamphlet written in 1657 to advocate the assassination of the Lord Protector, Oliver Cromwell. It would appear from subsequent correspondence that this classical advocacy of tyrannicide is nowadays almost forgotten. However, the political and religious murders of President Kennedy and Malcolm X have made this grim subject again topical. *Killing no Murder* remains the classical discussion of this dubious and intriguing theme, and it may not be out of place to again bring this most remarkable pamphlet to the notice of contemporary readers. For, apart from its author’s highly controversial conclusions, Edward Sexby’s thesis is without doubt a most remarkable one; a masterpiece of ironic eloquence and logical analysis. Despite its ruthless conclusions, it is one of the great political pamphlets in the English language.

Its author, steeped in the Puritan tradition of biblical eloquence, was an authentic master of English prose in what was perhaps its classical epoch. For like his great Puritan contemporaries, Milton and Bunyan, Sexby’s style reveals strong traces of the stately eloquence of the Authorised Version (1604) of the Bible, a monument of eloquent English prose if scarcely of scientific accuracy. I would rank *Killing no Murder* as in the top flight of 17th-century English prose, and its ex-Ironside author as not only one of the most acute critics of dictatorship in political literature but as the literary equal in prose, even of his fellow puritans Milton and Bunyan. As a modern radical publicist recently reminded us, the Cromwellian army nurtured the seeds of English democracy.

From internal evidence, *Killing no Murder*, was written in February 1657, soon after the failure of the conspiracy of Colonel Miles Sindercomb to kill the Lord Protector, Oliver Cromwell, as he passed down Whitehall; an earlier attempt to kill Cromwell as he drove through the streets of London in 1653 to assume the Protectorship had also narrowly failed, when a huge stone crashed through the glass roof of his carriage. Both Sindercomb and the author of *Killing no Murder* were members of the Levellers, an egalitarian group in Cromwell’s Ironsides, who would now be described as the extreme left of the English Revolution in the mid-17th century. As usually perhaps in the later stages of successful revolutionary movements, the radical wing became disappointed at the slow pace and incomplete results of the revolution for which they had fought. Like Milton, they evidently held that “a new presbyter is but old priest writ large”.

The Levellers had, in particular, expected a much greater degree of political and economic democracy than Cromwell’s regime was prepared to grant. In particular, the republican elements in the army were incensed at what they believed was the Protector’s intention to restore the monarchy in his own person and dynasty.

Cromwell twice refused the crown, but his radical critics believed that these were only feelers and that “King Oliver” would eventually succeed King Charles. Soon after the trial and execution of the Sindercomb conspirators, another officer in the army, Colonel Edward Sexby published *Killing no Murder*, a passionate defence of Sindercomb and an outspoken demand for the assassination of Cromwell. The pamphlet was printed in Holland (then the most liberal regime in Europe) under the pseudonym of William Allen. But its real author came

over clandestinely from Holland and distributed copies all over the country.

On June 24th, he was arrested by Cromwell’s ubiquitous secret police when on the point of embarking for Holland. He died violently in the Tower of London on January 13th, 1658 either as a result of committing suicide (as stated by the government) or (much more likely) assassinated by his jailers; “shot whilst trying to escape” would be the modern expression. Prior to the publication of his famous diatribe against Cromwell, Sexby had had a chequered career as successively a colonel in Cromwell’s army, a diplomatic agent of the Commonwealth regime, and finally as an anti-Cromwellian agitator.

Shortly before the publication of his pamphlet, he had been trying to form an incongruous alliance against Cromwell of his republican critics on the Left (as we now term it) and of his royalist enemies on the then political Right. In connection with which, Sexby had had an audience with the exiled Charles Stuart then resident in Holland, but had expressly stipulated that he “was not to bend the knee” to the future Charles II. Meanwhile the sensation made by *Killing no Murder*, was terrific. One of its most interested readers was Cromwell himself and Sexby had the (posthumous) satisfaction of assisting to do with his pen what he had advocated doing with the dagger.

For Cromwell was so haunted by the fear of assassination that he resorted to the most extraordinary precautions, changing his guards every day and his bedroom every night: Finally he “died of the fear of dying”, (as a contemporary royalist pamphleteer remarked significantly) on September 3rd, 1658, his “lucky day”, the precise anniversary of his decisive victories at Dunbar and Worcester—surely a bizarre illustration of the biblical adage that the pen is mightier than the sword, or the dagger!

Colonel Sexby’s arguments for tyrannicide are not only eloquent and logical, but are extremely learned, replete with classical and theological, lore. And some of them seem to be derived from earlier Jesuit manuals on regicide. As I have shown elsewhere, Sexby’s intermediary during his negotiations with Charles Stuart was a famous Jesuit, William Talbot SJ, later Archbishop of Dublin. Extremes meet: Jesuits and red publications combined against their common enemy, Cromwell. Cf my book: *The Revolutionary Tradition in England*, p. 131.

Unfortunately, in an article of this summary nature it is quite impossible to do even the barest justice to this great pamphlet, which begins with an ironic reminder to Cromwell that, however great his services to mankind may have been in his life they were nothing to the benefits that Cromwell would bequeath to his contemporaries by abruptly quitting this mortal scene. “For when the Father of his country is dead, all of us will be his heirs”.

Sexby goes on to outline the characteristics, not only of Cromwell and of the eight major-generals who then ruled Great Britain under the Protectorate, but which permanently reappear under every police state. Indeed—and again quite apart from its special subject matter—Sexby’s pamphlet must surely be regarded as one of the most powerful and permanent analyses ever penned of the endemic characteristics of every dictatorship. Much of it is still as relevant in connection with modern police states as it was, no doubt, to the military dictatorship of Cromwell and his major-generals. Its author passes with

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## This Believing World

SO THE Goya portrait of the Duks of Wellington has been recovered by the police without any "psychic" intervention by the "world-famous" Dutch clairvoyant Gerard Croiset, who completely failed to find it when he was here in England a few weeks ago. His failure was however not quite as bad as the utter failure of our own mediums, who had a much longer time to contact the spirits.

★

THEIR astonishing success has always been in getting in touch with somebody's Uncle George or Aunt Martha, still alive in Summerland after being dead and buried in this vale of tears years ago. These spirits have never the slightest difficulty in pointing out where the old flower pots still stand, or where a long lost will can be found in a disused bureau. Six poor girls were murdered this year, and not a single clue has been offered the police about the murderer by any medium. What a farce is "mediumship".

★

YOU can't keep true Christians out of the news. Here we have the Exclusive Plymouth Brethren back—in court this time, trying their utmost to stop a wife whose husband left her the better to worship Jesus, from interfering with their divine service. The wife actually had the temerity to call the Brethren "a lot of brain-washed idiots", for which, instead of turning the other cheek, they wanted her to be put in prison. Alas an unbelieving judge refused (*Daily Express*, 22/5/65) to grant such an order. We can't help wondering—what would Jesus himself have done if faced with such a case?

★

ALTHOUGH the Oberammergau Passion Play in Bavaria will not take place until 1970, it is already beginning to be talked about. The *Sunday Express* recently had five columns about it, though there was nothing said about it being as anti-Semitic as *Mein Kampf* itself. Whether Otto Preisinger will take the part of Jesus again is not certain, but of course he talked a lot about "our Lord" in the article. Indeed, Preisinger found out that "Christ was a very strong man". The strongest man that ever lived? We expected something of the sort.

★

WE DO not hear much these days of the Congregational Union, but we note that its new chairman, the Rev. E. Gould, wants a Christian warden in every street "to help and advise those in need". He wants even more—a "tremendous upheaval" (*Daily Express* 18/5/65) in his Church, to provide "spearheads of evangelism". In his own church, records were made of discussions between Christians and non-Christians and these were played back. But alas it appears that the Christian case was unsatisfactory "because people were not sure enough of their facts or shy of getting involved in an argument . . .". Which is a way of saying that the Christian case made a very poor show. It is a pity that Mr. Gould himself does not try his hand with a well-informed Freethinker. Is he shy?

### TEENAGE SEX

Notwithstanding all the influence to which young people of today are exposed—greater independence; the weakening of family bonds and religious influences; the development and exploitation of the teenage commercial market; earlier maturity and the powerful sex drive at this age—nowwithstanding all this, the results of this research show that premarital sexual relations are a long way from being universal amongst teenagers, for well over three-quarters of the boys and girls in our sample have never engaged in them.

—Michael Schofield (*The Sunday Times*, 23/5/65)

Well, well! *Surprise, surprise!*

### "KILLING NO MURDER"

(Concluded from page 179)

consummate literary skill from learned logic to passionate denunciation, and concludes with a tremendous burst of eloquence clearly modelled on the biblical prose of the Apocalypse.

"There's a great Roll behind, even of those that are in his own muster, rolls that are ambitious of the name of the Deliverers of their country and they know what the action is that will purchase it. His [Cromwell's] bed his table is not secure, and he stands in need of other guards to defend him against his own. Death and destruction pursue him wheresoever he goes; they follow him everywhere like his fellow-travellers, and at last they will come upon him like armed men. Darkness is hid in his secret places. a fire not blown shall consume him; it shall go ill with him that is left in his Tabernacle. He shall flee from the Iron weapon and a Bar of Steel shall smite him through. Because he hath oppressed and forsaken the poor, because he hath violently taken away a House that he builded not; we may be confident, and so may he, that ere long all this will be accomplished. For the triumphing of the wicked is but short and the joy of the Hypocrite but for a moment. Though His Excellency mount up to the Heavens, and his Head reacheth unto the clouds, yet he shall perish like his own dung. They that have seen him shall say Where is he?"

After this burst of burning rhetoric with which Sexby concludes his pamphlet, it is somewhat of an anticlimax that whilst Cromwell died in the same year as Sexby (1658), yet his demise was not followed by the millenium, but by the Restoration, a vastly more corrupt and incompetent regime than was that of Oliver Cromwell.

There are perhaps lasting lessons in "The Ethics of Assassination" to be learned from this historical anticlimax.

### FOUR POEMS

#### THE OLD CARDINAL

His servants,  
Fec, Fi, Fum and Fo,  
are dead long long and long ago.  
The woman who kept house for him  
became a bride in black.  
He lives alone  
and lives because  
his Hell's too full  
for him to die.

#### THE SEMINARY AND BRIGHT WINTER

In the maze of midsummer  
they spread a safety net,  
fit for a bishop,  
and bodies go  
straight into the cupboard.  
But then in wintertime the masters are  
too cold to watch with care  
just how the students grow!

#### THE HOLY GHOST

Mandarin angels  
borrow books  
ex libris Eucharist.  
They do their nuts  
at mention of  
a quiver of  
wood warblers.

#### TOADS FOR SUPPER

The handsome devil spent  
one night in heaven.  
"They weren't,"  
he smirked,  
"all angels!"

OSWELL BLAKESTON.

## THE FREETHINKER

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

Telephone: HOP 2717

THE FREETHINKER can be obtained through any newsagent or will be forwarded direct from the Publishing Office at the following rates: One year £1 17s. 6d.; half-year, 19s.; three months, 9s. 6d. In USA and Canada: One year, \$5.25; half-year, \$2.75; three months, \$1.40.

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

### 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.

### Notes and News

ECUMENISM pursues its leisured—and mainly one-sided way. The Bishop of Bath and Wells, the Right Rev. Edward Henderson will, we learn from the *Guardian* (24/5/65), take part in the annual Roman Catholic pilgrimage to Glastonbury on July 4th. He will thus become the first Anglican bishop to take part officially in a Roman Catholic pilgrimage. At Glastonbury Abbey, mass will be celebrated for the first time since the dissolution, and Archbishop Cardinale will crown a statue of Our Lady of Glastonbury.

★

THE twenty-eighth successor to St. Ignatius as Father-General of the Society of Jesus, Father Pedro Arrupe, is considered to be a man of the centre, George Armstrong reported from Rome (*The Guardian*, 24/5/65). He is certainly a man of experience. A 57-year-old Basque, Father Arrupe returns to Europe after having been a missionary in Japan since just before the last war. He was on the outskirts of Hiroshima when the first A-bomb was dropped, and his early training as a medical student proved useful in setting up field hospitals. He also believes in action. He would like to see the Jesuits entering into the working world—perhaps taking up where the worker priests were forced by Pius XII to leave off. His predecessor, Father Janssens, hoped that at least 30 per cent of the Jesuits would become engaged in actual mission work, but at present the figure is only 19 per cent. Having served in Mexico and the USA as well as Japan, Father Arrupe is missionary minded and may succeed in increasing the percentage.

★

ON MAY 23rd, Father Agnellus Andrew, the BBC's interpreter of Roman Catholic ceremonies—the papist Richard Dimbleby—launched an appeal for £500,000 to extend

and modernise the Catholic Centre for Television, Radio and Cinema at Hatch End, Middlesex. Religious programmes would be recorded at the Centre for use in the newly-emerging countries of Africa, Asia and South America, and students would be trained in the efficient use of broadcasting techniques. "A vast erosion of the Christian faith is going on all over the world", Father Andrew said. And he regretted that "We have still not succeeded in harnessing Christianity to the power of the broadcasting medium". But he can hardly attribute the failure to lack of practice.

★

LAST year the Church Commissioners' investments earned £18 million, nearly half the total income of the Church of England. "A Church which is really committed to serving humanity should give this money away", said Nicolas Stacey, Rector of Woolwich, writing in the *Observer* (23/5/65). Increasingly thoughtful Christians found themselves believing more and more in less and less—"more deeply committed to Christ, more ready to be reverently agnostic about much else". And so, Mr. Stacey prayed and pleaded for a "resurrected Church" which would not express its life in mighty buildings and other expressions of "worldly power and status". Its work would be done "without fuss or publicity through small groups of people meeting in their own homes and places of work . . . planning how they can best serve the community through the secular, statutory and voluntary organisations". This, believe it or not, is the way in which Mr. Stacey thinks the Church could survive.

★

IT MUST however be said in Mr. Stacey's favour that he sets an example. Though now Rural Dean of Greenwich as well as Rector of Woolwich, he is no longer paid by the Church, but earns his living outside.

★

ROBERT BROWNING, as Christopher Ricks mentioned in his *New Statesman* review (21/5/65) of *Browning to his American Friends* (Bowes and Bowes, 50s.), never forgave the Spiritualists who "gulled" his Elizabeth. And the best letters in the collection, Mr. Ricks said, "are those where he meets his old spiritualist enemies again". Notably, of course, "Mr. Sludge the Medium", alias Daniel Dunglas Home. Another, Sophie Eckley, "cheated Ba [Elizabeth] from the beginning" but Browning admitted "in the bitterness of truth", that his wife deserved it "for shutting her eyes and stopping her ears as she determinedly did".

★

FOR once all the bishops—or at least the four who voted—were on the right side in the House of Lords on the motion for the second reading of Lord Arran's bill on homosexual law reform, which was passed by 94 votes to 49. Former Conservative Lord Chancellors, Lord Dilhorne and Lord Kilmuir bitterly attacked the bill; former Lord Chief Justice Goddard spoke of "bugger's clubs" being "given a charter"; and Lord Montgomery made a comparison with "the devil and all his works". The present Lord Chancellor, Lord Gardiner and most of the Labour peers seem to have supported Lord Arran, but the Parliamentary Under-Secretary to the Home Office specifically dissociated the Government from the bill. Mr. Wilson's might be a great reforming Government, but it has its limits. And when Mr. Leo Abse sought leave to introduce a homosexual law reform bill in the House of Commons, 51 Labour members voted against it, along with 126 Conservatives and one Liberal. The minority in favour comprised 114 Labour members, 40 Conservatives and seven Liberals.

# The Age of Unreason

By GEORGE R. GOODMAN

(Continued from page 175)

As previously mentioned, our entire solar system with all its planets and moons describes a huge circle around another sun in space, viz., the star Sirius. This movement takes 25,920 years to complete and, during that time, our Sun appears to traverse through various constellations or star-clusters. This was already known to the ancients from China to Mexico and from Babylon to Egypt.

They called that belt or apparent pathway the large zodiac, because there is also the small zodiac of 12 months to which reference will be made later on.

By arbitrarily dividing that huge circle into 12 sections (or houses), they gave to each of them an appropriate sign and name and called the duration of 2,160 years an "age". Twelve of these ages constitute one complete turn of our solar system around Sirius.

As all the religious festivals in the world were—and still are—based on the movement of sun, moon and planets and the resulting four seasons, it is sheer imbecility on the part of the various denominations to assert that either the birth or the death of their central figure, or any "miraculous" happening in their particular orthodoxy had anything to do with the seasonal festival.

But for a long time it was something of a mystery why practically all the Sungods and most of the Christs and Messiahs should have been portrayed as having had two mothers. The answer can be found in the small zodiac. For if one draws a straight line from the zodiac's section called Virgo, going through the pivotal centre to the opposite section called Pisces, one has traversed six months, which will presently be seen to dramatise not only cosmic happenings, but also man's evolutionary development.

The ancients localised the birth of the natural man in the zodiacal house of Virgo, and that of the evolved man in the opposite house of Pisces. These, then were the houses of the two mothers of life's progeny. The first was the Virgo mother, the primeval symbol of the Virgin Mary—thousands of years before the year One. Virgo gave man his natural birth by water (all babies are born in a sac of water!) and became known as the "Water-mother". Pisces stood as the symbol of the evolved and intellectual man and was called the "Fish-mother".

Describing man, Plato wrote: "through body, it is an animal, through intellect, it is a god". No wonder then that Virgo was poetised as the Water-mother of the natural man, and Pisces as the intellectual and ethically-evolved man or the god-to-be. Man's physical body is the high product of a biological evolution that actually started in the ocean water! The Virgin mothers are all identified with water as symbol and their various names, such as Meri, Mary, Myra, Myrrha, Miriam, Venus (born of the sea-foam, stirred between the knees of Jupiter, as he waded through the seas), Tiamat and Thallath (Thalassa Greek for sea) are all designations for water or the sea.

On the other hand, there are the fish avatars of Vishnu (the second god of the Hindu triad), such as the Babylonian Ioannes who, like the Egyptian Horus and the Gospel Jesus, and the Hebrew Jonah (derived from Ioannes)—all came as the zodiacal Pisces or Ichthys, "fish" in Greek, and offered themselves as "food for man", while the latter is immersed in the sea of generation.

Dagon, the national god of the Philistines, represented as half-man and half-fish, was to his worshippers the symbol of the fertilising power of nature. And the Assyrian goddesses Atergatis and Semiramis (who is none other

than the Astarte of the Old Testament and equates with the Greek Aphrodite and the Roman Venus, were actually called "fish-mothers"!

To put it concisely in one sentence:—all the various Christs and saviours were credited with two mothers, because Virgo was the water-mother of the natural man, and Pisces was the fish-mother of the spiritually evolved or highly ethical and intellectual man.

May we put in a not out of the way aside, viz., that most humanists, agnostics and atheists have, because they spurn ecclesiastical dogmas, adopted in their stead highly ethical standards or maxims which, to them, are spiritually guiding lines of a far higher and more advanced type than the reason-insulting doctrines of a group of bigoted, stupid and superstitious creed manufacturers of the 3rd and 4th century!

The greatest honour and respect should be accorded to the Dane Hans Christian Anderson and, likewise, to the two German brothers Grimm because, unlike the writers of the New Testament, none of them had the impudence to call their fairy-tale books "holy" or "sacred".

Maybe, a hundred years hence, we shall have an "International Board of Writers and Historians" to determine whether any book deserves the predicate or subtitle "holy" or "sacred". And also, whether any historical person, like the Emperor Constantine I., of Nicean disrepute, deserved the subtitle "the Great"—or, whether the full subtitle should really have been "the Great Scoundrel".

It is impossible to assess the psychological effect and damage on children and teenagers caused by the horrible story of the beheading of the disciple John. But even to an adult, the picture of John's head being presented to an alleged "King" Herod on a platter (on account of a "promise" given to a strip-tease dancer) is one of the most repulsive and macabre representations in the Bible's extensive calendar of wicked atrocities—real or imaginary.

Alas, when one investigates this particular yarn of pious frightfulness, one comes to the astonishing discovery that the Tetrarch Herod of Galilee had died already in the year 4 BC and could not possibly have enjoyed the dancing of the damsel 35 or 36 years later on!

But the greatest dénouement awaits the investigator who makes use of the Julian calendar and the Roman Catholic calendar of "Saints" in connection with the large zodiac. He will find that the "death" of John the Baptist is fixed on August 29th. On that day, a specially bright star, representing the head of the constellation Aquarius, rises, whilst the rest of his body is below the horizon, at exactly the same time as the sun sets in Leo (the kingly sign representing Herod). Thus the latter "beheads" John, because John is associated with Aquarius, and the *horizon cuts off the head of Aquarius!*

And that was that.

(To be continued)

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## A Distinguished Humanist

By D. M. CHAPMAN

I DON'T mind finding fault with God but not with Gilbert Murray—not that Gilbert Murray is beyond criticism mind you; it's just that his *Humanist Essays*, recently reissued in Unwin Books, (7s. 6d.) lend themselves more to high praise. Some idea of what is to be enjoyed in this collection will be presented but, first of all, a word or two about the author would be in order for those who are unacquainted with him.

Gilbert Murray, who was destined to become Britain's foremost Greek scholar, was born in Australia in 1866 but moved to England while still a youth. Even as a child he was shocked by the cruelty of certain stories in the Bible, while in the school yard he had many a fight in defence of tortured animals. As he matured, intellectual arguments against religion developed, but his intellect was always integrated with his sensitive nature. This welding of high sensitivity and intellect was to be seen in his other endeavours of which his work in Greek drama was the most famous. His brilliance was early rewarded at the age of twenty-three with a Professorship of Greek at Glasgow. Later he returned to Oxford, where during the remainder of his ninety-one years he continued his studies and worked for peace as a staunch supporter of the League of Nations and the United Nations. Why the ashes of this freethinker now rest in Westminster Abbey is an interesting question I cannot answer.

The essays are divided into literary and philosophical ones. Almost all are of World War I vintage as certain allusions to the times show, but in no way are they rendered quaint or irrelevant with the passage of time. His prophesy that a second world war would bring about the end of civilisation was wrong, but lest we feel superior in our hindsight let us be sobered by the realisation that today it is almost a question of *life* surviving another world war. The main allusions however in these essays come from classical Greece and it's from this rich source that Gilbert Murray was able to draw some uncanny parallels with his day. Often though, especially in the essays dealing with Greek drama, the subject matter is treated for its own sake in such a way that interest is developed even for readers having no familiarity with Euripides and Aristophanes. Only seldom does a Greek or Latin phrase pass untranslated, for usually Murray is able to impart the meaning without the reader being aware of the translating, unlike some of the heavy-handed efforts one often encounters.

The problem of translation is chiefly this: a reader who has spent his youth suffering to master Greek and Latin does not want to be cheated by having the thrill of a personal translation snatched from him by the author; and what is worse, why give it to those who have not suffered? Gilbert Murray's art was to please both parties. His translations were by no means those of the pedant for instead of using the word "overwhelmed" in one instance, he boldly translated the Greek equivalent as "niagaraed".

Now, anybody can tell you who won the Battle of Cucumber Junction—and its date—but ever so rarely someone like Gilbert Murray comes along who can blend the historical facts in with the subtle moods and attitudes of the time and make them live for us. This feeling for a period in history comes with long study of all aspects of the civilisation and with a poet's intuition in reading between the lines without getting carried away or forcing present day attitudes into the past.

This last point implies that some attitudes of the ancients should seem strange or inexplicable to us but of all the ancient civilisations, that of the Greeks would seem most akin to ours, especially in many of the ways we approach and think about a problem. Our recent strongly experimental approach to problems is an exception but, nevertheless, since we can trace much of the best of our philosophical and scientific outlook to the Greeks, it is not surprising that we feel this kinship. Murray's essays are an eloquent argument in favour of this view as he shows just how great our debt is to this race. Had we evolved into a mystically orientated civilisation, then India, the "very gonad of theology" (as H. L. Mencken put it) might have seemed more spiritually at one with us, and the Greek phenomenon, on the other hand, a mere aberration of history.

Murray was his own devil's advocate concerning the usefulness of Greek studies. "Granted . . . that the ancient poets and philosophers were all that you say, surely the valuable parts of their thought have been absorbed long since in the common fund of humanity . . . Why go back and labour over their actual words?" His answers, by the way, are required reading for schoolmasters engaged in teaching Latin and Greek.

Plato's vivid imagery of the shadows in the cave and how these imperfect projections of reality constitute the world of those untutored in philosophy, is well known. Murray too, in the same tradition, expressed the life led by the ignorant in the following fashion:

Think of life as a vast picture gallery, or museum; or better, perhaps, as a vast engineering workshop. It is all those things, among others. Then think of oneself walking through it. You know the average man walks through a museum or a workshop when he knows nothing particular about it. You try hard to be intelligent; failing in that you try to conceal your lack of intelligence. You would like to be interested, but you do not know what is interesting and what is not. Some of the specimens strike you as pretty; some of the engines seem to you very powerful; you are dazzled and amused by the blaze of the fires, you are secretly interested in the men and wish you could talk to them. But in the main you come out at the other end tired and rather dispirited and having got remarkably little out of it. That is the way a stupid and uneducated man, with no one to help him, goes through life.

Next, in the same vein, he tells of the difference it makes to be guided by someone competent. Most of us at some time have felt this way, but it needs the artist to take the commonplace and make us aware of it afresh, as well as to point out details which escaped us.

Professor Murray also took no little interest in anthropology and comparative religion. His ideas on man as a social animal are worth noting. Man does not need gods and priests to tell him what is good in all matters because as a social animal there are instincts eliciting actions of self-sacrifice for the good of the species.

The whole supposition that a system of violent and intense rewards and punishments is necessary to induce human beings to perform acts for the good of others is based on a false psychology which starts from the individual isolated man instead of man the social animal. Man is an integral member of his group. Among his natural instincts there are those which aim at group-preservation as well as self-preservation . . . Even among the animals, a cow, a tigress, a hen pheasant, does not need a promise of future rewards to induce her to risk her life to save her young from harm . . . Why did St. Francis love his fellow-men, his birds, his enemies? He no doubt explained that it was all a part of his love of God. True, but his love of God was really his humanity . . . which

made him love his group, and take into his group all life that met him, especially those parts that needed love most, the helpless, the despised, the angry and hostile.

Just as great minds drift into senility and beautiful women become crones, so too the light the Greeks kindled in the Mediterranean world dimmed and was replaced by a weary despair for the world and a way out through some sort of saviour religion. This state of affairs is treated in his "Pagan Religion and Philosophy at the Time of Christ". The interesting paradox of gods losing rank but gaining in vitality is discussed. J. M. Robertson also developed this idea when he speculated on the existence of a Joshua-Jesus saviour cult of great antiquity that had always smouldered among the less sophisticated in spite of their official monotheism.

I feel that Murray lapsed when he decided to define religion in such a way that it had no similarity with any dictionary meaning. It would have been easy for him to coin a new word for the feeling of awe one has for the immensity of the universe, this being his notion of a religious attitude. "To be cock-sure is to be without religion. The essence of religion is the consciousness of a vast unknown". This, I suppose, makes him a religious atheist.

## CORRESPONDENCE

### SECULARISM TODAY

As a new boy to the ranks of your paper—well, new subscriber, let us say as I am 63½ years of age—may I be given a little of your letter page to comment on secularism today. I agree wholeheartedly with your correspondent, Michael R. Evans, who comments on the slight rift between Atheists and Agnostics, and am inclined to put it more strongly—and have done so in propounding the agnostic idea for years. A man is as much a fool to proclaim there is *no* God, as to say there *is*—we do not *know*, either way. Not a particularly scholarly way of expressing a fundamental truth, maybe, but pretty near the mark!

While I agree that dissertations on secularism should be scholarly, so giving dignity and poise to the subject, I do think we should be able to speak and write to meet the minds of the not-so-educated (like me, for instance) and there is a tendency, I find to cling too tightly to the past. There seems to me a danger of near-canonising Charles Bradlaugh, a little too much mention of the days of slavery—wars and bloodshed lying at the door of organised religion *in past centuries* and statements to the effect that the advent of Christianity was a tragedy that overcame mankind, etc. All this, you and your readers may think, sounds like secular-heresy, but how can I, or we, answer the really sincere Christian, when he or she mentions the undeniably good work that has been done *in comparatively recent years* by people—ordinary people, as well as the Schweitzers, the Catholic priest caring for the child-thieves and ragamuffins in the streets of Naples, and the various societies who operate under the inspiration of Christian belief? It seems a lame answer, to say, these people *could* have benefited humanity *without* having the stimulus of Christian belief—in fact, from their own inner goodness. Perhaps some of your younger in age, but older in secular reasoning and argument, readers, may be able to help me with suggestions on these points.

Now, Mr. Editor, my own particular "anti", is directed against the Lord's Day Observance Society, who's moronic activities and pharasaical edicts are probably not unknown to your readers. What is *not* generally known and realised, is that this Society is still very, very strong, both in supporters and finance, and still a force to be reckoned with, and to be fought against tooth and nail, because there are a surprising number of adherents to this ghastly society, among Members of Parliament, which is now engaged in examining the old, and not-so-old laws, which these religious dictators invoke to gain their own ends. My son and I have organised a petition-campaign to get as many names as possible to put before Parliament the proposition that these outdated laws, many of which are ridiculous in the extreme, but nevertheless, enforceable, removed completely from the Statute Book, or at the very least, drastically modified. We call ourselves—at the moment, nearly two thousand of us—the Sunday Freedom League, and we would like to hear from readers to add their names to our petition, and automatically enrol them into our League, which we are running entirely at our expense, and wish to keep it so.

I have appeared on TV recently—TWW (West of England and

Wales)—and was able to "bring down in flames" the West of England's Representative of the Lord's Day Observance Society.

JOHN SHEPHERD,

Lyndon Vale, Paulton, Near Bristol, Somerset.

### DOGMATIC?

If asked my religion, I reply "Atheist". To say "Agnostic" would mean that I have not "got rid of all my gods, in any shape or form": they may be half out of the door, but they have not yet shaken the dust from their feet. To call oneself an Agnostic in this 20th century, inevitably implies that Christian claims may well be true, so that, far from "attacking", the position of Agnosticism hardly seems worth defending.

To ask for proof "against" something, is to create a contradiction in terms, as positive evidence cannot be used in negative argument. However, though this may seem like casuistry, let me put forward evidence for the non-existence of a god. As there has never been a finite being which could comprehend the infinite, so, if an infinite being existed, it would not only not comprehend the finite, but not be aware of it; for infinity is timeless, and how long is a millenium in its span? Similarly, how long can infinity itself be? Infinity must consist only of finite periods one after the other. If we find no gods in the finite, then there can be none in the succession of the periods that go to make up the infinite. A timeless and stateless infinity is by definition, non-existent, and if postulated, can only be inhabited by mythical beings.

Michael R. Evans almost puts his finger on the Atheist's real problem, which is—How can any man state categorically anything at all? Rockets to the moon—could the scientists be deceiving us? We might indeed all be dreaming (or having nightmares!) at this moment. Life, however, involves commitment, essential if we are to put our convictions into practice. As there is no evidence for the existence of fairies at the bottom of my garden, I must reject all claims that there are, in spite of the fact that no one can prove they are not there. Dogmatic, us Atheists?—not so; for we will readily change our appellation to Agnostic, if and when someone puts forward evidence to show the existence of an unknown god.

ERIC S. BARKER.

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