

The Freethinker

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I FIRST read the late Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring*—or parts of it—as a series of (I think three) long instalments in the *New Yorker*. The full work first appeared in this country two years ago. Now it is available as a Penguin for the price of two *New Yorkers* (5s.) and it is essential reading for anybody who has not yet encountered it. Essential because it concerns our very survival as well as that of many other living organisms. The danger it deals with comes not from the bomb—though radiation is not forgotten—but from chemical insecticides. And the story it tells is truly alarming.

Miss Carson did not say that chemical insecticides should never be used. What she contended was that "poisonous and biologically potent chemicals" were being put indiscriminately into the hands of persons largely or wholly ignorant of the harmful potential involved; that we have subjected enormous numbers of people "without their consent and often without their knowledge" to contact with these poisons. She further contended that we have allowed them to be used with "little or no advance investigation of their effect on soil, water, wildlife, and man himself". The limited awareness of the threat is partly attributable to specialisation—each seeing his own problem and not "the larger frame into which it fits". But ours is not only an era of specialists, it is also "an era dominated by industry, in which the right to make a dollar at whatever cost is seldom challenged". And Miss Carson quoted the French biologist, Jean Rostand: "The obligation to endure gives us the right to know".

A Great Industry

All human beings, from conception until death, are now subjected to contact with dangerous chemicals. In less than two decades, the synthetic pesticides have been so thoroughly distributed that they occur virtually everywhere.

They have been recovered from most of the major river systems and even from streams of ground-water flowing unseen through the earth. Residues of these chemicals linger in soil to which they may have been applied a dozen years before. They have entered and lodged in the bodies of fish, birds, reptiles, and domestic and wild animals so universally that scientists carrying on animal experiments find it almost impossible to locate subjects free from such contamination. They have been found in fish in remote mountain lakes, in earthworms burrowing in soil, in the eggs of birds—and in man himself. For these chemicals are now stored in the bodies of the vast majority of human beings, regardless of age. They occur in the mother's milk, and probably in the tissues of the unborn child.

A great industry has been built up on the basis of research into agents of chemical warfare; an industry pouring forth "a seemingly endless stream of synthetic insecticides", very different from the simpler inorganic insecticides of pre-war days. What sets them apart is their "enormous biological potency". Not only do they poison, they "enter into the most vital processes of the body and change them in sinister and often deadly ways". And Miss Carson gave some terrible (documented) cases.

The chlorinated hydrocarbon Endrin, for instance, has killed fish, cattle and dogs. It caused vomiting, convul-

sions and loss of consciousness in a one-year-old child of American parents living in Venezuela, even though precautions were taken after the house had been sprayed to get rid of cockroaches. And this normal healthy baby became "little more than a vegetable—unable to see or hear, subject to frequent muscular spasms, apparently cut off from contact with his surroundings". In 1961, the *Lancet* published a report by Australian investigators on sixteen

cases of mental disease, all with a history of prolonged exposure to organic phosphorus insecticides. And as long ago as 1945, the *British Medical Journal* carried this description of the effect of a water-soluble paint containing 2 per cent DDT, overlaid with a film of oil.

The tiredness, heaviness, and aching of limbs were very real things, and the mental state was also most distressing . . . [there was] extreme irritability . . . great distaste for work of any sort . . . a feeling of mental incompetence in tackling the simplest mental task. The joint pains were quite violent at times.

Yet, eleven years later, American investigators conducting an experiment with DDT on volunteer subjects dismissed the complaint of headache and "pain in every bone" as "obviously of psychoneurotic origin".

These are but a few of the many—often disastrous—consequences of contact with chemical insecticides. Sometimes the result follows swiftly; in other cases the harmful or fatal effects may not be visible for a generation. Dr. David Price of the US Public Health Service has said that:

We all live under the haunting fear that something may corrupt the environment to the point where man joins the dinosaurs as an obsolete form of life. And what makes these thoughts all the more disturbing is the knowledge that our fate could perhaps be sealed twenty or more years before the development of symptoms.

Nobody could call *Silent Spring* a dispassionate book, no more than one could that earlier *New Yorker* scoop, John Hersey's *Hiroshima*. Nor was it ever intended to be (even the title is emotive). But how can one write dispassionately about an evil that threatens the very existence of the human and other animal species? Miss Carson did not, however, allow her passion to blind her reason: she was too good a biologist for that. It is the soundly scientific basis of its humanism that makes *Silent Spring* unique.

Man is never separated from nature, even in thought.

For each of us, as for the robin in Michigan or the salmon in the Miramiche, this is a problem of ecology, of interrelationships, or interdependence. We poison the caddis flies in a stream and the salmon runs dwindle and die. We poison the gnats in a lake and the poison travels from link to link of the food chain and soon the birds of the lake margins become its victims. We spray our elms and the following springs are silent of robin song, not because we sprayed the robins directly but because the poison travelled, step by step, through the now familiar elm leaf-earthworm-robin cycle. These are matters of record, observable, part of the visible world around us. They reflect the web of life—or death—that scientists know as ecology.

But we also have an ecology of our own—within our bodies—where "minute causes produce mighty effects",

VIEWS AND OPINIONS

The Right to Know

By COLIN McCALL

and where the relationship of cause and effect is often complicated and obscure. "To discover the agent of disease and death depends on a patient piecing together of many seemingly distinct and unrelated facts developed through a vast amount of research in widely separated fields". We are apt, however, to look only for the immediate effect. "Unless this appears promptly and in such obvious form that it cannot be ignored, we deny the existence of hazard . . . The lack of sufficiently delicate methods to detect injury before the symptoms appear is one of the great unsolved problems in medicine". Toxic materials may be stored up in the body and their poisonous effects delayed. A New Zealander under treatment for obesity suddenly developed symptoms of poisoning. "On examination his fat was found to contain stored diethrin, which had been metabolised as he lost weight". Other examples will be found, fully documented as usual. Footnotes are avoided in the text, but Miss Carson's references, arranged by chapter and page, fill 43 pages at the back, and are followed by a

15-page index.

While eminently readable, therefore, the book satisfies the necessary standards of a work of science. True, it starts with a short "fable for tomorrow", envisaging a "spring without voices". But this provides, in fact, a moral for today, and Miss Carson clearly indicated the imaginary nature of the setting. It was a composite picture. No community has suffered all the disasters that are described, yet every one of them has happened somewhere and "many real communities have already suffered a substantial number of them".

Silent Spring is then a timely warning, and one that has fortunately to some extent been heeded. It is tragic and terrible but not hopeless. Miss Carson's final chapter points "the other road" to an awareness of the problem of sharing our earth with other creatures—"with living populations and all their pressures and counter-pressures, their surges and recessions"—achieving "a reasonable accommodation between the insect hordes and ourselves".

New Morality or None at All

By GILLIAN HAWTIN

AT THE end of last year, a group of Oxford parents expressed concern, in written evidence submitted to the Franks Commission, about the "unhealthy incidence of mental breakdown, promiscuity, abortions and drug-taking at Oxford University" (*The Times*, 29/12/64). The parents included Mr. Garth Lean, and the Rev. Paul Rimmer, vicar of Marston, Oxford, the former being co-author with Arnold Lunn, of *The New Morality*, a narrow book which was an embarrassment even to Roman Catholic reviewers, and received an indifferent criticism in the *Times Literary Supplement* (27/2/64).

Freethinkers are, of course, very concerned with symptoms of malaise, especially when they appear among those who should have "lively minds" and may one day be "top people". But Baroness Wootton has rightly reminded us that one of the potent causes of these breakdowns is the linking of behaviour norms with disproved superstition. Here, Freethinkers have a great opportunity. Morality has been the great stock-in-trade monopolised for too long by the Churches. All of it—honesty, clean-living—can be supported entirely by pleas to rationality.

And the major Christian denominations—certainly the Catholic Church, with its system of "natural law", if not predestinarian Calvinism, or Lutheranism with its insistence on *sola fide*—have recognised for centuries (the evidence could not be refuted) that moral behaviour could exist apart from belief. But they believe it is rare, and difficult, and, by and large, this view that religion is essential to moral behaviour is probably one of the major reasons why people cling, for all their doubts, to some degree of church membership. Time and again people ask, if we drive religion from the schools, what will happen to morality? The fact is, every principle of good behaviour—social and individual—can be derived from reason alone!

The evidence to the Franks Commission strongly criticised the "destructive" attitude of some dons who "conceive it to be their duty to shake their pupils to their intellectual and moral foundations without giving them anything to take the place of the convictions they have destroyed". In a plea that Oxford should choose undergraduates for their "character potential", as well as cleverness, and that the University should make a deliberate effort to build up the whole personality, the writers continued:—"It is unrealistic to leave the whole burden of this work to the

college chaplains in an age where few undergraduates either attend chapel, or go to their chaplaincies for help".

We, too, have our views on these matters and we must promulgate them; we have our own remedies for these ills. Thus we do not think promiscuity is necessarily bad *per se* or because God has "fix'd His canon 'gainst" it. But we can point out that unlicensed sex may burden the studies which are the primary purpose of a university course, and do lasting psychological damage in undermining any capacity for permanent marital stability. This is apart, of course, from biological results! "Are you personally in favour of giving birth control advice and assistance to girls who are unmarried . . .?" Lord Longford asked the House of Lords some months ago. "I certainly am. It is common sense", replied Lord Chorley. It is indeed common sense. We may recall, too, Bertrand Russell's censure on Samuel Butler's "hero" who raped the housemaid as soon as he lost his faith!

It is a pity, perhaps, that contraceptives were withdrawn from sale at the University of Keele, last year. The present writer has often noted with astonishment that Christians sometimes seem to *want* unmarried girls to have babies—so that their "shame" should stand as a warning to others! And it was significant that the very next day after the report to which we have alluded above, the *Times* (30/12/64) printed a letter from a lady bewildered because a group of "charming teenagers" appeared at her door, sang "Unto us a Child is born", and explained they were collecting for International Family Planning. Birth-control knowledge is, of course, the real answer to abortion and its attendant dangers.

What of mental breakdown? Is this due in all cases to overwork? There is some evidence that it is at least abetted by irresponsible psychological experimentation. Drug addiction does not need a supernatural injunction; it wrecks the system, even if one is not deterred by the thought that the ruin of one's university career is a misuse of the public money one may be receiving.

The warning given by Dr. Sargant, author of *Battle for the Mind*, in a lecture for young people at the Royal Society of Medicine, on December 29th, 1964, might also be publicised to a wider audience. He said that some modern beats were still very primitive and produced the

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The Evidence for Jesus

By GEORGES ORY

FIRST, let us consider the texts which are said to be historic. Jewish writings give us no information of Christ; the *Talmud* has nothing certain to say of him; the rare passages which concern him form a polemic against the Christian tradition and can scarcely be regarded as a proof of the existence of the Jesus of the gospels.

The sole item of value in this polemic of the old rabbis is that they do not deny the Christian tradition; they interpret it to ruin it, to sap its foundations, but they do not oppose to it an earlier Jewish tradition; all that they had to attack was the Christian legend.

We can note that there was a certain Jesus ben Pandera who was assimilated to a Jesus ben Stada in the *Talmud*. The former was stoned and his body exposed at Jerusalem one Easter eve in the time of Alexander Jannaeus (106-79 BC). The latter lived apparently at the time of the Rabbi Akiba, about AD 130. He, too, was stoned to death and hanged one Easter eve, far from Palestine at Lydda in Asia Minor¹. Whether it is a question of two different men or of one personage duplicated in legend, the *Talmud* indicates that there was a Jesus a century before the gospels, who resembled the Jesus of the gospels. The problem becomes more difficult since the *Talmud* refers to yet another Jesus, a contemporary of Yehoshua ben Peraya who lived at the time of Alexander Jannaeus, i.e. at the same time as Jesus ben Pandera, and this Jesus is said to have founded a sect of Jewish apostates. Hence Salomon Reinach's surprise that there should have existed disciples of Jesus nearly a century before the Christian era², and an English author asks if Jesus did not live a hundred years BC.³

An Israelite student⁴ who believes in the historic Jesus writes as follows: "the appearance of Jesus in the period of confusion which occurred in Judaea under the Herods and the Roman Procurators passed so unperceived that the contemporaries of Jesus and his first disciples were scarcely aware of it; and when Christianity developed into a powerful and influential sect, the Israelite doctors were already too far removed from the time of Jesus to revive in its veritable aspect the recollection of the events of the life of the Christian Messiah and the facts of his existence. . . ." Nevertheless, it is just on these legends and on the gospels that the author bases a work of 600 pages devoted to the life of Jesus the Nazarene. As Reinach wrote, "true history is not made from myths any more than bread is made from flower pollen".

In the Greek text of the *Jewish Antiquities* of Flavius Josephus two references to Jesus are to be found (xviii, 3, 3; xx, 9, 1). Both of these are interpolations.⁵ Apart from these, Josephus makes no reference anywhere either to Christianity or to messianism, and this latter he must certainly have known. This silence has been explained by saying that he wished to conciliate the Romans by leaving out anything they might consider disagreeable. It can be said with equal weight that the Christians have erased from Josephus anything which might be disagreeable to them or differ from their orthodox teaching. Neither is impossible, but they do not offer a satisfactory explanation of the silence of this man who lived from AD 37 to 100, i.e. just after the supposed career of Jesus, just at the time Christianity was supposed to be preached.

Other Jewish authors, well informed and celebrated in their time, are just as silent as Josephus concerning Christ and Christianity; Philo the Jew, born 30 BC, died AD 50,

ought to have mentioned Jesus and the Christians, for he wrote a *History of the Jews*; and similarly Justus of Tiberias who compiled a Jewish history up to the year 50 should surely have mentioned events which took place in the years 29-30. It is very astonishing that neither of these historians should make even an allusion to the gospel events. Our astonishment vanishes if we know that this Jesus was no man, but a god.

Nor do the heathen writers of the first century know anything either of the crucifixion of Jesus or of the Christians. Seneca (2 BC-AD 66), Pliny the Elder (23-79), Martial (40-103), Plutarch (45-125), Juvenal (55-140), Persius (34-62), Pausanias (c. 185), Apuleius (c. 170) all preserve a silence as complete as it is astonishing concerning Christ and his followers. Epictetus (50-130?) refers to Galileans, but not Christianity; he deals with those who, beginning with Judas the Galilean (6-7), were in constant revolt against the Romans and who gave rise to the Zelotes. Lucan, Seneca and Pliny all speak severely of Jews, but have not a word concerning Christians.

The attempt to include a reference to Christians in the message sent in 41 by the Emperor to the Prefect of Egypt is groundless, "Forbid the Jews to invite other Jews to come by water from Syria or from elsewhere in Egypt, for that will compel me to suspect them gravely. If they do not refrain from so doing I shall proceed against them with every means as fomenting a sort of disease common to the whole world". This refers to messianist or apocalyptic Jews preaching the end of the world and the coming of the messiah. Moreover what worried Claudius was not the messianism, which scarcely affected the hellenised Jews of Egypt, but the number of these fanatics and the violent anti-semitic feeling they aroused.

The earliest documents in Latin which, if it is not apocryphal, touches on Christianity, is of the year 111. It is the letter said to have been sent by Pliny the Younger when governor of Bithynia⁶ to the Emperor Trajan to ask him how he should treat those Christians who assembled every day to chant the praise of Christ as a god. The phrase "Christo quasi deo" proves that this Christ was looked on almost as a god, or the son of a god, or a sort of angel.

Ever since the 16th century the authenticity of this letter has been questioned.⁷ No matter, this letter would prove just one thing, that Pliny knew of Christians who worshipped a quasi god Christ, but not that he knew of a man Jesus.

About the year 120, Suetonius in his "Life of Nero" mentions the persecution of Christians without referring to the founder of the sect. In his "Life of Claudius" he speaks incidentally of the expulsion of Jews from Rome because they took part in seditious activities under the instigation of one Chrestos. Once again Jews; who is this Chrestos? An unknown Jewish agitator or perhaps Jesus Christ? If the latter mark that Suetonius places his coming in the reign of Claudius, i.e. AD 41-54. He could not therefore be the Jesus crucified in AD 30, but would be of the time of Paul.⁸ It is only in this passage concerning the burning of Rome (63) that Suetonius speaks of Christians.

Now let us look at the pretended evidence of Tacitus dating about 116-177. In his *Annals*, xv, 44, he reports that Nero accused the Christians of having set fire to Rome
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This Believing World

THAT once flourishing business under the patronage of Sir William Crookes with Miss Florence Cook as Managing Director, for the sole purpose of producing "materialisations" has been declining for years in this country. Happily, though in South America and particularly in South Africa, it has picked up enormously, and is showing fat dividends. Our own "famous medium", Douglas Johnson, has just returned from South Africa, where he was thrilled with materialisations galore at a seance under the auspices of another medium, Alec Harris.

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MR. JOHNSON saw at least twelve full scale materialisations—"the finest sight I have ever witnessed", he declared afterwards. He even shook hands with his own spirit guide. Out of the cabinet came "a small smiling Chinese figure", "a doctor", "a six-foot Jew", "a young Cockney boy", and among others came Mr. Harris's own Indian guide. The audience even saw the complete materialisation of a child from ectoplasm, and the complete disappearance through the floor of another "materialised form". What a pity Mr. Johnson did not bring the whole circus to England!

★

STANDS Scotland where it once did so triumphantly on religion? It certainly does for ministers of the Free Kirk (*The Observer*, 6/6/65) were praying "for a miracle that would prevent the British Railways' ferry running out from Kyle that day at 1 p.m.", the hour when "sin will come and the island be darkened". Staunch Sabbatarians have always opposed any desecration of the Sabbath day, as they call it, Sunday is not the Sabbath day, but the day for worship of the Sun. Alas the miracle never happened, the ferry ran, and those who tried to prevent cars landing were arrested.

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THE SAME journal headed an article, "Rome hint that Pope favours pill". But the fact is that Catholic women now are no longer content to be mere breeding machines at the behest of celibate priests. And, if the *Observer* report is true, it indicates that the Pope is at last shrewd enough to see where the wind is blowing.

NEW MORALITY OR NONE AT ALL

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same state of excitement, collapse and ecstasy as the rhythm produced by "stone age" people still living in Kenya. He reminded his hearers that "the human nervous system over 2,000 years has not changed. People in such states of excitement were susceptible to suggestion and could be made to believe and do all kinds of things". There you are. So if our university students do not want to hasten the arrival of 1984 they had better stick to Beethoven!

That nature abhors a vacuum applies to the human organism also. There is at least a case for Freethinkers to "examine their consciences" and see if, in the fight against the Churches—most vital, and one in which we may never relent—we have not concentrated more on clearing the ground, than on rebuilding. Some of our students seem, clearly, to have thrown the baby out with the bath-water. They may be agreeably surprised that not all who are concerned at their problems are Mrs. Grundies! We may do valuable service to them and society, by leading them back to paths of common sense and enlightened—as opposed to anarchic—Freethought.

THE EVIDENCE FOR JESUS

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and that this name of Christians came from the Christ who in the reign of Tiberius was executed by the procurator Pontius Pilate. He adds that this detestable superstition, suppressed at the time, had not only revived in Judaea, but also had made its appearance in Rome. Tacitus does not name Jesus; he takes the cultural title for a personal name: "Christ". Who are these sectaries formerly repressed, now once more in evidence? Is it the same religious body as that which was dealt with in Jerusalem in AD 30? Tacitus was writing three generations later than the events which he was describing—by hearsay, not by direct witness. It is rather astonishing that he should know more of the Christians than his predecessors. Does he confuse messianists of Nero's day with Christians of Trajan's reign?"

(To be continued)

1. J. M. Robertson, *Christianity and Mythology*, p. 263; *The Jesus Problem* p. 112.

2. S. Reinach, *Orpheus*, p. 334, par. 31, Paris 1933.

3. *Did Jesus live 100 BC?* London 1903. An anonymous work of which the author was G. R. S. Mead. See also *Dict. of Christ and the Gospels* ii, pp. 877-882, art. by Travers Herford. Consideration of the passages in the Talmud where Jesus is mentioned lead P. Lagrange to write "in the Jewish writings the life of Jesus is sometimes placed in the time of Alexander Jannaeus and sometimes in that of Akiba or even later, giving a variation of two centuries" (*Le Messianisme chez les Juifs*, 1909 p. 289). Another writer notes "already in early days clumsy fables were common among the Jews concerning Jesus in which there seems to be a confusion between and amalgamation of several persons of different periods . . . the story of Jesus in the Talmud is so muddled that the rabbis of the Middle Ages, with the best faith in the world, could maintain that the Jesus of the Talmud was not the Christian Jesus (Isidore Loeb, "La controverse religieuse entre les Chrétiens et les Juifs au moyen-âge, in *Rev. Hist. des Relig.* xvii, 1888, p. 317).

4. Joseph Klausner, *Jésus le Nazaréen*, Payot, Paris 1933.

5. None of the three MSS. which we now have of Josephus is earlier than the 11th cent. Origen (*C. Celsus*, i, 47) tells us that Josephus did not believe that Jesus was the Messiah, but Eusebius, about AD 320 found the contrary affirmation in a text, which, meanwhile, had been "improved".

6. It is not certain that Pliny ever was a governor of a province.

7. Notably by Havet "Le christianisme et ses origines, vol. iv, pp. 428-431. He observes "the sole MS. of this correspondence of Pliny with Trajan disappeared immediately after the publication of this letter so that we have no material proof that the letter was ever in the MS. nor that they were not manufactured by a latinist of the 15th century . . ." Note, too, that apart from this letter, Pliny never refers to Christians, neither in his private correspondence, nor in his letters to the Emperor, nor in his Panegyric. Arthur Drews (*The Jesus Myth*, p. 100) is of opinion that this letter was copied from the speech of Festus to King Agrippa (Acts 25, 14 et sq.) and that it was fabricated early in the 16th century by Giocondo di Verona, and finally that Pliny never was governor of Bithynia.

8. Josephus says nothing of the incident reported by Suetonius and speaks kindly of Claudius. On the contrary Acts 24. 25 emphasises the charge made against Paul at Caesarea "for we have found this man a pestilent fellow and a mover of sedition among all the Jews throughout the world . . ." Paul, please note, had a fellow worker named "Jesus which is called Justus" (Col. 4, 11) even as James, the brother of Christ was called the Just.

9. Battifol writes on this subject in *L'Eglise Naissante et la Catholicisme*: "The words of Tacitus cannot be taken literally. He depicts the situation as if between the death of Christ and the burning of Rome. Christianity had passed through a period of suppression and then just before 64 had suddenly expanded, not only in Judaea but also in Rome". Bruno Bauer (*Christ and the Caesars*) thinks that Tacitus found the fact of the condemnation of the founder of Christianity in the same archives as Tertullian found the record that at the moment of the death of Jesus the sun was darkened at full noon. This note in the *Annals* is the sole place where Pilate is mentioned by name by a Roman writer.

SPECIAL OFFER to readers of this paper. The Autobiography of Major Christopher Draper, DSC., entitled *The Mad Major*, first published in 1962 at 25s. A limited number offered at 10s. post paid, 230 pages fully illustrated and autographed from C. Draper, 2 Conway Street, London, W.1.

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OUTDOOR

Edinburgh Branch NSS (The Mound)—Sunday afternoon and evening: MESSRS. CRONAN, MCRAE and MURRAY.

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Nottingham Branch NSS (Old Market Square), every Friday, 1 p.m.: T. M. MOSLEY.

INDOOR

South Place Ethical Society, (Conway Hall Humanist Centre, Red Lion Square, London, W.C.1), Sunday, June 20th, 11 a.m.: LORD SORENSEN, "Problems of World Unity".

Notes and News

FOR nineteen centuries the Christian faith has grown, wrote the Rev. G. W. Butterworth in his *Sunday Times* reflections on Pentecost (6/6/65). It was "still growing" but "far from covering the world". But we should remember that "God loves the non-Christians as well as He loves us". And so, after acknowledging—in a typical understatement—that the "Church's history is by no means what it ought to be", Mr. Butterworth turned patronisingly to ask what must we do with the many other religions? "Islam has always displayed reverence, but not the vigour of work and freedom to live as Jesus taught us". Yet only a few weeks ago Mr. Butterworth had read in a newspaper that "a leader of Islam told his readers to be polite to Christians". Christians "must behave equally to them". For, "Better a respectful religion than none at all". So, too, with "the Eastern religion, which arose when the prince abandoned his wife and little child because of the misery he saw in the world".

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THE Papal Commission on Birth Control has, the *Observer* reported (6/6/65), reached a "dead point" in its work. The majority is in favour of birth control, but the opposition group includes the formidable head of the Curia, Cardinal Ottaviani, as well as Cardinal Ruffini of Palermo, and Monsignor Kelly, Director of the Office of Family Life of New York. With things in this state of "paralysis", the Commission is unwilling to take final responsibility itself, and awaits a light "push" or "hint" from the Pope himself. There is, we are told, a widespread feeling in Rome that the Pope is in favour of the pill, and the majority hopes that the "hint" will come this month at one of the several important audiences. It is also learnt "unofficially" that the Pope has urged indulgence towards Father McMahon and Father Cocker, the two young British priests who spoke out in favour of birth control. Now

they, no doubt—along with the majority of the Commission—await a hint of that support.

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THE divisive influence of religion has been demonstrated yet again—this time in Mauritius. On the eve of the country's independence, religion has assumed "some political importance", as the *Observer* put it. Indians—mainly Hindus—form the majority of the population, and the minority groups have "grown restless". British troops have therefore been despatched to the island in case of trouble. Children of one of the minority groups, the Muslims, were pictured being "carefully instructed in the correct way of praying towards Mecca".

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"TO MARY conceived without sin" declared a banner to be used in the Manchester Roman Catholic Whitsun walk, in front of which the *Sunday Times* (6/6/65) showed three not especially bright-looking men. They, along with thousands of other men, women and children, were due to take part in the gaudy parade which would close the city centre to traffic on Whit Friday. On the previous Monday, the Church of England would have held its less showy walk. In the old days, it is said, Protestants used to pray for sun on Whit Monday and rain on Whit Friday: the Catholics the other way round. Now, of course, things are different: we live in the age of ecumenism. But there are still two walks.

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MRS. AVRIL Stevens, aged 24, who already had two children, died giving birth to twins in Whyalla, South Australia, after she and her husband had refused on religious grounds to allow blood transfusions. The couple, who went to Australia from Yorkshire last March, were Jehovah's Witnesses. The first twin survived, but the second was stillborn, when Mrs. Stevens suffered a rupture and severe haemorrhage. Doctors said the complications could have been overcome if transfusions had been permitted, but legal authorities said that the couple had the right to refuse the permission (*The Guardian*, 8/6/65). Mr. Stevens said that his wife's last words were "No blood, no blood". They had discussed the question for years and had decided that if the situation arose no blood transfusions would be allowed. He added that he had no regrets.

★

AT THE recent General Assembly of the Church of Scotland, little was said—the *Sunday Post* pointed out (30/5/65)—about the alarming drop in Kirk membership. There has been a steady decline in the last eight years from 1,315,630 to 1,259,162—a loss of over 56,000. In the same period the population of Scotland rose by at least 20,000. An "expert who has made a study of the fall in Church of Scotland membership" attributes it—hardly surprisingly—to "the general scepticism of the age". The greatest increases in membership occurred in 1955 and 1956, a period of mission and evangelism on a great scale. But "Either the missions, such as the Billy Graham crusade, really accomplished nothing, or the Church failed to consolidate the increase in membership made at that time".

★

THE National Secular Society has arranged a trip, on Sunday, July 25th, to Lewes, Sussex, where Thomas Paine lived. The Mayor of Lewes has kindly arranged for the Town Book with entries relating to Paine to be on view at the Lewes Town Hall during the visit. There will be a conducted tour of the town by two local councillors, and lunch will be at the Bull House Restaurant, a building with close Paine associations. A coach will leave Central London at 9.30 a.m., and the cost of return fare and lunch will be £1. Applications should be made immediately to Mr. W. McIlroy, General Secretary, National Secular Society, 103 Borough High Street, London, S.E.1.

The Church Militant

By OSWELL BLAKESTON

Persons: Sister Catherine; a young nun who has studied geology.
Sister Helena; a young nun who has studied psychology.
Sister Agatha; a young nun who has studied meteorology.
Sister Mary; the leader of the expedition.

The scene sketches the interior of some sort of igloo. The noise of the wind: and, in the darkness, the voices speak.

Helena: "Sister Theresa told you . . .".

Catherine: "Theresa is changing. She becomes so clumsy and gruff. Anyway, she hasn't had much experience. Medicine for the missions . . .".

Helena gets up cautiously and begins to pace slowly a few steps.

Catherine (hysterically): "What are you doing?"

Helena: "Ghost walking".

Catherine: "Dear God, we're all ghosts! To think that I've lost my sight for an imbecile notion—the first expedition to the Pole by nuns to grab the headlines and publicise The Church Militant. How sordid! All we advertise, dear sister, is The Church Asinine".

Helena is gradually extending the length of her pacing.

Catherine (conciliatory): "All right, The fault is mine. I know Sister Mary's your special idol. So I've provoked my own doom. I admit it. Oh, I did so want to get away from the convent, far away . . . But that's something I should never mention, isn't it?"

Helena: "Since our wireless went caput and we had to dig in, all the unforgivable things are being said".

She strikes a match, and with fumbling hands lights a lamp to reveal Catherine stretched on a camp bed.

Catherine (excited): "You've lit a lamp, haven't you? I think . . . I can see something . . . like a cross . . . Oh, how beastly of you not to tell me. Do you think I'd inform your beloved Sister Mary that you've disobeyed her instructions about oil rationing? Are you as cold as all this ice that pretends to be decent, solid land?"

Helena: "It'll go on pretending. Don't worry. We're not drifting back to the convent. And all this ice has built us a good ice house, my child. If we can be proud of nothing else, we've at least proved that nuns can build an ice house".

Catherine: "An ice house . . . yes . . .".

Helena brings her face close and stares at the lamp.

Helena: "If only you could be a little less emotional, Catherine, you might look on snow-blindness as a therapy. There are things you don't want to see in your life. Your deep need is being acted out for you. If you co-operate, you'll find that, when you recover, you'll have recovered from your psychic trauma as well as from your physical and spiritual blindness".

She straightens up and begins to circle the lamp slowly.

Catherine (distracted): "It doesn't seem possible. I'm supposed to be a scientist, a geologist; and you, as a psychologist, are also supposed to be a scientist. And we are both sisters in Christ. Yet we're poles apart . . . Oh Lord, I shouldn't have used that word. Let's say we're miles apart. And you, you're just waiting to study the hysteria you knew would break out when women get together to do something that only men should do".

Helena: "The terms of my commission have always been that I should study the effects of strain. Now we must all find out that a thing need not be for ever for it to be too long. Well, I might give you another sedative, I suppose;

but, if you aren't in acute pain, perhaps we ought to remember that Sister Theresa may have more urgent needs for the medicine chest later on".

Catherine (wildly): "Later on! What do you think are the chances of a plane ever finding us when our beautiful ice home is so beautifully camouflaged with ice? You know about your Sister Mary? I'll swear she's the one who lost our course. It wasn't just a demon in the weasel-tanks which got us into this goddamned awful mess. Will you tell me that she's been acting out of deep need for some catastrophe? Then I'll answer that she can go to hell, if she's not already there. I'm sure she thinks I should have crawled out into the snow to die, so as not to hold up her precious expedition. That's the tradition, isn't it? But it wouldn't have made any difference. Look what she's managed to do. Oh, I ask for life and I ask for death in the same breath. Won't anyone have pity on me?"

She gets off the bed and stands tottering, holding out her arms. Helena sits down on a packing case.

Helena: "If you want to go outside and die, be good enough not to creep too far from the camp. Your body might serve as a useful marker for a plane".

Catherine (hissing): "No . . . no it wouldn't. I'd be covered up by snow in no time".

She begins to cry as another figure shuffles into the scene.

Agatha: "Shut up! Stop that blubbing. All heaven's outside. Even if you've seen the aurora a thousand times, this is The Light of the World out of this world. Great banners fluttering up to the zenith. Sheets of fire like crackling gelatine".

Helena (clinically): "Agatha, where are the others?"

Agatha: "Dear one, they're still looking for a seal for supper. Delicious old seal tasting of ancient mariners".

As she moves forward, she stumbles over a packing case.

Agatha (in anguish): "Mother of God, help me".

The stage is slowly flooded with coloured lights which reach an intense radiance. The wind noises die down.

Helena: "You can't see real things any more, can you, Agatha? And you've brought your vision in here with you, haven't you, your Northern Lights".

Agatha: "Oh, you're cruel, cruel".

Catherine: "One moment . . . Helena, you didn't know whether you'd lit the lamp or not, did you? I've only just realised you went blind yourself while you were watching me. Oh, it's monstrous . . .".

She moves forward and blunders into Agatha and clutches her round the waist.

Catherine (shrilly): "Come on, come on, we're the rescue party! Can't you hear the huskies galloping along, galloping along? You'd think the ice'd cut them like knives, but not a bit of it. Their paws ring out like velvet on the ice, don't they?"

Catherine and Agatha career crazily around, bumping into things and panting. Helena's control breaks, and she reaches out and joins in the mad dance. Then they pause for breath.

Catherine: "I say . . . what do you think of the man who's driving these dogs?"

Agatha: "Of course it's a man".

Helena (shouting): "Ahoy there?"

Agatha (simpering): "Rescuers, we're waiting for you".

Helena (loudly): "Shut your mouth and run for it".

They perform again, but now it is even more macabre for they remain stamping and staggering on one spot. The

coloured lights begin to fade. The wind noises are heard again. Sister Mary enters.

Mary: "In heaven's name, what's going on here?"

Helena (wrenching herself from the others and pulling herself together): "Mary, can you see me? You know I'm loyal. Tell me the truth".

Mary: "Children, I may be going down with a touch of this snow-blindness. But . . . it will pass".

Catherine (gasping): "So . . . ?"

Agatha (wailing): "What's to become of us?"

Mary (brightly): "That's right. Think of yourselves. It's the best rule for survival. That's why I gave up looking for the others out there".

Helena (bleakly): "Lost?"

Mary: "Lost . . . I'm afraid my children, that all God's little nuns are lost".

Helena: "You take it so calmly . . . Mary, you're wonderful. You're a miracle".

Mary: "Do you indeed love me, sisters? . . . as much as you love our Holy Mother Church?"

Agatha: "Darling".

Helena: "Darling!" . . .

Catherine: "Bitch".

History and the Bible

By H. CUTNER

AN ENFORCED leisure period in hospital recently enabled me to look up a few books which had escaped me. One of them was Sir Leonard Woolley's *Digging up the Past*, a little work which I found of absorbing interest. Thirty years or so ago, when the discoveries of Woolley, Howard Carter and other archaeologists were used to prove the truth of the Bible, Woolley in particular was quoted to me as having proved the story of Noah's Flood beyond doubt; while the historicity of Abraham and Ur of the Caldees proved how closely the Bible had recorded historical facts.

Now whether Abraham was or was not a "prophet"—he is called one in the index—or whether Woolley really believed that discovering Ur actually meant that he had rediscovered Abraham, I do not know. But *Digging up the Past* says very little about discoveries in Palestine proving the Bible. On the contrary, indeed, Woolley says:—

In Palestine, a certain amount of scrappy digging has been done, but no connected history has been traced . . . There was no evidence for fixing exact dates because there were no written documents . . . The question "when did such and such event happen" cannot be expressed in terms of years. There is no empirical method of ascertaining such knowledge . . .

To put the matter clearly—so far, there has been precious little found in digging Palestine which has proved the Old Testament historically true. If any reader can show where I can find such evidence I should be grateful.

In the meantime may I be allowed to point out to "Ben Yehuda" (THE FREETHINKER, May 14th) and to many who think like him, that no one has unearthed a scrap of proof that David and Solomon ever lived—outside the Bible. Ben Yehuda, in fact, almost agrees with me. Instead of dealing with the two renowned "monarchs", he runs off at a tangent and courteously asks—"Yes, but what about Ahab and Omri? What about Jehosophat of Judah?" In fact, he even makes it more difficult for me by throwing in Sanacherib as a make-weight. Moreover, Jehosophat of Judah, he tells us, "was only the fifth after Solomon". How does he know? Why, it says so in Holy Writ!

But Ahab and Omri are mentioned on the Moabite Stone now in the Louvre. So what? I am not quite clear. Frankly, I cannot see why if the names of Omri and Ahab are there, why were not the names of David and Solomon also on the Moabite Stone? (Incidentally, I do not believe

in the stone's authenticity. Samuel Sharpe, the famous Egyptologist, and a Jewish rabbi, Dr. Loewe argued that it was a forgery. I have given a number of times in these columns why I believe they were right).

The truth is there is no evidence whatever for the historical David and Solomon, and the fact that some of the points I raised from the Encyclopedia Biblica were utterly ignored by Ben Yehuda, and that a Ahab and Omri—to say nothing of Shalmaneser—were introduced for discussion, shows the absence of evidence.

And this goes for Solomon's temple too. We are now told that "little work has been done on the traditional temple site due to the fanatical veneration for that spot and the building of the mosque".

I am not quite sure whether anybody now knows or ever did know "the traditional temple site", but I find the addition of a mosque to the discussion quite exhilarating. Mohammed flourished in the 7th century AD; Solomon's Temple was built in 1012 BC. I leave it to Ben Yehuda to work out the chronology—that is, how many centuries there were between the date of the destruction of the temple, and the building of the mosque on the site. It seems to me that there was ample time to preserve a few relics in a period of about 1800 years.

Just as a matter of interest; it is quite amusing to find a distinguished Christian scholar, the Rev. S. G. Green, in The Variorum Teacher's Bible admitting that the chronology between "the Exodus and the establishment of the Israelite kingdom" is "apparently irreconcilable". I relish the word "apparently". There are hundreds of clear statements in the Bible which are quite "irreconcilable" with other statements. Written by a team of first class Christian scholars, the Encyclopedia Biblica makes mincemeat of hundreds of Bible statements, and proves they are quite untrue. David and Solomon have to go the way of Noah, Abraham, and Moses—they are all myths.

RELIGIOUS INSTRUCTION SURVEY

MR. O. R. Johnston, lecturer in the Department of Education at Newcastle University is to conduct a survey among parents in Newcastle and Northumberland to find out how they feel about morning prayers and religious instruction in schools. Mr. B. R. May, of the Institute of Education in Durham University, is undertaking a similar survey in Durham. Questionnaires are being drawn up that will "require as little work as possible" to answer, and Mr. Johnston hopes to provide factual information which would be useful background material for any reappraisal of religious education. His own feeling is that "the vast majority of parents would like their children to receive it", but he thinks there may be a need to make attendance voluntary.

Humanist Councillor F. R. Griffin—in a letter to the Newcastle *Evening Chronicle* (1/6/65)—hoped that Mr. Johnston's survey would be "a genuine and objective piece of research and not merely another boost for the Churches". If the exercise were merely to ask whether or not parents favour RI in schools, the answer could be foreseen. Instead, said Mr. Griffin the questionnaires should test whether parents favour: (1) religious indoctrination with the Christian belief as is practised at present; (2) the entire elimination of RI from the county schools; or (3) "RI as an educational subject preparing children for British citizenship and citizenship of the world where our neighbours are of many different religions and ideologies". It should also be made clear, Mr. Griffin added, whether the survey would cover voluntary, i.e. Church schools as well as county schools. Parents who sent their children to Church schools generally did so because they favoured the religious instruction given there.

NSS Annual Conference

NEARLY 60 delegates and members attended the Annual Conference of the National Secular Society which was held in Birmingham on Whit Sunday, June 6th. Most of them had also attended a reception given by the Executive Committee the previous evening.

Mr. David Tribe was re-elected President, Mrs. E. Venton Vice-President, and Mr. W. Griffiths, Hon. Treasurer. Mr. L. Ebury announced his decision not to stand for the other Vice-Presidency, and as there were no other candidates, Mr. J. A. Millar was elected.

A resolution was passed calling for the abolition of the blasphemy laws. These and other laws which are a violation of civil liberties will no doubt be dealt with by Lord Gardiner's Law Commission.

Those present welcomed the success of the Society's Secular Education Month last year, and were urged to intensify the campaign against compulsory religious instruction and acts of worship in county schools.

Resolutions were also passed deploring discrimination on grounds of race, colour, religion and sex; the payment of money from public funds to religious organisations; and the pressure that certain MPs are bringing to bear on freedom of expression on the BBC. A resolution protesting against Britain's entry into the Common Market was narrowly defeated.

A resolution that the expulsion of the late George Taylor from the NSS be rescinded was passed by an overwhelming majority.

CORRESPONDENCE

JOSEPHUS

In reply to Mr. Chris. Strother's letter. The undersigned would be much obliged if Mr. Strother would abstain from personal attacks based on totally unfounded premises.

As to his remark that Josephus "does refer to Jesus" which, according to Mr. Strother, is equal to an "historical nuclear bomb", I should like to point out that no scholar of any standing has ever doubted that the passage in Josephus is an *interpolation* by Christian writers who were dismayed that Josephus never mentioned Jesus!

Oceans of ink have, within the last 150 years been wasted on arguments about that obvious forgery in Josephus's writings. I shall refer to it in a subsequent article.

As regards Mr. Smith's letter that will also be dealt with in a special article, as it would be too long for the correspondence column. I shall be pleased to answer readers' letters, providing that the subject matter is of general interest.

GEORGE R. GOODMAN.

[Josephus's references to Jesus are also mentioned by M. Ory in his article on page 195—Ed.]

THE WAY FORWARD

I happen to think that we, in the Freethought and Humanist movements, have Christianity on the run, but that we need to have a clear, general theory of social constructiveness before we can win through to the disestablishment of churches and religious theories everywhere. As Nigel Sinnott points out in a letter to THE FREETHINKER (14/5/65) we would be foolish to imagine that we can expect a Christian-dominated government to do other than continue "opposing every progressive idea and reform—evolution, anaesthetics, birth-control, women's suffrage, and education . . . divorce, abortion.

This is true and our role—if we are to be serious and get our ideas into practice—is to be prepared to take control of the state from them and get people who believe positively in our ideas in their stead.

To do this we must have a perfectly clear idea of the function of the state which will appeal not only to Atheists but to all fair-minded persons, even if they hanker after some forms of theism. Their beliefs may be an advance upon the fundamentalist nonsense which is managing to maintain an influence because of our short-sightedness in failing to distinguish between forms of theism which are compatible with science, and those which (like fundamentalism) are incompatible with science.

I believe that to gain control of the situation we must alter our

tactics here, and the ideas I have on the subject should divide the theists and bring the modern types of theist on to our side.

To put the matter as simply as possible I think we should declare that a form of agnosticism is the proper basis for a democracy. As Michael R. Evans points out—in an excellent letter in the same issue of THE FREETHINKER—we simply must recognise that the Agnostics have a point in declaring that *nobody really knows* what we really ought to think and do during our lifetimes. As I see it, a clear and forthright recognition of our fundamental agnosticism, in this sense, is required to provide us with a logical justification for our acceptance of a democratic system of state organisation which—unlike communism and fascism—includes freedom of thought and speech and association as civic rights.

Now it is well-known that many persons who continue to regard themselves as "Christians" or "Hindus" or "Buddhists", etc., etc., are, under the influence of evolutionary ideas, beginning to see the folly of the world continuing to be divided into armed or arming nations with the divisive purposes that local patriotism brings in its train. This is our opportunity. We can take the lead by appealing to these individuals to join us in aiming to create a world-wide democratic society and thus put the nationalists and racialists and traditionalists in all parts of the world to rout.

When this common front of persons who are concerned about the survival of the human race as a whole is formed I predict that the Labour and Conservative and Liberal parties in Britain will be split from top to bottom and we will find the reactionaries in all these parties combining to form an anti-humanist front and doing their worst with prayers for national survival, Union-Jack waving and monarchy-parading—not to mention NATO—and United Nations-praising which logically belongs to all forms of nationalistic thought which stems from the Bible and other ancient tribalist books.

The persons in those parties who are concerned about human beings generally and personally prepared to be on terms of common humanity with them will come together with us and—*because we are on the side of human unity and human survival*—will work with us to revolutionise the world in terms of our concepts.

I am convinced that this is the way forward for mankind.

E. G. MACFARLANE.

OBITUARY

The Manchester Branch of the National Secular Society has lost another member by the death in her 48th year of Mrs. Florence May Lord of Ainsworth, Radcliffe, Manchester, which took place in hospital on May 20th. Mrs Lord was keenly interested in all matters concerning Freethought but was unfortunately dogged by ill health and unable to accomplish all she had in view.

The cremation took place at Overdale, Bolton, on Tuesday, May 25th, when Mr. Bayford addressed the gathering of relatives and friends and paid a last tribute to the memory of the deceased.

We extend our sincere sympathy to all members of the family.
W.C.

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