

The Freethinker

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HERE'S NEWS!—as our lowbrow papers would describe it. For we read recently in a leftish journal in this country (*The Newsletter*, organ of the Socialist Labour League) the following interesting item: "Number 18 of the Soviet bibliographical bulletin, *Novi Knigi* (New Books), announced the publication in the Soviet Union of a Russian translation of the book, *L'Apparition de l'Homme*, a work by the Reverend Teilhard de Chardin, a member of the Society of Jesus, who died in 1955".

The *Newsletter* goes on to inform us that, the book, "which is to be sold at the low price of 96 kopeks, will be prefaced by an introduction by Roger Garaud, a member of the political bureau of the French Communist Party". We learn further that Garaud, who has for some time been extolling collaboration between Catholics and Communists, was invited a few weeks ago to address a conference at the Catholic university at Louvain in Belgium, and of course accepted.

After a debate on the subject of materialism and humanism which took place in Geneva on April 9th, 1965, Garaud stated that "Marxism would be impoverished if St. Augustine or St. John of the Cross were to become foreign to it". Upon which *Newsletter* aptly comments: "One can guess the manner in which he will present the philosophy of the Reverend Fr. Teilhard de Chardin to the Soviet public".

Having proceeded to point out that it is still impossible to publish in the Soviet Union even the works of opposition Communists of the intellectual calibre of Trotsky and Bukharin (both of whom fell foul of Stalin), the paper adds this pungent comment: "But they do publish a work by a Jesuit priest, a member of a Catholic organisation which *has been since its creation one of the most formidable instruments of the Papacy against all movements of emancipation whether spiritual or material*" (itals in original).

The Opium of the People

Time was—in 1917 and the years immediately following—when Russian Communism (including the Communism exported by the Third International) was definitely atheistic and avowedly anti-religious. In his Marxist classic, *Materialism and Empirio Criticism* originally written in the Reading Room of the British Museum where Marx had also written *Das Capital*, Lenin fiercely inveighed against the supernatural, expressly praised the old French Materialists of the "Enlightenment" (such as Diderot) and denounced in the strongest terms the attempt of some contemporary revisionist Marxists to "smuggle in Idealism by the back door".

After the 1917 Revolution, the Bolshviks conducted an organised campaign against religion as—in Marx's words—"the opium of the people", a prehistoric relic of animism deliberately cultivated by a decadent bourgeoisie which had opposed it during its own early revolutionary period for the express purpose of keeping the exploited

masses in material and mental subjugation.

The above attitude formed an integral part of Bolshevik theory and practice during the early years of the Soviet regime. Under Lenin's personal auspices, the League of Militant Atheists was founded to conduct this international propaganda.

And for some years before the war, the League was affiliated to the World Union of Freethinkers. It was represented at the World Congress in London in 1938 by E. Yaroslavsky. Earlier, in the Thirties and before the popular front, the English Communist expert on religion, the late T. A. Jackson, tried to form an English section of the League of Militant Atheists and approached several English Socialists interested in religion, including this writer. But the project did not survive the ensuing changes in Russian policy.

This attitude in fact lasted until the advent of Hitler, when Stalin began to substitute his policy of the popular front for earlier revolutionary policies. And the new policy involved collaboration with liberal and anti-Fascist religionists, Christian Socialists and the like, the "red" Dean of Canterbury, Dr. Hewlett Johnson being the best-known example in this country. During the war, Stalin carried his collaboration policy still further by dissolving the League of Militant Atheists professedly "in the interest of national unity", and the Soviet government officially recognised the Russian Orthodox Church. In the East European peoples democracies set up under Russian auspices after the war, the state officially subsidised the churches, and atheistic propaganda organisations were discouraged, if not actually forbidden.

Catholicism and Communism

Whilst the Communist popular front met with some success in harnessing liberal and anti-Fascist religious elements into active collaboration, it continued to meet with implacable hostility from the Vatican. But since the accession of Pope John in 1958, Communist-Catholic collaboration seems to have made quite considerable progress, as is surely evident from the surprising information indicated above. Certainly Lenin would turn in his grave were he aware of the apparently official endorsement of de Chardin in the USSR! Just as presumably say, Pius XII, that fanatically pro-Fascist pope, would also indulge in post mortem gyrations were he to learn that French Communists are officially invited to lecture in Catholic universities like Louvain.

However, the present-day Communist regimes apparently consider that no popular front would be complete without God! As for the Vatican, we have had occasion to note before that its social evolution from chattel-slavery via feudalism and capitalism, to perhaps Christian socialism (if not eventually to downright communism), has been, if possible, even more elastic than has been its strictly theological "development" in Newman's phrase.

That cynical old humbug, the late Dean Inge, who cultivated God and Mammon simultaneously (and with

VIEWS AND OPINIONS

Comrade Aquinas!

By F. A. RIDLEY

equal success), was once asked which he would prefer—the red International, or the black, the Catholic—both of which he detested about equally. His reply is stated to have been the red since red internationals come and go, but the black remains.

Today it would appear that the Communists are coming round to the same point of view. For in the hope perhaps,

that the Vatican may one day canonise Marx, the Communists are prepared already to publish Teilhard de Chardin as a *quid pro quo*. Perhaps the French Communist Party will presently issue an honorary membership card posthumously to Brother Thomas OP, who was, after all, a professor in 13th century Paris. Comrade Aquinas!

The Last Post

By GEORGE R. GOODMAN

Most people have, at one time or another, experienced bereavement. The scene in the mourner's house is generally somewhat like this:—A small group of people around a coffin, very silent. Sudden entry by a matter-of-fact clergyman who, without much ado, whips out a much-used ear-marked pocket edition of the Prayer Book and, in a horribly monotonous voice, begins to read the formal and utterly meaningless funeral service.

Nobody can follow or cares what he says, but the women-folk are generally dissolved in tears and are far too upset to listen to the black-gowned fellow's funeral farrago. All one seems to hear him say with great gusto a great number of times are "Christ" and "Lord Jesus Christ"; but the sentences do not make sense and are as far removed from our ways of thinking as the stars in the Milky Way.

It says in the Prayer Book that the priest shall not conduct the burial service "for any that die unbaptised, or are excommunicated or have laid violent hands upon themselves".

Meeting the corpse, he shall say or "sing": "I am the resurrection and the life, saith the Lord; he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live; and whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die.

"I know that my Redeemer liveth, and that he shall stand at the latter day upon earth; and though after my skin worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God, whom I shall see for myself, and mine eyes shall behold, and not another".

Which is about the crudest hocus-pocus that religiously-crazed charlatans ever invented! For concentrated falsehoods and sacerdotal quackery, it is hard to beat!

Incorporated into the orthodox burial service is always Paul's letter to the Corinthians (I Cor. 15), copiously interpolated with words like "Christ" and "Christ Jesus". Considering that Paul never knew a man called "Jesus Christ" for the simple reason that he never existed, every sentence in Paul's letters that mentions these two words is an impudent forgery by later writers, merely to "confirm" the Church's impossible dogmas.

And if somebody had told Paul that he was a "Christian" and expounded "Christianity", he would undoubtedly have asked: "Prithee what is that?"

Incidentally, during the first century of our era, the word "mystery" meant a gathering of "initiated people", something on a par to a masonic order. Certain secrets were imparted to the members of the fraternity, and had not to be divulged to those who had not been initiated.

In those days, there were a great number of such mystery religions—for that is what they were. And if a Greek or a Roman wanted to change from (providing it existed) the "Independent Order of Golden Tortoises" to one that was holier and livelier and perhaps called "The Olympic Kirk of Latter Day Saints", then he would merely tell his friends that he had gone to "another mystery", meaning that he had joined another denomination.

To enumerate and elaborate on all the interpolations

and alterations in this one chapter of Corinthians would become boring, but there is one well-known and oft-quoted sentence that lends itself to an interesting dissertation which will throw an entirely new light on an otherwise obscure passage.

"Behold, I shew you a mystery. We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump; for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed".

Nobody can say today *what* were the words that Paul actually used, for the whole chapter is simply riddled with alterations and interpolations. Maybe, Paul wrote "let me tell you something about *our* mystery".

We shall not (all) sleep. Orthodox ministers explain the insertion of the word "all" as meaning: some will sleep for ever, but those "in Christ" will be raised. Thus, the outlook for the writer of this article and the Editor is distinctly gloomy!

"For the trumpet (shall) sound, and the dead (shall) be raised incorruptible, and we (shall) be changed". The early Christian Church twisted everything to suit her purposes and to "confirm" her dogmas; hence the insertion of the word shall, so as to make it a future tense.

When asked, how a dead person would hear "the trumpet", a minister replied that all "believers" would hear that signal! Presumably, those who are hard of hearing will be supplied with a "Christian" hearing aid, and unbelievers will remain in the nether regions, deaf to all entreaties.

One thing is *certain*. When Paul wrote to the Corinthians, he was *not* referring to a trumpet at a resurrection in a nebulous future, but to something that happened every day in Judaea: if not every day, then certainly several times a week! Here are the facts.

In the days of Paul (and before and after him) it was the custom, when a man was on his deathbed, to send for the Jewish priest or rabbi who would say a few words of comfort; all religionists do a similar thing nowadays too.

But, roughly 1900 years ago, the rabbi brought with him an assistant or clerk who carried the ceremonial ram's horn (sho'far).

And when the dying man had given up the ghost and was good and truly dead, the rabbi would nod to the clerk who would then take the instrument out of its case.

Then the rabbi would call out the word "t'ru-o" (in Italian musical language today *tremolando*, note the similarity) and the clerk would produce the customary three notes; a sort of "farewell" fanfare, which the English-speaking people have copied in the form of "The Last Post" at military funerals and on Remembrance Days. *And the notes are almost identical!*

By the way, to produce any notes at all from a ram's horn is most difficult and requires weeks of practice.

(To be concluded)

Opinion off the Peg

By T. HILL

THE OTHER DAY somebody remarked: "I am an agnostic, but I have no axe to grind with the Churches; they have done a lot of good". The logic of this argument is on a par with that of another which could frequently be heard during the Italian invasion of Abyssinia: "... but Mussolini has made the trains run on time."

After the fall of the Roman Empire, the monasteries were the only remaining centres of culture and learning; the monks educated the semi-barbarian populace to become husbandmen and artisans; the noblemen they taught reading and writing; they were the advisers and counsellors of the kings whilst feeding some bread and soup to the starving. In this way they came to power and converted Europe to Christianity. People accepted the new religion not because of its persuasive beauty of teaching, but because they were dependent on its propagators.

Later, missionaries went to foreign lands and, closely linked with the Bible, brought education to backward peoples, instilling in them the idea that our greater knowledge and higher standard of living were the outcome of our religious beliefs. In order to share these manifest advantages, many considered it useful to change their gods. However, in the wake of the missionaries came the colonisers, the vendors of liquor and opium traders. The good the Churches had done bore thousandfold profit. Wherever the clerics trod, the tender plant of independent thinking and personal freedom wilted and people were forced to move in the chain-mail of medieval doctrine.

Children are still being brain-washed, some until they become obsessed neurotics and believe that death opens the gate to eternal life, whilst life itself is sinful. Thanks to their mortifying doctrines the Churches have been able to oppose every human progress in the name of a handy figment of fantasy. Being wealthy themselves, they are the natural allies of the rich and together they work to perpetuate the old order. Religion and freedom are incompatible as are fire and water. Therefore he who refuses to challenge the Church gives her the right to speak and lay down the rules for our lives in your name and mine.

The necessity to fight the religious *institutions* in the interest of progress and freedom does, however, by no means include our opposition to *individual* members of religious institutions who may be noble-hearted citizens. My admiration for the late Pope John as an outstanding human being is independent of my fight against the institution of the Roman Catholic Church as a spiritual prison.

Since the beginning of recorded history, that is since the exploitation of man through man, religion has played an ambivalent role: it has provided a comforting dream of "pie in the sky" to those unable to free themselves and, at the same time, has lent the halo of divine approval to all forms of class society and social injustice. God is the imaginary scarecrow in the field of private property and any attempt at force to achieve social changes is tantamount to rebellion against the will of the Lord.* In this way, as the French saying goes, "the dead are at the throats of the living."

No wonder then that we have become accustomed to

accepting the current notions handed down from generation to generation as being good and proper in one set and abhorrent in another, without asking questions. People who think for themselves are very rare; but even rarer are those independent enough to act according to their independent findings. Who in the West would for a moment doubt that Christianity is the highest expression of morality — despite the shameful results we see around us every day. Vested interests have repeated this lie over and over again until everybody — as in the story of the Emperor's new clothes — is under the same deception.

From time to time, the younger generation rebel against the traditional norms by which their elders live; however, there is no intelligent searching for new and better standards. They merely act and dress in obvious opposition to the up-to-now accepted standards and thus create another norm and another uniform. They invent mannerisms and exterior shibboleths to which they all conform.

When I expressed surprise that even a group of youth-hostelling girls wore those ridiculous pointed shoes that were the fashion then, their leader replied: "You wouldn't like us to feel frustrated for being different from other young girls?" To create another money-spinner, some ruthless fashion tycoon gives out a new edict and all females hobble on stiletto stilts.

I think most sensible people will agree that it is not necessary to choke our postal channels with trashy Christmas cards uttering magical wishes to people whom we probably wish well all the year round. But who will break the habit at the peril of appearing mean and impolite? At the same time, parents go to incredible lengths of idiocy to persuade their children that it is not they who are to be thanked for expensive presents but some pagan figure who, to top it all, has to come through the chimney. This idea and the traditional stocking (or for that matter the throwing of confetti at newly-weds) had a magical meaning in pagan times but is no longer understood. We no longer believe in domestic spirits, but the bride has still to be carried over the threshold.

The law of inertia appears to apply not only to matter but also to our thinking. At a time when nearly everything is mass-produced, public opinion too is a commodity off the conveyor belt of press and radio. And as these are completely in the hands of the ruling class, it can be said that the "dominant ideas are the ideas of the dominant social class." Snobbishness requires us to write to Mr Brown as "Brown Esquire" (which in fact makes him the shield-bearer of a noble knight) and his good lady has to be addressed as Mrs John Brown, as if she were his chattel and had no individual first name.

Most people nowadays no longer bother about religion — except at special occasions where one *has* to conform. However, as a recent survey showed, a majority of parents want their children to receive religious instruction at school which, they believe, will give them a moral foundation in life. No wonder then that there are still hundreds of sacred cows which nobody dares touch. No Member of Parliament who wants to keep his seat would unnecessarily offend ancient religious views on, say, homosexuality, abortion, blasphemy and obscenity laws, sabbatarian strictures, *et al.*

Some 150 million people in Italy, San Merino, Andorra,
(Concluded on page 230)

* Accordingly, up to the French Revolution, all political and social conflicts were fought under the guise of religious controversies. Whilst religion provided the formal slogans for the Peasants Wars and Reformation, the causes were social; and the Crusades were in effect the first colonial wars.

This Believing World

AS WAS to be expected the centenary of the founding of the Salvation Army by "General" Booth received ample publicity from the press, the radio, and TV. We had pictures of the pioneers of its early days, though very little was said about the way the early converts were scoffed at, and how the Salvation Army's religion of "Blood and Fire" was derided by other Christian Churches much in the same way as Jehovah's Witnesses are these days. Even the (more or less young) lady converts with their tambourines were only just touched upon. Nowadays, the girls prefer hymns arranged to be played as pop music.

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BUT THE really surprising thing about all the publicity was in the way that the social services of the Army were stressed, and very little was said about its "Blood and Fire". No one could have suspected, for instance, that the Army's first care in those early days was to rescue sinners from hell and damnation. We got no pictures of how wife-beaters and child-torturers, as well as burglars and drunkards were "saved" by the Army's prayers—how they all became worthy members of society through the saving Grace of Christ. In other words, the *religious* work of the Army was under-stressed. One thing however was clear. The Army's many millions in money and property show how religion can pay—not through prayer but through ordinary business acumen.

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WHILE Protestant curates and vicars are sometimes made to look figures of fun—rarely do we see Catholic priests laughed at on stage or screen—our bishops have almost always been revered as veritable "men of God". However, there are exceptions, and according to a *Daily Mail* headline (30/6/65), "Crowd Boos Bishop out of Hall". This unhappy occasion in which a man threatened the 70-year-old Bishop of Colchester was a "rowdy" annual meeting of the Colchester Branch of the Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals which has had to close down a cats' and dogs' home. The Bishop declared that when people lost their sense of proportion they "tend to become animals themselves", a description which made at least one man want to "clobber" him, and the principal speakers had to "close down".

★

IT SHOULD not be forgotten that the youngsters who are responsible for train-wrecking, smashing street lamps, and for vandalism in general, all receive at school and home at least a formal Christian training. Yet churches suffer as well as the railways. For example, the church of St. John the Divine in Kennington "is under siege from child wreckers" (*South London Press*, 18/6/65). These young vandals recently caused £200 worth of damage to the interior, and stone-throwing at church windows goes on "all the time". Nobody appears to know how to stop all this, but one thing is certain, Christian training is no good.

★

ALMOST with tears in its pages, the *People* (20/6/65) begged Mr. Wilson to "put a stop to Sunday snoopers". This really means "to scrap the crazy laws which now restrict our leisure activities on Sundays". Well, we Free-thinkers have been trying to do this for over a century. Even Charles Dickens did his best to have them scrapped over 130 years ago, but to no purpose. They were part and parcel of the British way of life on God's Holy and Happy Day of Rest. There are indications now that attitudes are changing, but can we depend on either the Tory or Labour Party openly to oppose the Sabbatarians?

Specimens of Faith

LAST WEEK I heard about a woman who has eleven children. She is a Roman Catholic, thirty-six years old, and she suffers from arthritis. The children are unkempt and live in squalor. Some of them are sickly, others have been in trouble for truancy. The woman does not want another child, nor does her husband, who earns twelve pounds a week as a labourer. They are both hoping that the Pope will "see his way to allowing Roman Catholics to use contraceptives."

There is nothing to be gained here from arguing the case for contraception for all who require it. The pros and cons are well known and the need for some form of contraception is accepted by most thoughtful people not committed to Roman Catholic doctrine. Eventually one may expect this acceptance to be forced on the Vatican. But for the moment it is perhaps worth looking at the effects of the current Roman Catholic policy on families such as the one mentioned.

One cannot say with certitude that this couple would have been happier had they limited their family. However, they would have had more money to spend on themselves and on each child. They would have had more room, and the children would individually have received more attention. The mother would not have had the strain of bearing a child annually and would have been spared the struggle of rearing many children at the same time. As it is, she and her husband are in a situation which, for them, has made happy family life almost impossible. It has become a grim despairing battle to ward off a succession of crises. Anything approaching a sensitive awareness of the children's needs is impossible, and the home often verges on chaos. The father escapes to the pub from time to time, and the mother muddles along as best she can by giving her attention to the child who seems to have the most immediate claim. Because of their thinking, apparently of a low order and moulded by their Church, they are unable to question, let alone refute, Roman Catholic teaching. They can only acquiesce. Meanwhile the welfare state helps them along and contributes towards the children's education in the kind of religious schools which fashioned their parents' beliefs.

It is the uneducated Roman Catholic who bears the brunt of the Vatican's views on birth control. The educated, middle class Catholic somehow manages to escape the predicament of his less fortunate brother. He may manage this, of course, by a judicious use of the so-called safe period. It seems more likely, however, that he has the wit to square his conscience so that he can practise contraception. But the poor and uneducated, like so many oxen, are bowed and often broken from following to the letter the teaching of their priests. Such is the predicament of some of these Catholics that we have the extraordinary spectacle of sympathetic priests publicly defying the Vatican on this question.

At this moment thousands of children are living in families so large that the parents are overwhelmed by their difficulties. Many of these parents, Catholics and others, beget children casually and without thought of the future. But the non-Catholics are open to help. It is possible to encourage responsibility and restraint in bearing children. These families, with their concentration on the immediate and their unconcern for the future, may be loth to bother with contraceptives, but the agents of the state who often deal with them have some hope of success. The subject is not taboo.

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Lecture Notices, Etc.

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OUTDOOR

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

London Branches—Kingston, Marble Arch, North London: (Marble Arch), Sundays, from 4 p.m.: MESSRS. J. W. BARKER, L. EBURY, J. A. MILLAR and C. E. WOOD. (Tower Hill). Every Thursday, 12-2 p.m.: L. EBURY.

Manchester Branch NSS (Car Park, Victoria Street), Sunday Evenings.

Merseyside Branch NSS (Pierhead)—Meetings: Wednesdays, 1 p.m.: Sundays, 3 p.m. and 7.30 p.m.

North London Branch NSS (White Stone Pond, Hampstead)—Every Sunday, noon: L. EBURY. Every Friday, 8 p.m.: L. EBURY and J. A. MILLAR.

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

Notes and News

FROM now on—or at least as long as Sir Edward Gowers's revision of it survives—Fowler's *Modern English Usage* will contain a record of its compiler's unbelief. After leaving Oxford, H. W. Fowler spent seventeen years as a master at Sedbergh, but his career there was ended by a difference of opinion with his headmaster, H. G. Hart. Fowler, "never a professing Christian", could not, Sir Edward states in his preface, "conscientiously undertake to prepare boys for confirmation". So, as Hart "held this to be an indispensable part of a housemaster's duty", Fowler was passed over for a vacant housemastership. "He protested; Hart was firm; and Fowler resigned". G. G. Coulton, whose biographical sketch provided the basis for Sir Edward Gowers's account, compared Fowler to Socrates. Though a non-Christian, Fowler had "all the virtues claimed as distinctively Christian", and, like Socrates, "was one of those rare people, sincere and unostentatious, to whom the conduct of life is *ars artium*".

★

THE Methodist Conference might have resolved—on July 6th—to seek closer relations with the Church of England. But there is, according to Dr. Leslie Newman, chairman of the Voice of Methodism group, "not a ghost of a chance" of intercommunion being achieved in the near future. His group was in no way anti-Anglican, Dr. Newman explained. "If we were invited to become part of something like a unified Church of Christ in England, bringing all the churches together, it would be a different matter", he said, "but the proposals as they stand provide for our absorption by Anglicanism without any real contribution to the worldwide coming together of denominations" (*The Sunday Times*, 4/7/65). At present the Methodists enjoy an "open table" with other Free Churches in Britain, but union with the Anglicans would mean a "closed table", at least until the other Free

Churches were drawn into the discussions. So the ecumenical disputes continue: closed tables; open tables. But how many people care?

★

DISPUTE, too, in the United States, centring, moreover, around Luci Johnson, the 17-year-old daughter of the President. Bishop James Pike of the Episcopal Church described Miss Johnson's re-baptism in the Roman Catholic Church as an insult and a direct slap at the Episcopal Church (*The Guardian*, 5/7/65). While praising her for making her own religious choice, the Bishop deplored her re-baptism, since the Catholic Church recognised the validity of Episcopal baptism. He would demand an apology from Miss Johnson and the Roman Catholic Archbishop of Washington. Catholic officials stated that the decision to re-baptise Miss Johnson was not a decision of the hierarchy.

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C. BRADLAUGH BONNER, President of the World Union of Freethinkers, reports that a letter he has received from the German Freethinker, Hubert Freistühler contains the following paragraph: "The case against me for endangering the state and for blasphemy, which has been dragging on since 1960 at last came up for judgment this February, when the five-day trial ended in acquittal on the first charge and a fine of 600 marks for insulting the Church". Mr. Bonner recalls that in 1960 police entered Mr. Freistühler's bookshop and took away various volumes on which the charge of sedition and blasphemy was based. "Effectively he has been acquitted on both charges, though fined for libelling the Church".

★

WHEN entering his local station recently, the *Daily Worker* columnist Walter Holmes received a leaflet recording the "greatest transaction" of the American millionaire J. Pierpont Morgan (29/6/65). It turned out to be Mr. Morgan's will, in which he wrote: "I commit my soul in the hands of my Saviour full of confidence that, having redeemed it and washed it with his most precious blood, he will present it faultless before the throne of my heavenly Father". Reading on, Mr. Holmes discovered that the millionaire didn't merely "indulge in a pious hope that he might be saved"; he made a firm offer through his "personal saviour". As it was well backed by millions of dollars, Mr. Holmes commented, "I imagine that J. Pierpont Morgan got by".

★

WE WELCOME the letter in the names of Clive Eaton, Leon Griffiths, Troy Kennedy-Martin, David Mercer and Ken Taylor, proposing an organisation to counteract "the pressures which are attempting to subvert the BBC" (*The Guardian*, 6/5/65). Groups which at one time seemed "a mere nuisance" are now "a positive danger", the more so—the letter pointed out—"since their attitudes coincide with those of many MPs' whose uninformed speeches . . . reveal a common desire to see the Corporation's output reduced to mere soporifics". If the MRA, Mrs. Whitehouse, and the commercial lobbies succeed in their campaigns "the largest and most important channel of free expression in this country will be lost".

★

RICHMOND and Twickenham Humanist Group is to hold a garden party on Saturday evening, August 21st., at the home of one of its members, G. Landsborough, 46 Ormond Avenue, Hampton, Middlesex. Neighbouring Humanist Groups are invited to turn up in force. There will, Mr. Landsborough says, be "no raffles, no charges" just "pure humanism".

Opinion off the Peg

By T. HILL

(Concluded from page 227)

Liechtenstein, Ireland, Chile, Brazil and Spain have to marry in church with no hope for divorce redress. Millions of durable human connections are considered concubinary and their offspring illegitimate. Cases are known where an adulteress goes abroad, gets a divorce and remarries; she can demand to be supported by her deserted husband as by law he is still her legal husband! It took an Italian ex-serviceman from the First World War 47 years to get his marriage dissolved. When he returned from the front, his wife had gone abroad and remarried. So, in order to keep the door to freedom ajar, Italian couples nowadays exchange letters before marriage stipulating conditions which are considered immoral in Canon Law, such as: "Our marriage is contracted for a duration of five years and under the strict understanding that each part retains his/her full liberty to have extra-marital love affairs." This, properly laid down with a notary, gives about 12,000 Italian couples per year the possibility to go to court and get a civil divorce.

A Socialist Deputy, who in 1954 tried to alter the Italian divorce laws, found himself publicly attacked and vilified and was not re-elected.

It is the social task of both religion and tradition to preserve the old, thereby perpetuating injustice and social prerogatives. The close alliance between the wealthy Churches and the capitalist state is a sort of mutual insurance, guaranteed by the mental laziness of the public at large.

It is false to assert that religion is primarily concerned with the way man is to treat his fellow men; its main concern is how he is to worship his god in fear of the hereafter and remembering divine approval of the prevailing state of things.

It is a deceptive lie that all men are born equal (the British Trade Union and Labour movements sprang from this Christian fallacy with the result that the Labour Party never grew Marxist teeth, whilst the clergy developed some leftist tendencies). It stands to reason that the son born into a rich family starts life with an advantage; he gets better education and later occupies commanding positions in society. Consequently, the state belongs to the wealthy. Democracy gives the man in the street the impression he, too, has a say in the direction of policies, whilst it leaves the reins of decision in the hands of big business. Just at this moment you may be sent to Malaysia to die for interests in rubber and tin. In the world's richest country, the United States, it becomes clear that you must be very rich — or be a manager of the rich — to run for state office, which explains why the US cannot have a progressive policy or party.

And how is it possible that minority views become "public opinion"? Because this "public opinion" is being spelled out by and canalised through the millionaire press. No individual or group publication can profitably compete with mass-circularised daily papers, magazines and lush illustrated weeklies from the huge modern plants of the press barons. They not only own the latest machinery but also the raw material (forests, pulp and paper mills), and with cheap stocks of printing paper and select writers they sell you pages and pages for the price others have to ask for a poor four-pager. And most of it is paid for by advertisements before they even start printing. This is how

the ruling set formulates and regulates "public opinion" and no election, however free, can really express the aspirations of the less privileged citizen.

Even more potent opinion moulders are radio and television. The Independent Television Authority, being merely an extended arm of the press trusts, eagerly spreads the Holy Smoke. The BBC charter prohibits advertising unless in propagation of the Christian faith; the BBC is, therefore, a little bit more independent than Independent TV and in order to infringe on this latitude, the millionaire press keeps up a hue and cry about "smut", "obscenity" and "blasphemy". If in the face of this challenge we keep quiet, they may prevail. It is a Turkish saying that only the child that cries is taken to the breast.

Are merely the enemies of progress permitted to shout and threaten with acts of repression and boycott if they dislike something shown or printed? So far, religious blackmail is not being prosecuted.

This sorry state of affairs is only possible because of our silence. We must learn to repel attack in counter-attack. Be clear about that!

A Clerical Critic

Someone, who cut his name from the top corner, from shame, I presume, sent me some time ago, a copy of THE FREETHINKER, of December 14th AD 1962. As a Christian, I too am a Freethinker, but have only just found time from more important interests to read it.

I admire, as you apparently don't, the efforts of the Jews to explain the then known history of man, of which efforts there is little to be ashamed of, much less sneered at.

But you avoid the obvious fact deduced from modern knowledge, that human history is still in its infancy, with its love of violence, etc. Time, after all, is a fourth dimension, and it is becoming clearer that it is a conception of ours, which has no meaning in cosmogony.

On the origin of life, where matter tends to disintegrate, you have nothing to say. Yet ultra-microscopic beings have developed from the mythical electronic world in a few million years into conscious groups, and even in man into a self-conscious group, with marvellous eyes, adapted to enjoy and develop a wide set of vibrations which are interpreted as beautiful colours, infra red rays, and ultra violet ones. Hearing and the rest of the six senses, quite impossible developments with revolutionary design, are sorted out from a single cell, into the marvellously different ones, e.g. for nerve, muscle, and skin, etc.; though an occasional outlaw starts cancer, or fails to form anything other than morons, or other defectives.

Even pain has an essential purpose, and where we cannot "take it" often produces marvels of courage, and even happy acceptance. After all, we are not merely individuals but members of a society whose greatest joy is in service to others, especially the helpless, not in ignorance like THE FREETHINKER, which would lead to self shame and chaos.

Your arguments are too childish to be taken seriously, and remind me of the parable of the chicken locked in a dark barn, who did not believe in a world outside its own environment.

Yours very sincerely, and somewhat sorrowfully,

(REV.) FRED. R. CRADDOCK, MB, CHB, DTM

[One may or may not admire the efforts of the Jews to explain the "then known history of man", they were certainly not original. The point is, however, that we don't accept the biblical explanation today. We don't accept the mythical fall of man and therefore have no need of a mythical redemption. On the origin of life it would have been better, we suggest that Mr. Craddock should have said nothing, since what he says is either confused or meaningless, ("mythical electronic world"?). Pain has on occasion a warning function, not a purpose; and extreme pain degrades, it does not uplift. And the outlaws, they rather mar a perfect design, don't they Mr. Craddock?—ED.]

A Christian Existentialist

By F. H. AMPHLETT MICKLEWRIGHT

A Berdyaev Anthology

Selected and translated by Donald A. Lowrie

(George Allen & Unwin Ltd., 55/-)

EXISTENTIALISM has attracted a following in the modern world. In many ways, it may be seen as a jaded and tired reaction within a world where violent discord has succeeded to the orderly progress which was the dream of the Victorian rationalist. Put briefly, it is the denial of reason and adopts a pessimistic view of man. Life tends to be interpreted in a state of crisis and crisis is met with an emotional, non-rational reaction which transcends reason. So far as the question of religion comes into the picture, the conclusion to be reached depends very largely upon the existentialist act of faith. Protestant thinkers following this course have commonly fallen back upon the strange pessimistic Christianity of Kierkegaard, the Danish existentialist of a century ago who charted out a path not altogether distasteful to Karl Barth and the earlier stages of his movement. On the other hand, it is possible to interpret the same point of view over into atheism pure and simple, the standpoint of the left-bank Parisian existentialists of whom Sartre is the best known in this country.

So far as Christian existentialism is concerned, the Russian thinker, Berdyaev, has always occupied a favoured niche. He was a product of reaction from the Marxism of the Russian Revolution and for long a prominent figure in *emigré* orthodox circles. His theology tended to be formless and mystical, whilst his theological moralisings upon the world situation were couched in terms of crisis and eschatology. Certain major concepts governed his mind. Man is a free spirit, an assertion which he reconciled with Christian belief and saw as antagonistic to Marxist Communism. There is a God-man relationship which determines the fulfilment of the potentialities of the human spirit. In this relationship, man is a co-creator with God.

For many years, Dr. Lowrie was a colleague of Berdyaev and became his biographer as well as one of his major exponents. He has now produced a definitive anthology of Berdyaev's voluminous theological writings.

For anybody who wishes to delve into Berdyaev's thought and to discover the lines upon which the Russian theologian worked out his philosophy of religion and of life, it cannot be commended too highly.

But, it is difficult to imagine that the secularist will find very much sympathy with Berdyaev. If he be claimed for any form of humanism, it must be for a humanism which is in no sense secularistic and which stands over against any type of naturalism. Berdyaev was a theist first and foremost, and his speculations concerning man see humanity as existing within the final relationships of a theistic pattern. His conception of man as a free spirit was something entirely different to that of, for example, Mill in his essay *On Liberty*, or any other of the more important liberal thinkers. The rationalistic tradition would make of human reason and experience something very different to that which Berdyaev chiselled out with his theology. In the last resort, Berdyaev was concerned through and through with a concept of "the eternal", whilst the monistic humanist is concerned with the world of the here and the now. Berdyaev claimed to experience an order transcending that of the universe of time and space. The secularistic humanist would reply that he has no evidence of the existence of any such order or any knowledge of its content.

These are fundamental differences, and there is no bridge over from the existentialism of Berdyaev to that of the liberal humanist whose appeal is to a universe interpreted by scientific methods of comparison and experiment. The liberal appeal is to the world as seen by the generations inspired through Darwin and Huxley, a world in which there is no room for the inherited mysticism of the Russian Orthodox Church, a mysticism centring in the icon rather than in the laboratory. Yet it is essential that the point of view expounded by Berdyaev should be known and understood. It has had an important effect upon many Christians who have been perplexed by the impact of the twentieth century upon their faith. If only for this reason, we would commend Dr. Lowrie's scholarly anthology as the most useful source-book of the subject available to the English reader.

SPECIMENS OF FAITH

(Concluded from page 228)

The Catholics, however, have been told that contraception is wrong. Discussion is often not possible because families do not have the freedom to think and decide for themselves. They are shackled with outmoded and harmful beliefs which are regarded as ridiculous by most of their contemporaries. Even when the health of the mother is in jeopardy these foolish beliefs prevail. Like dinosaurs, Catholics flounder in an age which has passed them by. Strangely, they may live in a welter of immorality yet still cling to the precious ideal of shunning contraception. They are specimens of faith. They merit study.

D.W.

CORRESPONDENCE

THE LDOS—REPLY TO ALBERT T. PETERS

Surely, you are not still squirming and writhing under the lash of the agnostic defender of Sunday freedom, yours truly, after all this time? I refer, of course, to our TV appearance last February, when, as you quote, "you were brought down in flames".

Probably you, my dear "Christian" friend, imbibed a great deal of theological learning at college, but apparently you weren't taught to take a thrashing like a man! It seems to have taken over five months to write—to a secular, atheist and agnostic journal, of *all* papers—that which surely you should have shot back at me when we met on TWW. Instead of which, I and thousands of viewers—remember, you sat with your head in your hands, eyes closed, seemingly snivelling and mumbling to your own peculiar little god, to put some words into your mouth, or to strike dumb this devil's agent, and uplift you out of the Slough of Despond into which it was obvious to all you had fallen! Or was your letter to THE FREETHINKER an order from your superiors in London to try to vindicate yourself and the LDOS?

Yet when I wrote to you, time and again (prompted by a pang of remorse at subjecting a fellow creature to such humiliation) and even invited you and your family to my home—for I don't hate

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you, only what you represent and stand for—I received no reply whatsoever.

Quoting you "Mr. Shephard has *at least* [my italics] woken to the fact that the LDOS is a force to be reckoned with"—my dear Mr. "Piety" Peters, I've never said or thought otherwise for years, since "Misery" Martin's days, in fact, and I *did* state on TWW that I realised I was involved in a David and Goliath struggle with the powerful and rich LDOS, but I had every faith in my son David's ability with the sling and his strong right arm, and my own ability to provide the "stones" therefore! Remember, Mr. Peters, or were you praying?

And, I asked you if you were proud, and if your wife was proud of you, for earning a living by snooping and informing upon children and calling them "unholy" for wanting to give a show in Torquay, to benefit handicapped and underprivileged youngsters. Remember, Mr. Peters, or were you still praying? Was this questioning on my part, of the activities of your ghastly Society really such "uncontrolled, unreasoning and unintelligent ravings?" Or the fact you *couldn't* answer, so much "imagination" on my part?

Quoting you again, friend Piety, "the *large majority* of MPs . . . are not so well disposed to Mr. Shephard's way of thinking" If this is so, and means that the LDOS has an overwhelming amount of support in Parliament, which I very much doubt, from my own contact with influential people—and would like proof—*outside* proof, *not* Mr. Peters's or Mr. Legerton's—what do these MPs' constituents think of this? To use a colloquialism—come off it, Piety, you might kid your unquestioning, simple open-mouthed-in-wonder Christian LDOS fellow-travellers, but *not* John and David Shephard, *nor* the growing numbers of supporters of this Sunday Freedom League! Don't forget Mr. Peters, that the LDOS has had 134 years in which to grow, whereas the Freedom League has been going only 8 months.

Finally, my offer of hospitality still holds good. Come and see me, and help me in the garden, preferably one Sunday!

Yours as ever, JOHN SHEPHARD.

As a friend, workmate, and supporter of John Shephard in his fight against the activities of the Lord's Day Observance Society, I would like to refute the statements made by Albert E. Peters, the Society's local agent here in the West. Co-supporters listed with me below, are with John Shephard in these matters.

Quoting from Mr. Peters's letter—"Mr. Shephard has good reason to be upset about this"—I can assure you, knowing John and his sense of humour and fun, and his appreciation of the ludicrous, he would be the last one to worry about the obvious misrepresentations about public and parliamentary opinion on Peters's queer society. Incidentally those of us who saw, with many others, the TV appearance in question, are unanimous in our opinion that:

1. John conducted himself with complete propriety and control even though burdened at that time with a fierce and understandable indignation at the contemptible activities of the Lord's Day Observance Society in stopping the children's charity show in Torquay. This was the only possible attitude that John Shephard could have taken. As he has said since, logic, reason

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and discussion are, like sarcasm, lost on the fanatical and the very young! I personally thought that Mr. Peters's performance was pathetic! What a meek and sorry figure he looked. If all the rest of the LDOS are of the same weak-willed calibre, then no wonder they pray to the Lord for sustenance.

2. We very much hope that any reply to Mr. Peters's letter that John may make will be inserted in the correspondence columns of THE FREETHINKER, though I really do not think he is unduly perturbed about this, as the Peters person and his queer society leave him (John) quite cold.

S. A. RICHARDS, Brislington, 4, W. LERPINIÈRE, Keynsham, A. W. BREWER, Warmley, STAN RICHARDS, Bristol, A. C. BADMAN, Bristol, N. COLE, Bristol, F. STONE, Bristol, A. STRANGE, Bristol.

D. DYSON.

AGNOSTICS ADOPTION SOCIETY

I think Mrs Ebury (June 25th) is unduly perturbed by my reference to the absence of credal tests in the work of the Agnostics Adoption Society. There is a long waiting list of atheists and agnostics, and I do not imagine that any jesuitical plot to flood the society with Catholic applications would get very far.

Most atheists would not however, I imagine, wish to set up *L'Eglise Libre Pensée*. It is the whole basis of the Secularist position that professional qualifications and "social and ethical merit" are more important than ideological labels. Especially is this true today when religious labels are often purely nominal. It is also a Secularist position that no mystical right is conferred on people by the fact that they are natural parents, and that those who are actually bringing the children up should be responsible for their training.

Probably Mrs. Ebury and I are agreed in considering that some creeds, for example 100 per cent orthodox Roman Catholicism or Exclusive Brotherhood, are so warping psychologically that their adherents would not make suitable adopters in any circumstances. But every individual must be judged individually.

DAVID TRIBE.

OBITUARY

The North London branch of the National Secular Society has lost a firm friend and member through the death of Mr. F. H. Bohringer. He was aged 65 and had been ill for several months. The funeral took place with civic honours at Enfield Crematorium.

F. H. Bohringer was a native of Suffolk, and became involved in politics and public affairs in 1922. Since then he had been active in a number of organisations including the National Unemployed Committee Movement, the Old Age Pensioners Federation and the National Cripples Reform League. He was particularly interested in the affairs of Tottenham, and served on the Trades Council, the Town Safety Committee and the Co-operative Society.

He was a former Mayor of Tottenham and the present Mayor's tribute will be echoed by the deceased's many friends "He served well his fellow citizens".

EVA EBURY.

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