

FREETHINKER

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ELECTION

Next Thursday the country will go to the polls to elect its representatives for the 700-year-old Parliament at Westminster. The British parliamentary system has worked so well that experts have come from far and wide to study it and import it into their own countries. But is it as ideal as we are led to believe?

Most of the defects of any political system result from the people who operate it. Short of some magic breakthrough in biochemistry or psychiatry, these human faults will remain and governmental imperfections remain with them. Humanists in general differ from religionists in that they do not recognise an absolute source of perfection to which humanity can become attuned, and from political utopianists in that they do not believe that changed economic or political circumstances will of themselves eliminate social and psychological faults. But they are not "of all men most miserable", for they see evidence that by the patient exercise of reason the grossest abuses of peacetime life are gradually being eliminated, and they hope—though with a realistic caution—that the application of reason to the international scene will bring home to all men everywhere the horror and futility of global combat.

Unlike the rationalists of old, however, Freethinkers, living in a post-Freudian age, do not have inflated notions of the invincibility of reason. Ideally, in electoral terms, people ought to judge impartially the manifesto and political record of each of the parties offering candidates, and the record of public service and ideas of each of the candidates, whether party or independent, offering himself. In practice, electors seem to vote in large measure according to family loyalties and fringe prejudices like racialism.

Factors influencing the vote

In the last century one of Britain's most perspicacious satirists, W. S. Gilbert, made Private Willis enthuse how wonderful it was that every little boy or girl born into the world was "either a little Liberal or else a little Conservative". Such is the power of family influence. Mostly this is a matter of social class. In 1964 National Opinion Polls found that 74.7 and 30.9 per cent of the upper-middle classes and unskilled workers respectively voted Conservative. Other factors such as sex, religion and age have been invoked. In 1964 39.7 and 45.7 per cent of men and women respectively voted Conservative. To some extent this is offset by the facts that women live, on average, five years longer than men and Conservatism is stronger among the older age groups, and that women tend to vote less than men in all social classes, particularly among working class pro-Labour groups. One of the great disappointments of the suffragettes and feminists of both sexes has

been the comparative lack of interest in politics shown by women in this country since they got the vote. This may of course be said of the working classes generally, and it must be admitted that women are still neither educated to public life nor unhampered by prejudice if they choose to "invade" it. But it is perhaps a pity that there is nothing here to rival in power the wellknown Right-wing Daughters of the American Revolution and lesser-known Left-wing organizations of women voters.

Because Conservatism is strongest in the upper age bracket, it has been said that any proposal to extend the franchise to 18-year-olds would favour the Labour Party. But the greatest Radicalism has been found not in the twenties but in the age range 35-44. Though history can cite many young liberals like Wordsworth or Wilkes who grew conservative in old age, and while many workers are able in later life to buy themselves into suburbia, where they acquire the local voting habits (often Conservative), Anthony King believes the voting of the age groups reflects political conditions when they were young. Most political attitudes, whether Conservative or Communist, fossilise by 30. Because of the Depression and the rise and eventual defeat of Fascism, he sees the climate of the next decade as pro-Labour.

Religion and politics

In a survey in Bristol North-east in 1955, Anglicans composed 52.7 per cent of the sample, but 62.4 per cent of the Conservative vote, while Nonconformists were 20.5 per cent of the sample and 24.2 per cent of the Labour vote. To a considerable extent this is a matter of class. Traditionally the Church of England has been "the Tory Party at prayer". In the spacious days of Hogarthian electioneering Anglican incumbents played a not inconsiderable part, especially in country areas. Some are loath to abandon the role today. A display advertisement on the front page of the *Reading Chronicle* has been informing readers that the Vicar of St Lawrence's, now in America, sends his good wishes to Mr Peter Emery, the Conservative candidate. It is a moot point whether in 1966 the support of the local vicar will be a godsend (in all senses) or a liability; but whoever paid for the advertisement presumably expected voters to be favourably impressed.

In the United States today, the so-called liberal, classless society, religion is probably a greater pointer to social class than it is in modern Britain, which has by and large ceased to regard religion as a token of anything but the vaguest respectability. Throughout the New World and in Northern Europe (including Britain), many immigrant groups are the unemployed or at least unprivileged of Catholic countries. Already lower class in their native

land, they lose further status simply by being an immigrant minority, and so have gravitated to parties of the Left, though the Vatican itself remains a pillar of the Right. Thus in America, Britain, Australia, Catholic Action has been particularly active in the Democratic or Labour Party. Writing in *The Future of Catholic Christianity*, Ronald Brech shows that in terms of work status and income there has been between 1938 and 1964 in Britain an enormous upgrading of the Catholic population, which now corresponds approximately with the national average. Some influential Catholics have recently become Conservative MPs. This trend is likely to continue.

Humanism and politics

Traditionally the Humanist movement has been anti-Establishment and radical. Before the development of trade union and Communist Establishments, this meant politically Left-wing, however loosely defined. The original inspiration of almost all working class movements throughout the world came from Freethinkers. But eventually these movements became politically significant, and bigger interests muscled in and took control. Till 1911 and 1912 respectively, secular education was on the agenda of Labour Party Conferences and annual sessions of the TUC. By the 1950s, Mr Morgan Phillips was able to say that the Labour movement owed more to Methodism than to Marx, without adding that it owed more to Freethought (French rationalism, Paine, Place, Owen, Lovett, Bentham and the great names of the next fifty years) than to either. Soon, no doubt, we shall be told it all spring from *Rerum novarum*.

Some Humanists still assert today that the Humanist movement should affiliate to the Labour Party or that they cannot see how a Humanist can be anything other than a man of the Left. In our modern pragmatic age this is certainly an oversimplification. For better or for worse, the world is now impatient of ideology. Too many ideological panaceas have been weighed in the political balance and found wanting. Further, Anglo-Saxon society has always been suspicious of intellectuals, philosophical systems and culture generally. Intellectuals have certainly entered politics, but they've tried to keep quiet about brains. It is an embarrassment to be "too clever by half". Poland may have its Paderewski, but there's something odd about the Leader of the British Opposition being musical. In 1964 it really seemed that burning issues and great causes were at stake, but mercifully

the Wilson Government soon adjusted to the realities of power. One of the reasons why religious intrigue has been so successful in this country is that it has never come out into the open as a theologically identifiable party—which would certain provoke major anticlerical opposition movements, as on the Continent—but has always operated behind the scenes on so-called political issues, so that many who should know better have been deceived. But though it cannot ignore politics, the Humanist movement has been and should continue to be interested in specific socio-ethical programmes and should hold itself above party wrangling.

Is everything for the best . . . ?

Many countries throughout the world, Eurasian and now African have introduced one-party systems. The extent to which dictatorship and corruption have been thus able to thrive cannot encourage a similar experiment here. But the party system by no means offers the freedom of choice advertised. Parties cost a lot of private money to maintain, so that vested interests, big business or big unionism, move in. At Westminster the MP still in high theory represents his constituency and not his party, but the world knows this is merely a legal fiction. The production of lobby-fodder is a growing phenomenon, even where margins are not narrow. Modern economics and communications increasingly favour the big and the established. Independents and small parties have to face huge printing and travelling costs. By "agreement", the BBC gives 60 minutes TV and 55 minutes radio time each to Labour and Conservative, and 35 and 30 respectively to the Liberals. This year the Communists are fielding over 50 candidates and will receive 5 minutes each for the first time. Nobody else gets anything. In the absence of a preference system, displeasure or near-approbation cannot be expressed even where there are more than two candidates. In 1964 Liberals got one tenth of all the votes, but in a simple majority, as distinct from a proportional representation system, received 9 instead of 63 seats. The smaller parties are forever doomed to the political wilderness. Though this situation keeps out the lunatic fringe, it also keeps out the intellectual fringe.

And the result next Thursday? This paper employs no clairvoyant or astrologer (making it almost unique). Probably another thanksgiving service for Lord Soper and the Bishop of Southwark, with the thanks not as loud as the polls are predicting.

WINDOW ON THE WORLD

Otto Wolfgang

IT IS SAD to see, from year to year, the number of British holiday-makers who are thoughtless enough (not to use a stronger word) to carry their money to fascist Spain as if nowhere else could they enjoy the pleasures of the Mediterranean. This gives Franco much-needed foreign exchange and the pretence of having raised the living standards of the Spanish people, whereas in fact the tourist trade has benefited merely the hotels, night clubs and bars in the Balears and on the Costa Brava. In the interior of the country, the downtrodden people are as poor as ever, church-ridden and deprived of human rights. "Franco violates International Agreements", writes *Libertad para España* (January), when he banned the Friends of the United Nations from celebrating, in

Barcelona, the 17th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Next December was to see the holding of discussions on various "Human Rights". As a member of UN, Franco, to please his US protectors, signed the Declaration, but he refuses to go any further than that.

Likewise, the clerico-fascist terror in neighbouring Portugal is allowed to go on, as new publications from the Front Patriotique de Liberation Nationale (rue Auber 13, Algiers) show; one booklet (*Faim au Portugal*) publishes statistics about the starvation diet of the common people, another (*La Terreur Salazariste Condamnée*) describes how political prisoners are exterminated by PIDE (Internal Police for the Defence of the State). A resolu-

tion adopted by the International Federation for Human Rights at the Congress of Athens (17-19 April, 1965) condemned the medieval and degrading methods of PIDE and decided to launch a public protest with the United Nations. Last July the Junta Revolucionária Portuguesa submitted to the UN sub-committee of the Special Committee (Denmark, Ethiopia, Mali, Tanzania, Syria, Tunisia, USSR and Yugoslavia) a document about fascist demagoguery and imperialist interests in Portugal's colonies. American, British, French and German capital is involved in the exploitation of these territories, which explains why nothing is being done to give the negroes under Portuguese rule the same rights as are claimed for those in Rhodesia and elsewhere.

Vietnam

The same hypocrisy prevails in the attitude of the US and British governments with regard to the war in Vietnam, despite the fact that on February 16 the Central Committee of the World Council of Churches, meeting in Geneva, adopted a resolution condemning America's intervention in Vietnam, demanding a "phased withdrawal" of foreign troops and the recognition that, besides the so-called (because unrepresentative) government of South Vietnam, the National Liberation Front (Viet Cong) has a right to have its say. Point 6 of the resolution states "That all parties recognize the extent to which what is happening in Vietnam is part of a social revolution" and that—by implication—it seems quite natural that the North Vietnamese come to the assistance of their kith and kin in the South against the onslaught of foreign invaders. (The text of the Resolution was published in *New Christian*, February 24).

At the same time, the World Council of Churches also elected a new General Secretary (whom *Newsweek* of February 21 calls the "Protestant Pope"). By 79 to 3 votes the committee chose Dr Eugene Carson Blake (United Presbyterian Church in the US), who, in 1961, was bold enough to bring the Russian Orthodox church into the world body and has stood out as an uninhibited advocate of racial integration (he was arrested in 1963 when leading some 300 negro and white marchers).

In America the liberal Protestant paper *Christianity and Crisis*, under its chairman Reinhold Niebuhr, celebrated its 25th anniversary. At its inception it attacked American isolationism, urging maximum material help for Britain in her struggle with Hitler; and today the editors sharply criticize "the American Government's policy of belligerence in Vietnam", calling for a negotiated political settlement "that will not depend on the defeat of the other side" (*Newsweek*, February 28).

Vatican humbug

Against these signs of Christian realism in the Protestant camp we must hold up the insincerity in Vatican circles who, for world consumption, give out the window-dressing of the Vatican Council as big changes whilst assuring their frightened flock that in fact "nothing had really changed" (*New Christian*, January 27). A study by an Italian priest, a sociologist, is quoted as saying that much of Roman Catholicism has become "a religion of initiates—the bishops". The initiates "confer the privilege of faith upon their followers, who in turn become more interested in conformity and obedience than in content". One need not minimize the changes but it would be even worse to exaggerate them.

As far as the Roman Catholic attitude is concerned, any exaggeration will be counteracted by reading the Council documents.

The exclusive claim is still there. The one Church of Christ continues, it is said, to exist in the Roman Catholic Church, which has inherited the full truth of Christ's message and kept intact all the means he left to bring men salvation.

However, the February issue of *Libertad para España* has fallen for the Dialogue bait, and this is the explanation. Asked on television about the position of the Dominican Order in relation to Communism, Father Aniceto Fernandez, their Grand Master, replied: "I do want a dialogue, a liaison, a conversation—why should we not have a conversation?" Which does not commit anybody, least of all the Vatican, and which makes Communists somewhat "respectable" as human beings.

Intrigues

But if you call the bluff you are not welcome. Jean Coterau, President of the French Freethinkers, describes in the February issue of *La Raison* how desperately *Le Monde* wriggled to deprive him of taking part in a "free" discussion on the Dialogue. He first wrote in, in December last; after a long time they maintained the manuscript was no longer up to date, would he submit another? That, they pretended, was lost, could he do yet another? And in the end, after a long-drawn-out silence, they "regretted" it was now too late and, after all, they had aired all opinions, i.e. from an RC priest, a Protestant, and a Marxist (the Communist Garaudy, who, like his Italian and Austrian counterparts, is, as the saying goes, "more popish than the Pope").

M. Cotereau wrote back, he was in no way surprised about this treatment, since he never believed in their "so-called impartiality" however much *Monde* pretended to have an Open Forum ("*Libre Opinion*"). Now at least they have furnished the proof of what bourgeois liberalism is like. If the Vatican wished to include the Atheists in their "dialogue", it wasn't enough to ask everyone but the organization of atheists what he thought of it.

Once, when I was asked to contribute an article to the Austrian *Freidneker*, I translated one of my articles previously published in this paper; in it I had quoted Freud's diagnosis that piety was an obsessional neurosis, and I went on to quote from modern textbooks the symptoms which also exactly fitted the religionists. Immediately I was bitterly attacked by the Austrian Communists with the dirtiest invectives they could think up; did I not know that religion was the outcrop of class society and, consequently, will disappear with it?

The tenacity of belief

In Poland it has disappeared so little that the government is afraid of letting in foreign delegations—let alone the Pope—for the *Cestochova* celebrations (as previously reported in this column).

Writing in *Osvetov Prace*, a Czechoslovak trade union paper, Milan Machovec sounds a warning that in AD 2000 the country will have more believers than ever, despite twenty years of Communist rule. The decisive error of party propaganda, he writes, is to think human beings can be "manipulated" and influenced by ideas; as a matter of fact, emotional and irrational trends have, after 2,000 years of indoctrination, taken root and cannot be disputed away.

Miscellany

A former SS officers who, in 1947, had been sentenced to death *in absentia* in Brussels stood before an Austrian court and was acquitted. Dealing with this and similar

(Continued on page 93)

THIS WORLD

Women and Secularism

IT is often said, even by those who should know better, that the Secular Humanist world has been one of aggressive masculinity where women were neither attracted nor wanted. The truth is very different. As Vice-President under Charles Bradlaugh, Annie Besant had an influence and prestige rare to women in national movements at that time. Today, as then, the Vice-President is a woman, Mrs. E. Venton. Ten years ago came a landmark in broadcasting with the series on **Morals without Religion** by distinguished Secular Humanist Mrs. Margaret Knight. In the recent series **Inquiry into Humanism**, many listeners thought the best interview was with Mrs Madeleine Simms. WE are pleased to announce yet another breakthrough by talented NSS women. Mrs Kit Mouat, author of *What Humanism Is About* and founder of the unique Humanist Letter Network (International), is to appear on that digest of pious waffle, **Woman's Hour** (BBC Light, 2.0 p.m.), on March 29. Mrs Mouat has insisted on telling her own story in her own way, and listeners may be assured that there will be nothing pious or waffly on that occasion.

Only in Small Doses

AN unfortunate postman in South London recently came to religion, whereupon he followed the Sermon on the Mount by giving up his job, giving away his possessions and visiting holy places. Eventually he committed suicide. Observed the coroner: "Although it is not unusual to be interested in religion, when carried to extremes like this it is sometimes suggestive of underlying mental disease". No doubt he would have made a similar pronouncement on the Gospel Jesus, in whose name the law terms open, on whose book all police officers swear, and whose precepts are urged upon all our school children.

Thomas Paine

TWO exhibitions in his memory will shortly be staged. In Leicester in co-operation with the Leicester Secular Society, and in Nottingham (May 9-14) in co-operation with the local Co-operation Society and Group of the Private Libraries Association, the Thomas Paine Society will be showing many pieces from private collections.

That Controversial Baby

THREE Law Lords have upheld the decision of the Court of Appeal in the "Ties of Blood" case of the 18-month-old boy (FREETHINKER, March 11). They considered that the 1958 Adoption Act, which appears to give all rights to the natural mother, was not in conflict with the 1959 Legitimacy Act, which gives rights and duties to the natural father, and that the baby's best interests would be served by taking him away from his foster parents and would-be adopters and giving him to his natural father, who was anxious and able to see him well provided for. A somewhat offbeat journalistic light was thrown on the case by *New Society* (March 10). It stated that the father had not been told of the baby's existence earlier, and that the mother's main concern was not so much the baby's welfare as a desire that he be brought up as a Roman Catholic. Much of the agitation about the case seems to have come from the curiously phrased psychiatric advice. While acknowledging that in the event justice seems to have been done, one cannot help feeling sorry for the Catholic foster parents.

Enemy of Mankind

GOD has been declared "just about the greatest enemy of mankind" by best-selling novelist Kingsley Amis. In his latest, *The Anti-Death League* about cancer and bacteriological warfare, God is denounced for his unfeeling brutality. In a radio interview Mr Amis described himself as an agnostic and humanitarian, but not a Humanist, "if by that you mean those people who write letters to the paper". Mr Amis can rejoice that while some people devote their equally valuable time to, and risk persecution through agitation for social reforms and rationalism, he can indulge his taste for agnosticism and lucrative penmanship.

Church Schools

AT the Holy Cross RC Academy, Edinburgh, last month, four members of Catholic Parent-Teacher Associations debated "Denominational schools should be retained". The motion was lost. The Union of Catholic Students has found Catholic educational philosophy a "scandal" based on "expedient compromises which amount to political manoeuvres". Children at St Paul's Church, Walworth, South London, all aged under 14, want less religion in day schools. Perhaps the National Secular Society is less out of step with the rank and file in religious circles than its high diplomacy critics.

Freedom

PROTESTS are invited by the *Portuguese and Colonial Bulletin* (February-March) on behalf of Sofia Ferreira, Jose Victoriano and other political prisoners languishing for years in gaol under the notorious "security measures". They should be sent to the Portuguese Embassy, 11 Belgrave Square, London, SW1, or the Ministerio da Justica, Lisbon.

Sent to Coventry

IF Lady Godiver should ride again, Peeping Tom may find himself arrested by a coloured bobby. Though there have been reports of coloured special constables in other places, Coventry seems to be the first force to admit a non-white to ordinary training. May others follow suit.

Beyond the Fringe

DESCRIBED as a "Teach-In" and accompanied by a Programme with Rodin's "Thinker" on the front, a junket of spiritual healers met in three sessions on March 12 to present "the mid-twentieth century approach to healing". There were Lord Soper and a Catholic Inspector of School, Dr Weatherhead and the Editor of *Psychic News*, Canon Pearce-Higgins and Harry Edwards, Brian Inglis and Beverley Nichols, a Labour MP and a "doctor", a Past Vice-President of the Royal College of Surgeons and a Buddhist, and a whole galaxy of faith healers from rival Spiritualist organisations. Everyone agreed that something wonderful happened, though there was no agreement on what and how. Some favoured white coats and a clinical manner, others lounge suits and a rivalist rally atmosphere. Some advocated medical knowledge and diagnosis, others not. Laying on of hands, absent prayers, hypnosis, "radiation" and shrines were advertised. Some looked to cosmic forces, others to higher intelligences, others to the spirits of departed doctors, and yet others, including a vociferous woman in the gallery, wanted all the glory to go to Jesus.

GORDON Turner, Chairman of the National Federation of Spiritual Healers, proclaimed that for "virtually every disease" faith healing worked where medical science failed, though the only two he actually named were the notoriously

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LECTURE NOTICES, ETC.

Items for insertion in this column must reach THE FREETHINKER office at least ten days before the date of publication.

OUTDOOR

- Edinburgh Branch NSS (The Mound)—Sunday afternoon and evening: MESSRS. CRONAN, McRAE and MURRAY.
 Manchester Branch NSS (Car Park, Victoria Street), 8 p.m.: MESSRS. COLLINS, WOODCOCK, and others.
 Merseyside Branch NSS (Pierhead)—Meetings: Wednesdays, 1 p.m.; Sundays, 3 p.m. and 7.30 p.m.
 Nottingham Branch NSS (Old Market Square), every Friday, 1 p.m.: T. M. MOSLEY.

INDOOR

- Bristol Humanist Group (Kelmescott, 4 Portland Street, Clifton), Sunday, March 27th, 7.15 p.m.: Mrs. ISA FOX, "Moral Education in School".
 King Alfred School (Manor Wood, North End Road, London, N.W.11), Day Conference, "Ethical and Moral Values in Education". Speakers: JOHN WILSON, JAMES HEMMING, JOHN WREN-LEWIS and MARGARET KNIGHT. Saturday, April 30th, 9.30 a.m.—6 p.m. Conference fee (including morning coffee, lunch and tea) £1 1s. 0d. Details from Edwin Savitt, 25 Grove Court, Circus Road, London, NW8.
 Leicester Secular Society (Secular Hall, 75, Humberstone Gate), Sunday, March 27th, 6.30 p.m.: T. HOSE, "The Russian Enigma".
 Marble Arch Branch NSS (The Carpenter's Arms, Seymour Place, London, W1), Sunday, March 27th: DAVID TRIBE, "A Century of Secularism".
 The Progressive League (109 Lancaster Gate, London, W2), Sunday, March 27th, 7.30 p.m.: ALISON LYONS, "The Taboo on Tenderness". Sixth meeting of the series "Towards a New Morality".
 The Progressive League (13 Prince of Wales Terrace, London, W8), Tuesday, March 29th, 7.30 p.m.: Archbishop ANTHONY BLOOM, "The Dark Night of the Soul".
 South Place Ethical Society (Conway Hall Humanist Centre, Red Lion Square, London, WC1). Sunday, March 27th, 11 a.m.: LORD SORENSON, "Moral Diversity and Moral Values"; Tuesday, March 29th, 7.30 p.m.: JANE JUDDSON, "Children talking about Religion".
 West Ham and District Branch NSS (Wanstead and Woodford Community Centre, Wanstead Green, E11). Meetings at 8 p.m. on the fourth Thursday of every month.
 Worthing Humanist Group (Morelands Hotel, The Pier), Sunday, March 27th, 5.30 p.m. Speaker: HAROLD J. BLACKHAM, Director of the British Humanist Association.
 Humanist Letter Network (International): send s.a.c. to Kit Mouat, Mercers, Cuckfield, Sussex.
 Kit Mouat will appear in "Woman's Hour" (BBC Light Programme) on Tuesday, March 29th, 2 p.m.

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THIS WORLD *continued*

intractable arthritis and disseminated sclerosis. The surgeon put the whole matter in some sort of perspective by saying that there were certain mental illnesses and rheumatism which the medical profession could do little for, and he didn't mind if the victims then wandered off to a faith healer; but the great danger was that cancer sufferers would dally with faith healers until their condition became inoperable.

IN 1954 the Archbishop of Canterbury convened a commission, with the help of the BMA, to look into the alleged phenomenon. It found no evidence that spiritual healing could cure any diseases not cured by medical knowledge (which is not, of course, unaware of the great role of the mind in much physical illness). The BMA was not at the "Teach-In". But Mr Turner forecast that in ten years time "all healing will be recognized as spiritual". We live in a scientific age. But never before has fringe medicine been more vociferous and quackery more clamorous.

NO COMMENT

"Nuns are invidious and insidious. They are at one like flies, their rosary beads clanking, the ominous rustle of black serge announcing their approach too late to do anything about it, driving us like so many sheepish Isaacs towards God . . . their charges are being kept free of any sort of influence other than a religious one of a selective, biased and bigoted kind; and snobbery runs riot in convents. . . . One of my nuns was quite mad. A misplaced vocation had driven her to lunacy and she frightened the day lights out of every girl in a school which was Dickensian in its dark misery and abuses"—*New Statesman*, March 11.

WINDOW ON THE WORLD

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trials in RC Austria, a recent report of the European Office of the American Jewish Committee concludes that the Austrians "have their own reasons for considering Nazi crimes as no crimes at all or, at any rate, as crimes that should be excused".

The February issue of the monthly bulletin of ACLU, the American Civil Liberties Union, reports a list of persons persecuted for their anti-Johnson stand with regard to American policy in Vietnam. Their New York affiliate has also taken up the—previously reported—case of the dismissal of 31 faculty members by the Catholic St John's University in "complete disregard for contemporary standards of academic freedom and academic due process".

In his efforts to whitewash Pius XII, his late master, Pope Paul has now published a number of letters written by Pius to his German bishops. This is Vatican diplomacy at its lowest, since the period covered is from when the two fascist dictators made it clear that they would tolerate no competition, from whatever quarter. Naturally, the "Representative of God" was angry that lay upstarts dared challenge the uniqueness of his absolute power. However, as soon as a *modus vivendi* was struck, the climate changed notably. Saul Friedlander, in his famous book *Pie XII et le 3ème Reich* published not only letters but also diplomatic documents which no sophistry will ever be able to disprove.

TOAST TO NSS

Brigid Brophy

IN CELEBRATING the centenary of the National Secular Society we are celebrating the fact that we have now had, in this country, one hundred years of militant freethought. This compares with eighteen or nineteen hundred years of the church militant. When you consider what a head start the church got away to, I think it must be confessed that the National Secular Society is doing pretty well.

What has been achieved during the last hundred years, and achieved very largely by the Society, is to secure to freethinkers their elementary civil and democratic rights. What we must acquire during the *next* hundred years is the social freedom to enjoy them. I think we must aim at abolishing that faint air of apology, that suspicion of holding back at the door for the more important people to go through first, with which a freethinker still tends to enter a public discussion—usually with the words “I’m afraid I have no religious beliefs . . .”

Out of mourning

There really is no need to be afraid, either in the idiomatic or in the literal sense. I suspect that the lugubrious manner of carrying one’s lack of religious belief is part of our inheritance, which in other respects is often highly valuable, from the Victorians; I cannot help associating it with the droop of George Eliot’s ringlets—though apart from that I will not utter a syllable in detriment of George Eliot, whom I bless daily as a great freethinker and great novelist. But we do still carry about us a touch of that regretfulness whereby a Victorian freethinker used to emphasise that, though unable to believe himself, he would not dream of disturbing the faith of anybody fortunate enough still to have one, and was in the habit of referring to the loss of his own faith as if it were the loss of a near and dear relative.

I think the time has now come for us freethinkers to come out of mourning. We might, I think, revert to the tough-mindedness of the eighteenth century. If we consider the religionists’ beliefs absurd, we might, I think, pay them the compliment of treating them as adult enough to be told so. We shall of course be lucky if we can tell them so half as wittily as Voltaire. But we might have a shot at it. We might have a shot at modelling ourselves on Edward Gibbon, who no more lamented the loss of his faith than he would have lamented the loss of a toothache. We might emulate that basically, by his own confession, eighteenth-century personality, that great artist and great wit, Bernard Shaw. Or we might adopt something of the round and frank vocabulary of Tom Paine, who described the Holy Ghost as “a flying pigeon” and added a footnote to the effect that the gospel “might as well have said a Goose—the creatures are equally harmless, and the one is as much a nonsensical lie as the other”. I like to think, incidentally, of the squall that would be provoked nowadays if a modern freethinker—if one of us—made Tom Paine’s remark in some television discussion with a clergyman.

No apology

In reason (and we are, after all, here in the name of reason), there is no more call to apologise for not believing in God than there is for not believing in fairies. If we let ourselves be betrayed into expressing a sense of apology,

we are letting ourselves be imposed on by the religionists—and in particular by that curious psychological phenomenon, which is central to religion, namely that religionists hold faith to be a virtue. To me it seems that either God is true (a hypothesis we, as freethinkers, are bound to consider seriously), in which case it can be no more virtuous to see it than it is virtuous of me to see that the earth is probably round; or he is untrue—and even a religious person would not, I think, consider it virtuous to believe an untruth. However, it is because they have this curious belief that faith is virtuous that the religionists insist on using our schools as centres of indoctrination, where faith is, unless we are very, very careful, inculcated into our children. And it is because they hold that to let a doubt cross one’s religious faith is unvirtuous that the religionists try to establish such control over the forums of public debate, especially, of course, radio and television, that when our children grow up they will never be subjected to hearing a word that might contradict the faith that was dinned into them at morning prayers or even a word that might inform them that there are quite a lot of people who do not subscribe to that faith.

It is, of course, in those two areas, the schools and broadcasting, that we, the freethinkers, are struggling head-on with the religionists. And we are at several disadvantages in the struggle. For one thing, where they believe faith to be a virtue, we cannot claim non-faith as a virtue, since we believe it to be mere common sense. I’ve urged it on you that it is nothing to apologise for, but even I can’t claim it is something we should congratulate ourselves on—except insofar as it implies thought, which is perhaps a matter of congratulation and is certainly a rarity. The National Secular Society describes itself as devoted to freethought, a description in which I think the *thought* bit quite as remarkable as the *free*. Indeed the Society must be one of the few institutions in this country, if not the only one, actually to proclaim thought as one of its purposes. Would the same could be said by our schools and universities.

Toleration at a disadvantage

Then, of course, we are at the further disadvantage of arguing fair—and not wanting to silence the opposition. Not only do we seriously consider the religionists’ hypothesis (whereas they are not quite free seriously to consider ours, because they believe unshaken and unshakable faith to be a virtue); we want them to state their hypothesis in public, so that we can consider it. Those who practise toleration are always at a disadvantage—especially in dealing with a government department, where the form is that you put in an application for a million pounds knowing perfectly well that you will be satisfied to get ten thousand. If we freethinkers could make representations in force to the BBC, saying “Please ban all Christian and other religious believers completely from radio and television”, it is quite likely that in a very short space of time we would get what we actually want, which is a just and democratic representation of our views on an equal footing with the Christians, plus a concession that we are emotionally respectable—an acknowledgment that it is perfectly possible to be on the side of the angels without believing in angels. But of course we cannot possibly ask for the Christians to be silenced. We are committed to wanting no one to be silenced. We urge toleration for them as well as for ourselves. The very nature of our

struggle obliges us to pursue it with one hand tied behind our back, and we cannot even wish it were otherwise.

And we are also at a disadvantage in the noises of disgust we can emit. *They* suffer hurt feelings; *they* take offence; and a splutter of offended feeling always makes a louder noise than the despair we may suffer over their absurdities. We are at a disadvantage precisely because we are more reasonable. But again we can't wish it otherwise. It is because we are more reasonable that we are in the struggle at all.

Freethought creative

Christians sometimes try to claim another unfair advantage by saying that our point of view is "merely negative". "What", they ask, "would you put in the place of religion?" Well, if what they have in mind is religionists' intolerance towards rival religions or towards us, or if they are thinking, for instance, of the Inquisition, then we are quite justified in answering their "What would you put in its place?" by "Nothing, we sincerely hope". If they mean what moral code would we put in the place of their rather muddled taboos, the answer is quite plain and far from negative (much less so than the Ten Commandments) in the National Secular Society membership card, where the stated aims go from international peace, through the abolition of the illogical and barbaric idea of punishment in our treatment of criminals, to (I am delighted to see) decent behaviour towards animals; it is, as a whole, if you discount the misprints, one of the noblest documents ever devised by man.

And if the Christians mean with what would we replace the images of religion, the sheer compelling magic which religion has long exercised over the imagination, they are, I think, grossly under-estimating man as an aesthetic animal. Belief is no less forceful for not being literal. There is also what Coleridge called "that willing suspension of disbelief for the moment which constitutes poetic faith". The whole difference between religious faith and poetic or aesthetic faith is that aesthetic faith is willing—is free. We, inasmuch as we are freethinkers, are also free imaginers.

Nature of myth

As a matter of fact (here I may speak with a certain personal bias as an author of fictions) I have always felt that whenever a myth gets accepted by religious people as literal truth some poor storyteller was getting done out of his due for having invented it. Religionists seem to behave like that very clever craftsman but deplorable and immoral sentimentalist, J. M. Barrie—as if in their heart of hearts they thought God was Tinker Bell, a light that would give out if all the children in the audience (or in the school) didn't clap their hands to affirm that they believe in fairies, irrespective of whether they really believe or not. J. M. Barrie was being very wicked when he tried to make the children morally responsible—tried to impress on them that if Tinker Bell died they would be guilty. When I insist that we need feel no apology for our lack of religious faith, I am urging that we should not let the religious people put it over on us that we are morally responsible for killing God. If he's there, he's there, and nothing we can say can harm him or alter it; and if he's not, he's not, and it is in no way our doing.

When the religionists ask us "With what would you replace belief in God?", we have a perfect right to reply "Well, with what have we replaced belief in fairies?" And this is perfectly to the point. Civilised people have

replaced belief in fairies not with J. M. Barrie's tawdry little fairy play, excellent though that is as a job of stage carpentry, but with *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. We all believe in fairies while we are watching or reading *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. And likewise we all believe in God while we are contemplating a religious masterpiece. What's more, through having no literal belief, we are a good deal freer—we are more catholic—in our taste in religious masterpieces than religious believers are. To be irreligious is to have one's imagination set free from the very earthbound chains of literalness; the irreligious person is made free of *all* the religious myths. He is a protestant while he listens to Bach's *Saint Matthew Passion*; he is a high baroque Catholic when he looks at a Rubens madonna caught up to heaven; as he stands in the Egyptian section of the British Museum, he is quite convinced of, he is very deeply susceptible to, the sacredness of cats.

Libation

Not the least charming of the myths of which we are made free—made free, voluntary believers—is the myth of that most beautiful of Greek gods, Dionysos or Bacchos, who so benevolently taught human beings how to grow vines and what to do with the grapes when they had been grown. The ceremony which it is now my privilege and pleasure to perform is one of the oldest religious rituals in the world. (However, there is progress, even in religion, because in the ancient Greek version of this ritual the Greeks used wastefully to pour some of the stuff on the floor; we have improved on that.) It is a ceremony which is a pure superstition—it will not be in the least effective in bringing health to the National Secular Society, except insofar as it may fortify members of the Society, who in turn may fortify it: but luckily being freely imaginative animals, we can take part in the ceremony without violence to our secular principles and with a good deal of delight to ourselves. Ladies and gentlemen, I invite you to join me in drinking to a further hundred years of good health for the National Secular Society.

It has been reported that the Secretary of State for Education and Science proposes to bring in legislation to raise the Government building grant for church schools from 75 to 80 per cent.

PUBLIC MEETING

WEDNESDAY, APRIL 13th at 7.45 p.m.

ALLIANCE HALL,
Caxton Street, London, S.W.1
(nearest Underground: St. James's Park)

Speakers include—

MARGARET KNIGHT HECTOR HAWTON
WILLIAM HAMLING, MP.

Organised by the National Secular Society,
103 Borough High Street, London, S.E.1

LETTERS

Criticized Critic Replies

I WAS HOPING to convey, in my review of Mr A. A. R. Douglas's poem, that I believe poetry to be a very special medium and that the test of poetry is if it opens new doors by increasing our sensitivity. Some poets achieve their aim by complexity and others (like Pope at his best) through genius for epigram; but personally I do not find the complexity which integrates values into new richness of experience or the genius for memorability in Mr Douglas.

It was precisely "the extent" of my reading (however limited) which told me that everything Mr Douglas was saying I had read before—and that it had been expressed more effectively by others. My criticism was not that repetition invalidates truth, but the point Mr Markley himself makes: that poetry does not lend itself to "long detailed analysis", and that, therefore, it is a mistake for a poet outside the category of genius to select material which relies on detailed analysis for adult impact. But of course if Mr Markley is prepared to equate the "excitement" of stamp collecting with that of aesthetic and ethical *revelation*, we can get no further.

Indeed I am grateful for "small piping voices", but I was simply affirming that I think they should be kept in the classroom.

I regret but . . . I still feel the reason why Mr Douglas chose to put his book into verse was not (on evidence of the lines) the consuming passion which produces a poem but a notion to give novelty to repetition and raise it above rehash. I must repeat that I cannot agree that this is enough to make poetry.

Yet I would also like to repeat that I tried to point out in my review that had I not been reviewing Mr Douglas on the level of poetry, I would have expanded my appreciation for his sincere and noble faith.

OSWELL BLAKESTON

Jesus a Giant?

SO YOUR correspondent, R. Smith of Dundee, maintains that "Jesus was a giant among pygmies. A great heart in a heartless world", and that he "preached and practised the doctrine of love".

I seem to remember that he prepared an eternity of hell-fire for his enemies; that he cursed a fig tree for not bearing fruit out of season; that he chased the money lenders out of the temple, and sent the Gadarene swine to a horrible death. He showed little of his "great heart" when he addressed his mother thus: "Woman, what have I to do with thee?"

(Mrs) E. TRASK

Catholic Plot

ROMAN CATHOLIC politicians in Australia have sabotaged British migration, whose purpose was to establish another England out here in the next 50 years. Instead, the jetsom of Europe—all Catholic of course—are being brought in, and those British migrants who do arrive find themselves in a country hostile to Britain. The most evil institution on this earth, the Roman Catholic Church, in reality an Eastern Theocratic Coolie State, is destroying this country.

Col. E. REDDALL (Australia)

Let's Be Honest

THE GODLY malign the "godless"; we know that; we expect it from some quarters if not from all. Shall we merit their contempt, as well as their hatred, by resorting to qualifying terms in order to wheedle them into looking at us more kindly? Does calling ourselves Agnostics, Humanists, Pantheists, etc., make our basic views more acceptable to the devout? Would *Panderer* look any better?

Surely the time has come when we can express ourselves honestly, and even believers (the best of them, at any rate) would respect us more, even if they continue to differ as much, if we were candid enough to use the word Atheist without equivocation or hypocrisy. I, for one, believe that we can't write off the efforts of the pioneers of Freethought as a dead loss and go on watering it down to please the ditherers. By all means let the devout cling to their rocking-stone, but let us continue to take our stand on the rock of reason.

This does not say that we need be offensive to those who cannot go the whole way with us, but we should be honest with them in the use of words, and with ourselves—yea, even "to God", if his agents can produce him.

COLLIN COATES (Australia)

Worse Warmongers than the Papacy

I AM ALWAYS reading in your columns of the warmongering activities of the Vatican. The Papacy may have been corrupt and vicious at times, but even Torquemada could not equal "Perfidious Albion" for blood lust. Why does the FREETHINKER never criticise English butchers who have oppressed India, Ireland, South Africa, Cyprus, Malaya, Left-wing Greeks, Egypt before and at Suez, and who once even showed their bravery by attacking little Denmark! ? Never mind popes. What about Churchill, Wellington, Clive, Nelson, Ernest Bevin and other national "heroes"? Let's read THIS for a change.

C. H. RILEY

MON AMI

My friend
has no soul
in any word or hope
he bids my call,
I swear in thanks.
My friend
loves my touch
but he's cold
and lifeless
to my charms
yet music to my mind
that never is in heaven.
My friend—we pass the wonder hour
alone
to make a story
of life
in this bloody world
of prayers for human murder.
My friend—will meet
you one sunny day
to learn my secret
for love is blind
like my friend,
my pal, devoted, unpaid for being
the metal-hearted darling
My . . . mine alone
Typewriter.
His future hopes are in my hands;
he has the keys to mine.

Arthur Francis

BOOKS OF INTEREST

A small Selection of Books from the Freethinker Bookshop.

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