

FREE THINKER

Registered at the
G.P.O. as a Newspaper

FOUNDED 1881 by G. W. FOOTE

Friday,
April 8, 1966

BAD FRIDAY

It is here again. Names we almost murmur in our sleep: Gethsemane, Golgotha, Calvary. Radio, TV and press take us tearfully past every stone of the *Via Dolorosa*. On Sunday morning church bells will waken us with a Resurrection peal. But history suggests this is the greatest non-event of all time, while psychology makes emotions revered from childhood look far from endearing.

At this hallowed hour it is well to recall that John Allegro (in line with a tradition dating back a hundred years and distantly related to the ancient heresies of Eutyches and Docetism) questions whether there ever was a Gospel Jesus, whether the whole thing is not an Essenite myth. Be that as it may, it is well-nigh certain that if there ever was a Nazarene carpenter who proclaimed himself Messiah and incurred the wrath of Rome and the Temple Establishment, he was either ignored as a harmless madman or executed in a routine political purge. There is one chance in ten million that the particular hole in the ground from which the Orthodox Patriarch on Easter Saturday night takes the flame of salvation is actually the place where the body of such a man was laid. It is scientifically certain that if a body was ever buried there and not subsequently exhumed, it is still there.

It's all been done before

It might have seemed that in 1966 these observations would be so obvious as to be hack to a degree, were it not for the minute-by-minute description of the Passion that still assails us as if it were indisputable fact. How often this weekend will one read or hear of the true origin of Easter?—

The name is derived from the Anglo-Saxon *Eostre* or *Eastre*, a modification of the Germanic *Ostara* and perhaps traceable back to the Greek *Eos*, goddess of the dawn and fertility. The death and resurrection of Jesus is related to the Jewish Passover, whose method of reckoning involves the Vernal Equinox (coming into manhood of the sun and into life of nature after her winter sleep) and the full moon (related to the menstrual cycle and female fertility). Hence the symbolism of rabbits and Easter eggs. More specifically, the Dying God of Christianity was born in a classical world familiar—one might almost say bored—with the phenomenon. The same story of Redemption had been told of Apollo and Dionysos in Greece; Hercules in

Rome, Mithra in Persia; Adonis and Attis in Syria and Phrygia; Osiris, Horus and Isis in Egypt; Baal and Astarte in Babylon, Phoenicia and Carthage—not to mention Krishna and Gautama Buddha in India. This was a mythological version of an even older idea, elaborated in *The Golden Bough* and *The Mystic Rose*, that the sin of the tribe must be expiated by one of its members, and only the very best would do. The story of Isaac and the ram caught in the thicket symbolised the way animal came to replace human sacrifice in Old Testament times. Far from being an advance, the sacrifice of Jesus represented an atavism to a more barbarous age.

Modernist Christians are reluctant to say precisely what happened on Sunday morning. Not believing in miracles they cannot believe in the Resurrection. Yet they choose to ignore the wise words of 1 Corinthians 15, 14: "And if Christ be not risen, then is our preaching vain, and your faith is also vain". Instead, they concentrate on Good Friday with its message of self-sacrifice, its outpouring of love, its ultimate forgiveness in response to persecution. It is the triumph of selflessness over selfishness, spirituality over worldliness, love over hate.

A green hill far away

It is hard not to be moved by this traditional story. From our earliest years we have been taught to be moved. Just as we have heard so much of the place names and their associations it is almost impossible to conceive of fabrication, so we have been conditioned to veneration and gratitude in a way difficult to outlive. His suffering has become our suffering, his mother's anguish our anguish, his disciples' gratitude our gratitude. But will such feelings survive the fires of reason?

In a theological sense, the Redemption story is meaningful only in relation to the Fall. By his Edenic disobedience man has turned the harmony of the spheres into *musique concrète*. Only the sacrifice of God Himself can redress this cosmic disaster. Today, however, there are few theologians who would pretend that man is a fallen angel rather than a risen animal, who consider the Garden of Eden more historic than the Garden of the Hesperides, who believe babies slink into the world stained with original sin. But if there is no Old Adam, where is the need for a New Adam? Without the Fall, why the Atonement?

Or we may look at the story from a psychological angle. The same Jesus as drove the money-changers out of the Temple trudges his weary way to an undeserved Cross, the same firebrand as calls woe upon the scribes and Pharisees and destruction upon Jerusalem within days is seeking forgiveness for his persecutors. As a man he must be a manic depressive. As a God he acts out a perverse charade. To effect the Exodus, Yahweh hardened Pharaoh's heart, thus making possible the plagues.

INSIDE

CHANGE AND DECAY : F. H. Amphlett Micklewright
 FEAR GOD . . . ? : Leslie Hanger
 CATHOLIC REACTIONARY : G. L. Simons
 ART, FREETHOUGHT & EDUCATION : Peter J. C. Leslie
 THIS WORLD : LECTURE NOTICES
 REVIEWS : NO COMMENT : LETTERS

In the New Testament story we find the same inevitability of disaster, the ostentatious entry into Jerusalem, the provocation of his enemies, the seduction of Judas, the deception of the masses, the non-cooperation with Pilate—all leading to the farce of a death that couldn't really happen to a god.

A squalid invention

But the most mischievous implications are probably sociological. First there is anti-Semitism. The Jews are made to say, "His blood be on us, and on our children" (Matthew 27, 25). Hatred of the Jews has been most marked among Catholics, whose devotions round the Station of the Cross are most precise and lachrymose, and whose hostility to the villains of the pieces is thus likely to be most deepseated. But the whole story is enervating rather than elevating, vicious rather than victorious.

CHANGE AND DECAY

ALTERNATIVE SERVICES, Recommended by the Archbishops of Canterbury and York, to be Introduced to the Convocations and the House of Laity, 1st and 2nd Series (London, Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1966, 12/6d each).

IT IS CERTAINLY UNUSUAL to review books of prayers in the FREETHINKER and it is difficult to believe that readers will have any use for them in the purpose for which they were intended to be used. Yet the two volumes before us are far from being without a more general interest. The Church of England has been in a difficult position with regard to its service books for some years. As an established church, its only legal prayer book is the schedule of an Act of Parliament and it has remained unchanged since 1662. Far-reaching attempts at revision in 1927 and 1928 encountered the abortive experience of parliamentary rejection. At the same time, the Church of England has had to face a situation where the social background and the language are far from that of 1662. It has also had to consider the vast amount of technical liturgical knowledge which has been garnered over the last century and which has left certain features of the 1662 book open to scholarly criticism. The present pamphlets represent an effort by a liturgical committee to put forward suggested alternatives to this unsatisfactory situation.

Back turned on beatnikery

At the outset, we should like to congratulate the committees upon their work even when it is reviewed from a secularist standpoint. They have attained a good style of literary language. The old forms of collects are kept and the traditional language of the period, described by Mr John Betjeman as "Jacobethan", is retained. At once, we were impressed. There is nothing of the vulgarisation which marks very much of individual contemporary attempts to provide attractive and novel church services by self-conscious effort at being "with it". Services pepped up with jazz, pop-groups and the like are not for this committee. We are here in the tradition of Cranmer, Laud or the divines of 1662. The merely vulgar or the obviously immature does not enter and strike a jarring note arising from the drifting of the beatnik society. If we may take these books as indicating that the church at its higher

To a Humanist, it represents the breakdown of reason and social organisation. God cannot forgive in the abstract, but must go through an eschatological pantomime. Sin cannot be assimilated, but must be purged. There cannot be "dialogue" with but must be divine curses for the scribes and Pharisees. Death and tragedy and disorder and vindictiveness and mob rule and capital punishment are the squalid apparatus by which the divine will is done. It is the triumph not of love but of hate; not of reason but of hysteria; not of negotiated settlement but of preventive war; not of reformation but of retribution. Death is answered by death.

It is at such moments that Humanists reaffirm their belief in life. Eternal life they cannot promise, any more than can a liberal theologian. But a life free of the arbitrary intervention of divinities they can.

F. H. Amphlett Micklewright

levels repudiates the prancings of clergy of the beat generation, we are thankful for the fact in the interests of culture as a whole.

Again, the books have obviously drawn upon the liturgical scholarship which has been explored during recent years. It lays no greater stress upon, for example, hell fire than do the traditional liturgies of Christendom, whether Eastern or Western. For the Freethinker two facts stand out. The more vulgar and sugary devotions which have arisen within Romanism, such as much of the *cultus* of the Virgin or prayers directed to the nails which pierced Christ's feet, are materialising accretions and do not form a part of the general liturgical tradition seen as a whole.

Protesant poverty

Again, on the Protestant side, it is necessary only to turn to various Protestant adaptations of the Book of Common Prayer, ranging from those of the Methodists to those of the Unitarians, to realise the utter historical inadequacy and lack of liturgical insight which has marked them. In the same way, a reading of the collects is a sharp reminder of the wide gap which exists between the tradition and the long, rambling effusions, sometimes *extempore* and frequently highly self-centred, which pass for prayers in a great deal of popular and merely sentimental Protestant worship. Indeed, we have never been able to see how, if the general grounds of Christian worship be allowed, it can escape a use of symbol, ceremonial or ritual, and language must play as large a part as music, art or colour in the general approach. Indeed, we were struck by the good points which mark these books as establishing a wide gulf between them and the theological crudity or sheer aesthetic badness of, for example, many popular hymns.

Freethought interest purely historical . . .

So far, a freethinking reviewer has found a measure of praise for this latest essay in Anglican liturgical experimentation. But one point must not be forgotten. This is the liturgy of Christian tradition, the devotional expression of its theology. One has only to turn to the early fathers, to mediaeval symbolism as that still to be found upon the walls of churches or in the great epic of Dante to realise that its theology was one of sin and damnation.

a fact which shines forth in the massive orthodoxy of Thomas Aquinas. Again, one has only to look through the Kalendar of Christian festivals to realise how this theology is based upon a three-storey view of the universe itself. One has only to turn to the structure of the services and their language to understand how the devotional expression was a facet arising from a rigid orthodoxy of creed.

It may seem a far cry from the age of the great liturgies to that of Darwin and his successors, but the connection lies in the extent to which the evolutionists have shattered for all time, by causing the death of Adam, the theology of sin and damnation simply because they have shattered the world-view within which alone it reaches any sense of coherence. If the theology has gone the way of the Christian world-view, the liturgy, however fine its language, is left in a void and becomes without purpose or meaning. Liturgiology has been looked at askance by many religious liberals, indeed the late Dean Inge once called it a bogus science. In some ways, this is a mistake. It can scarcely be likened to collecting postage stamps, which was the unfortunate comparison made by the Dean. Like the great examples of ecclesiastical art, it can cast not a little sidelight upon certain aspects of the history of Christian Europe. In some ways, it is no more irrelevant as a study than are other aspects of mediaeval culture.

... and aesthetic

But it has no place in the rival rationalistic and evolutionary culture of the present day. The devotion is valid only so long as it has rational justification. Its use calls for the exercise of faith, for belief in revelation, inspiration,

intuition as means of knowing. Such an approach has no place in the world of comparison and experiment, of a demand that the only means of knowing is that of the world of analytical knowledge. For the Freethinker, the present books, like the great parent liturgies of Christendom, have an historical and aesthetic interest. His feelings are the same as those with which he gazes at the great last judgement painting on the west wall of Chaldon Church in Surrey or upon the same theology in All Saints, York, where it survives in magnificent mediaeval stained glass. He is entitled to take a scholarly interest in these things just as he is entitled to join his orthodox neighbour in the many enjoyments to be obtained from such a hobby as brass-rubbing or from the details of ecclesiology generally. They have an historic and aesthetic interest but nothing more.

Curious survivals

Such were the reflections of one secularist into whose unlikely hands these books have strayed. But he allowed his thoughts to wander. Would not much the same criticisms be applicable to reverent humanists, ethical churches, ethical societies or other curious semi-ecclesiastical survivals from the past seeking in the present to cultivate "a rational religious sentiment"? The passing of religion will leave them in the eyes of the world today equally in a void and they will appear as curious if they seek to express themselves within this world of the present as do the great liturgies of Christendom. Like the liturgies, they represent a phase, albeit a far smaller and less significant phase, of cultural development and, like the emancipated churches of last century liberal Protestantism, their day is over because the void has overtaken them.

FEAR GOD . . . ?

Leslie Hanger

FEAR GOD, honour the King. So I was taught when I went to school. Honour the King? Yes, that made sense to my schoolboy mind, but why fear God? If I was to believe all I was taught in the Scripture lessons God was love. At any rate Jesus Christ was love and he was one and the same person as God, at least so I was given to understand. And so for that matter was the Holy Ghost, not that we bothered much about the third person of the Trinity when I went to school. He or she made things much too involved and quite beyond my comprehension. I did not doubt at the time that my teachers understood it all quite plainly, though now I realise they understood no more, and probably believed a lot less, than their pupils. But if school children realised that, there would be an end of discipline.

To return to the point, why fear God? God was love, he had sent his only begotten son to redeem the sins of the world. I had not committed any great sin that I was aware of, but I thought I probably would when I grew up, so that was a consolation. God was the divine father watching over us to comfort us and keep us safe from harm. "Suffer little children to come unto me," and a lot more on those lines. So why should I fear God?

Desire to escape notice

It did not occur to me to pose this question to my teachers. If I had I don't suppose I should have got a good mark for asking questions they had not been trained

to answer. When it came to religious instruction my main concern was to seek out the answers my teachers expected, learn them by rote and repeat them parrot-fashion at the right moment. I had observed that it was the top and bottom of a class that received most attention from the teacher. First the teacher would turn to the bottom of the class and try to goad, beg or bully the dunces into doing better. On tiring of this he would seek relief by turning to the bright boys, who would give the correct answers and reflect a little credit on him. As I liked a quiet life I aimed for the middle of the class, just high enough to keep out of trouble, but not so high that I would be expected to shine, in fact to escape the notice of my teacher as much as possible.

Perhaps there is a clue here to this "Fear God" business. Perhaps most people who profess a belief in a deity wish to escape his notice as much as they can. "God is everywhere and sees everything you do", so I was solemnly assured, and I did not like the idea very much. I thought God was rather bad-mannered to come spying on me when I was doing something quite private. Something quite harmless but nevertheless something I would rather have kept to myself. Perhaps the average member of the faithful feels this way about God and is a little afraid of him in consequence. So they all aim to keep on the right side of God at the same time as aiming to attract as little divine attention to themselves as possible.

If an official form asks for their religion, they put
(Continued on page 109)

THIS WORLD

Meeting in the Middle

AT the opening of the Twenty-third Congress of the Soviet Communist Party, First Secretary Mr Brezhnev hoped for better relations with Britain. "The future will show to what extent Britain's foreign policy makes possible such a development," he said.

THE sooner Britain sees her "rôle east of Suez" as technological and not imperialistic and refuses to support America's gratuitous intervention in Vietnam, the sooner will she earn the respect of other than her closest allies. But the Soviet Union must play her part in reducing international suspicion.

HUMANISTS are no more sympathetic to "hack artists" than Mr Brezhnev. Those who earn fortunes peddling the mediocre to undiscerning teenagers or whet the morbid appetite with mindless sex-n-violence command nobody's respect, and the West has rather a lot of them. Whatever their views on ultimate reality all great writers have had a well-developed moral sense. But this is a far cry from support of whatever government or political party happens to be in power, or mechanical approbation of "our heroic people". The artist must be free to praise or blame, to sail untrammelled the seas of the mind. Adulation for political reasons of whatever anti-Soviet potboilers sneak out to the West is a debasement of art. But the Russian Government must appreciate the strength of conviction overseas that political control of art is even more debasing.

BHA News

THE British Humanist Association has just set up a Moral and Religious Education Committee. Its policy statement comes very close to that of the National Secular Society, as elaborated in *Religion and Ethics in Schools*.

BETWEEN April and August an interesting series of courses and conferences is to be held on various aspects of Humanism. Well known personalities like publisher John Calder, Dr Faith Spicer of the Brook Advisory Centres, Avril Fox of Cosmo, and Richard Hauser of the Institute for Group and Community Development will be taking part. Details from 13 Prince of Wales Terrace, London, W8.

More Church Criticism

MR Rex Price, deputy headmaster of Hampstead Parochial School, has joined other Church educationists in censuring the present statutory provisions for religion in schools. He wants religious instruction dropped for all children under seven.

You can get Bible stories and religious worship over to them, but it's impossible to teach spiritual matters.

In fact, he's not at all sure whether this is possible under the age of 11 before the development of some understanding of abstract concepts. Probably religious instruction should be confined to church schools. Too many teachers are atheists and agnostics unwillingly complying with the legal requirements of the 1944 Education Act. The Church must bring its religious teaching up to date, he declares. Prayers, hymns and music need rewriting.

It could be argued that it has neither the time nor the money. Unless it does something soon it may have both time and money to spare, but no congegation.

Marriage Law Reform Committee

FOR some time there have been in existence organisations for marriage and divorce law reform, but they haven't been very active. A new committee has just been formed. It will include Professor A. J. Ayer, Leo Abse, MP and Professor Ronald Fletcher (author of *Ten Non Commandments*).

IT will consider the possibility of divorce by consent or after five years' separation, reconciliation during divorce proceedings, furthering the interests of children and divorced or separated wives, and fuller use of probation officers and other social workers.

The Lear of the Sensualist

HITHERTO American pornography has not fallen foul of the Federal Supreme Court. But this is true no longer. Using the above criterion, the court recently upheld sentences on two young publishers of provocative magazines, who tried to get their promotional circulars stamped with the postmark of Blue Ball or Intercourse, towns in Pennsylvania. Incidentally the court looked at *Fanny Hill* and found the leer absent from that modest damsel's face.

Election Sidelights

TWO members of the Leyton and Ilford Libertarian Group were stopped by the police while handing out leaflets urging people to spoil their ballot papers. They were told the matter was to be referred to the Director of Public Prosecutions for action under Section 52 of the 1949 Representation of the People Act and Section 35 of the 1952 Magistrates Courts Act. Shortly afterwards Jo Grimond gave the same advice.

AS if in response to a FREETHINKER lament, 19 women's organisations have just issued a *Manifesto of the Status of Women Committee*, pointing out the serious inequalities which still exist between men and women. While it may be doubted whether any social issue—with the exception of racialism—had the slightest influence on the recent election, the production of such a manifesto may ultimately make some impact on the electorate.

Family Planning

THERE'S many a slip 'twixt the cup and the lip of the uterus. Just when everyone thought the United Nations General Assembly and the World Health Organisation had endorsed "an expanded programme of assistance" for effective international planned parenthood, something went wrong. An amendment introduced "the understanding that such services should not involve operational activities". Readers will be amazed to hear that it was proposed by Ireland, supported by Argentina and Spain, and quoted Pope Paul's UN speech on the "banquet of life".

BUT reaction is not always triumphant. It now seems that UNICEF is to step up technical assistance in this field. It is further rumoured that President Johnson's offer of more wheat to Mrs Indira Gandhi is contingent on India's more effective implementation of family planning.

Lafayette Ronald Hubbard

ACCORDING to the *People* (March 20), the founder of Scientology is conducting a smear campaign against anyone, particularly psychiatrists, opposing his infallible teaching. Though normally hospitable, the FREE-THINKER offices will not uncork the champagne for any snoopers with E-meters.

FREETHINKER

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Telephone: HOP 0029

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

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

LECTURE NOTICES, ETC.

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

OUTDOOR

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

Bournemouth Humanist Group (Crag Head Hotel, Manor Road), Wednesday, April 13th, 8 p.m.: MARGARET MCILROY, "Religion and the Rights of the Child".
British Humanist Association, Essex Branches (Civic Centre, Chelmsford), Saturday, April 16th, 2.30 p.m. District Rally. Speakers: MARGARET KNIGHT and DERRICK LEE. Transport from Havering. Children looked after. Contact S. Goodman, 51 Percy Road, Romford.
King Alfred School (Manor Wood, North End Road, London, NW11), 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.
South Place Ethical Society (Conway Hall Humanist Centre, Red Lion Square, London, WC1), Sunday, April 17th, 11 a.m.: Professor T. H. PEAR, "A classless England or a New Class?"
Tuesday, April 19th, 7.30 p.m.: ANDREW CHEYNE, "Magnetic Healing".
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.
Humanist Letter Network (International: send s.a.c. to Kit Mouat, Mercers, Cuckfield, Sussex.

THIS WORLD *continued*

Revolt of Italian Youth

TURIN University has just published a "Kinsey Report" on 348 students. Half approve of and practise premarital intercourse. Seventy per cent favour divorce and 97 per cent birth control. Alas, 247 said they were Roman Catholics.

A FEW days later three coeducational secondary school students, their headmaster and the printer of their school magazine *La Zanzara* ("The "Mosquito") were prosecuted for obscenity and corruption. The authorities were stung to action by the report of a discussion on sex and marriage by some girl students. They indicated that contraceptives would widen their sexual horizons. Police called on an act from Fascist days to order a medical examination. The girl student accused refused. Amid cheering from the public gallery the judge upheld her decision.

Dr Ramsey, Please Explain

THIS was the title of a press release issued by the National Secular Society on the occasion of a joint statement by the Pope and the Archbishop of Canterbury promising "sin-

cere efforts to remove the causes of conflict and to re-establish unity". Quoting from the Royal Preamble to the Thirty-Nine Articles and Article Thirty-seven, the release pointed out that "the Archi-episcopal undertaking is either meaningless or illegal in the present state of English law". In conclusion:

Clearly Papal Infallibility or Ecclesiastical Establishment will have to go. The National Secular Society would like to see the disappearance of both. All citizens must now DEMAND that of the latter.

NO COMMENT

"To make use of a recent advertising phrase, Humanism is a religion born for the age we live in. . . . By the close of the last century, Humanism implied antigodliness. Theism of any kind was considered as opposition. The present Humanist code does not hold this position. Although most Humanists are agnostics, there are few atheists among them"—*Croydon Advertiser*, March 11.

FEAR GOD . . . ?

(Continued from page 107)

"C. of E.", "R.C.", "Methodist" or whatever their father did before them. They get married in church, have baby Jane christened and call in the parson when Aunt Lucy dies. To most people this is what is meant by having a religion and they feel that everyone has to have a religion; what religion does not matter so long as they have one. This is the first step in keeping on the right side of God. Some think this should be backed up by going to church fairly regularly on Sundays, but a lot of people think this is no longer necessary. The people who don't go to church think those who do are being ostentatious and trying to make themselves out to be better than they are. In any case, they do not think it wise to be very wicked as they have an uneasy feeling at the back of their minds that something rather unpleasant will happen to them if they are. God is very powerful and, according to the stories in the Old Testament, very bad-tempered, so it is best not to do anything to upset him. And on no account should you make jokes about religion; jokes about sex are all right, but not religion. Yet religion is ten times funnier than sex and not half as important.

No striving after righteousness

At the same time they have no desire to strive officiously after righteousness. No doubt the saints of old were very worthy people, but they have no longing to emulate them. To be really holy would mean leading a very austere and exacting existence, which would be much too exhausting and quite beyond will or strength to sustain.

The aim of most people is to have just enough religion to keep them out of trouble, but not enough to make them feel uncomfortable. So this primitive fear of God lingers on, half stifled but still with us. The idea that, no matter what, one must have a religion. The idea at the back of the mind that if you do not placate the Deity something awful will happen.

The battle of the Apes and the Angels is won and lost. Man's place in evolution is assured and it leaves no room for God. But there are a lot of mopping-up operations to be done yet. We have to assert and make it quite plain that the Atheist is the superior of the Theist and that Humanism is a finer creed than Christianity.

CATHOLIC REACTIONARY

G. L. Simons

THE WORKS OF JOSEPH DE MAISTRE (Allen and Unwin, 35s cloth, 21s paper) is a selection from six of Maistre's major works. The selection and (excellent) translation is by Jack Lively, who also contributes a worthwhile introduction. (My page references are to the above work, not to those works from which the extracts are selected.)

Joseph de Maistre was born in 1753 and educated in a Jesuit school. Throughout his life he remained a dedicated, if sometimes unorthodox Roman Catholic. Much of his work was inspired by the French Revolution, which he at first welcomed and then condemned with a singular fury. In his *Considerations on France* he wrote (p69):—

What distinguishes the French Revolution . . . is that it is radically evil; no element of good relieves the picture it presents; it reaches the highest point of corruption ever known; it is pure impurity.

In what scene of history can be found so many vices acting at once on the same stage, such an appalling combination of baseness and cruelty, such profound immorality, such a disdain for all decency?

Maistre believed that *republics* were ill-advised, that *monarchy* was much to be preferred: "There cannot exist a great free nation under a republican form of government" (p65). He acknowledges the existence of America but says "I know nothing so provoking as the praise showered on this babe-in-arms: let it grow" (p67). And he claims that the strengths in the American republic are those derived from the parent cultures in Europe; all else is weakness. Maistre doubted whether the early Congress resolutions would be carried out: "There is too much deliberation, too much of mankind, in all this, and it is a thousand to one that the town will not be built, or that it will not be called *Washington*, or that Congress will not sit there" (p85).

Reason berated

He blames the *philosophes* of the Enlightenment (both French and English) for what he considers the follies, depravities and excesses of the contemporary French turmoil; and he believes that other European states may be infected with the French corruption. He fulminates against empiricists, calling them wicked, evil and criminal; this is odd when one considers the mild Locke and the cautious Hume. He rants, more understandably, against the French atheists, and spares neither Rousseau nor Voltaire. He is opposed to "reason" and "philosophy".

For Maistre the sound society must be based on religion; if it is not then society can only be unstable and ephemeral. God, not man, must be acknowledged as the giver of constitutions. The divine revelation is seen in tradition and custom rather than in sacred works. Constitutions cannot be created by "deliberation" or by "reason"; they must be allowed to evolve as societies change. Maistre is firmly opposed to the idea of a *written* constitution. In *The Generative Principle of Political Constitutions* he praises the fragment of Greek jurisprudence included in Roman law: *some [laws] are written and others are not*, and he praises the unwritten English constitution: "The real English constitution is the public spirit, admirable, unique, infallible . . . which leads, conserves and protects all—what is written is nothing" (p150). He quotes "the general rule": *Man cannot make a constitution, and no legitimate constitution can be written*

(p161). In *The Saint Petersburg Dialogues* he says that "every written constitution is sterile" (p270).

God and free will

In addition to giving societies unwritten constitutions God also plans history. This, however, must not be thought to limit human freedom. Maistre insists on the reality of free will, although also saying that man is "an *implement of God*" (p151). Elsewhere he compares man to the cogs and springs in a watch (the world).

Maistre is forced to posit free will, partly no doubt through orthodoxy, but also because he finds it useful in his efforts to solve the Problem of Evil, which causes him some (philosophical) concern and to which he returns over and over again: "We are assailed continually with the wearisome picture of the innocents who perish with the guilty" (p63). In the *Dialogues* he says that "evil could come into the world only through the fault of free beings" (p189), and repeatedly asserts the moral guilt of man (pp 50, 193, 259, 273, 274, etc). He further asserts that pain serves a worthy purpose: "There is no punishment that does not purify" (p64). Voltaire is particularly incensed at the idea of a loving god who permits great suffering; after the Lisbon earthquake he exclaimed:

Seeing this pile of victims, do you say;

God is avenged; their death is the price of their crimes?

What crime, what fault lies on these children

Broken and bloody on their mothers' breasts?

Maistre retorts: "This is bad reasoning, lacking care and close analysis" (p218), but his attempts to show this are lame indeed. Significantly on the next page he says "These are perhaps unapproachable mysteries".

Pragmatic Catholicism

Maistre has many aspects, some of which seem contradictory. Jack Lively rightly stresses his pragmatism in recognising that there can be many viable types of society. But pragmatism is not supposed to be a Catholic virtue, nor is the empirical approach that can also be detected. Despite these irregularities Maistre is Christian and Catholic. When his first sentence in the book starts "We are all bound to the throne of the Supreme Being", we have more than an inkling of what is to follow. In *The Pope* he says "All Catholic writers worthy of the name agree that the Church is monarchical but sufficiently tempered by aristocracy to be the best and most perfect of governments" (p132), and elsewhere he calls Christianity "the greatest of all imaginable institutions" (p153).

There can be little doubt that Maistre's political philosophy is greatly influenced by the structure of the institutionalised Roman Church. Just as the Church is thought to embody a type of infallibility in its sacred traditions, so societies must see the work of God in their histories. Hence Maistre is a traditionalist and a reactionary, suspicious of reform, hostile to change. He believes in the hereditary principle: monarchies and aristocracies are superior to republics and democracies. He exhorts the French to "return to monarchy" (p90) that their problems may be solved.

Fascism

There is also much in Maistre that permits a fascist interpretation of his position. War is praised, almost in the manner of Nietzsche; it braces weak nations and gen-

erates genius—"blood is the manure of that plant we call genius" (p63), and God works through men of genius. In the *Dialogues* the Senator says "The functions of the soldier are terrible, but they must result from a great law of the spiritual world . . . every nation in the world is united in seeing in this scourge something still more peculiarly divine than in others" (p251).

Despite the many obvious defects in his position there are also the germs of worthwhile ideas. Jack Lively observes (p4) that Maistre "sought a science of politics firmly rooted in history and experience". In his *Study on Sovereignty* Maistre attacks (I think rightly) the social contract theories and "all sorts of metaphysical theories" that "have been put forward to support airy hypotheses rejected by common sense and experience" (p95). He recognises that different political systems suit different societies (p100), adopts a strongly pragmatic attitude (p108) and acknowledges that a system should make its members happy (p126). One page 147 he quite inadvertently praises reason and throughout the book tacitly admits that argument and logic are important; on pages 65 and 152 he states a version of the design argument for God's existence.

Contradictions and oddities

I do not need to point out to secularists the defects in Maistre's outlook. Suffice it to remark that he blandly assumes the truth of all sorts of highly questionable statements about God, hell, purgatory, etc, and assumes also a Golden Age in the past that is quite without foundation. He blandly talks of freedom without saying what it is. Maistre's antirationalism is also untenable and his right-wing prejudices rather objectionable in a more enlightened age. Sometimes his position degenerates into oddity when, for example, he says that "It is forbidden to man to give great names to the things of which he is the author" (p174), when he introduces a curious proof for God's existence (which may be called the Argument from Syntax) on page 265, and when he embarks upon one of his frequent emotional diatribes.

Maistre is confused. He condemns logic and uses it; he rejects the empirical approach and praises it; he attacks metaphysics and introduces his own. Perhaps without a Catholic background and a Jesuit schooling he may have been able to organise a more coherent philosophy.

This is, however, a most interesting book. The prose is excellent, losing nothing (or gaining) in translation.

ART, FREETHOUGHT AND EDUCATION

Peter J. C. Leslie

HISTORY SUFFERS from being divided into periods, each period having a title and each title misleading. The present period is liable to be called "The Age of Affluence", but a better name and a more appropriate name would be "The Age of Self-Inflicted Ignorance and Blind Apathy".

For the first time in our history the great cultural achievements of Eastern and Western civilisation, past and present, are available for all to enjoy. The paintings of da Vinci, Rubens, Rembrandt, Cezanne and Picasso hang in the art galleries of London and the world, but more attention is paid to advertisements and neon signs. The works of Swift, Defoe, Dickens, Voltaire, Zola, Bennett and scores more lie gathering dust on the shelves of public libraries whilst Ian Fleming, Barbara Cartland and Agatha Christie are promoted to the heights of literary deities by an uncritical public.

Donovan is the poetic voice of the sixties, the television jingle is today's creed. It is the creed of conformity and beat your neighbour.

Where have all the Masters gone ?

The country houses of leisured aristocracy in an age long past, built by craftsmen under Vanbrugh, Adam or Nash, are open to the public of a democratic age. Unfortunately they have to be enticed with bingo, fairs, or nudist camps and a thousand and one other commercial gimmicks before they are prepared to leave their television sets.

Fine quality records of the greatest music composed by Western man are available on bargain labels. Folk music of every country, the plays of Shakespeare and the recorded speeches of men such as Bertrand Russell and Winston Churchill are all available to the record buying public. But what are the records that sell?—the Beatles, Elvis Presley and the Singing Nuns.

There has been a vast increase in artistic appreciation, but it is a midjet against the giant tide of commercialism.

It is a puny result for the life work of the educational pioneers of the past, e.g. Paine, Cobbett, Bentham, Carlile, Marx. How would Andrew Carnegie take the news that the millions of pounds he gave to establish public libraries in the country resulted in the provision of Barbara Cartland for bored housewives and Enid Blyton for bored children?

At last there is a government prepared to invest money in the arts via the Arts Council. But this will be a waste of public funds if it is just to provide multi-million concert halls and theatres in the provinces that will be half empty the year round, barring the occasions when they are used by pop groups.

Now that there is a literate and basically educated public, people's minds should be receptive to new ideas and should be re-assessing accepted values and traditions, instead of which they are totally apathetic. For one hundred years the National Secular Society has been preaching the gospel of freethought. It has achieved much on the periphery of its aims, e.g. free education, birth control and many aspects of law reform. But it has not yet been able to achieve its fundamental purpose in making the British public consider and debate religious issues, let alone reduce the influence of the churches in this country.

One of the few achievements of mass education has been the slow decline in the influence of the Anglican church and the slow self-destruction of that church. Unfortunately, to offset this achievement the power of the Roman Catholic church increases daily and every day the rantings of outraged demented cranks of the extreme low church sects get paid more and more notice by the establishment.

Given time, movements like the National Secular Society, the various humanist movements (other than those owing allegiance to Rome), the National Council for Civil Liberties, the various law reform societies and the work of Arnold Wesker's Centre Forty-two might defeat the enemies of man's progress: religion, commercialism, but, most deadly of all, apathy.

REVIEW

The Playboy of the Western World

FOR the next four weeks Unity Theatre is presenting J. M. Synge's satirical masterpiece at 7.45 p.m. Full of rich lyricism and passion, sanctimoniousness and prurience, the play splendidly captures the weakness and strength of Ireland, priest-ridden (constant references to "Father Reilly", who never appears), hypocritical, gallant, rich-voiced. At the same time it satirises the universal glamour of murder at a distance. There is excellent direction by Bathsheba Garnett and fine performances by all the cast, especially Tom Mercer, Declan Mulholland, Christine Pilgrim and Christine Wild.

UNITY (1 Goldington Street, London, NW1) has an outstanding record in introducing masterpieces to the London or world stage. Among them have been works by Sartre, O'Casey, Clifford Odets, Irwin Shaw and Brecht.

LETTERS

(Many excellent letters from overseas cannot be printed because they arrive after the relevant correspondence has been closed. Letters from abroad should be on general rather than topical issues, on principles rather than particular articles—Ed.)

Women

WITH REFERENCE to Mr Mace McCarthy's article in a recent FREETHINKER, I disagree that, all things being equal women as a whole are able to match men in thinking ability. I am all for the emergence of the fair sex from subservience to males, and agree with him that there have been brilliantly intellectual women, and that many more would have been prominent but for inequality of status. For a good many years, however, upbringing has very little discriminated in favour of male children and girls have paid scant regard to parental advice or authority. Today there is little to hinder their intellectual development, and society does not tell them not to use their brains.

My extensive experience among ordinary folk of both sexes has been that females have much less relish than males for political, scientific and sceptical subjects, and much less critical capacity. In general, they are much more naturally concerned with romance, marriage and emotional appeal. They form the great majority of churchgoers and, although there are talented ladies in the secular societies, women sceptics are greatly outnumbered by men.

I have great admiration for the numerous intellectual ladies of the past and present, but in nature the proportion of women thinkers will always be greatly less than that of the male sex.

F. H. SNOW

"WELL, HOW RIDICULOUS," my girl-friend cried, "all this stuff from Mr McCarthy about 'books of blood' and 'harem virtues', and look at the women he's chosen: they're the Shakespeares and Einsteins of the female race. Just think of the contemporary ones who are as prolific as the men."

I hurried to find a pen, but she'd already listed two dozen well-known modern authors. I only caught the last few. "... Mary McCarthy, Doris Lessing, Simone de Beauvoir. Then there's poets and playwrights like Elizabeth Jennings, Sylvia Plath and Ann Jellicoe. And the philosophers: Iris Murdoch, Simone Weil, Ruth Saw, Hannah Arendt, more important than your Ayers and Russells. And Ruth Draper and ..." but here I stopped her. "No, none of the actresses. You know men always say the prettiest women are on the stage." "Well, how about musicians, then?—Thea Musgrave, Elizabeth Maconchy, and look," she cried, hugging a record sleeve, "the English String Quartet are all women. And the historians and economists and so on: Pauline Gregg, Baroness Wootton, Juliet Rhys-Williams, and oh! so many more, all of them important. But tell your Mr McCarthy that patronising a few great names, and his wife, will get him nowhere. Although I don't know about the last bit," she added thoughtfully, "cos, after all, behind every successful man there's a successful woman."

ANDREW CLEVELY

Christianity and Slavery

A CORRESPONDENT J. H. Charles would welcome articles on the attitude of Christianity towards slavery, education and other social matters. Regarding slavery, the best work on the subject I know of is the late Chapman Cohen's *Christianity, Slavery and Labour*, in which this particular tit-bit of Christian "evidence" is fully dealt with. It is well documented and the references are worth following up, as I did in many cases. My copy was destroyed during an air raid and I feel a reprint of Cohen's masterpiece would be a useful weapon in the hands of all Freethinkers and a tribute to one who, at any rate for me and perhaps for many others, first opened the channels of Freethought and mental liberty.

E. MARKLEY

BBC and Religion

FRESH from reading your item on religious bias on BBC programmes (March 4), I listened to *Any Questions*, one of the suspect programmes. The question was asked, "Has religion or science done more good for mankind?" Two of the four speakers, Lord Boothby and the ex-editor of the *Sunday Telegraph*, were of the unequivocal opinion that religion had done nothing but harm. Marghanita Laski thought that religion had done some good, though, as an atheist, her idea of religion was far from orthodox. The only supporter of traditional religion was Lord Robens but unfortunately most of the applause was for him.

KEITH MACK

Social Need

I SHOULD LIKE to draw attention to the need for sheltered workshops in each city of the country for the mentally sick.

These people on discharge from a mental hospital or out-patients' clinic find themselves having to take jobs in normal industry.

As they have mental conflicts, and in many cases are undergoing treatment which produces a sleepy effect, they are slower in their work than the normal person and find it difficult to keep their jobs. Many have a relapse and have to re-enter hospital.

Sheltered workshops would enable them to avoid the stresses of industry and at the same time contribute to industry a society. It would also give them self-respect.

(Name and address supplied)

ADVERTISEMENT

VATICAN IMPERIALISM IN THE TWENTIETH CENTURY by Avro Manhattan (412 pp) (42s—40 per cent to FREETHINKER—plus 1/7 postage). At present obtainable in Great Britain only through Freethinker Bookshop (103 Borough High Street, London, SE1). American readers can obtain in America. A book you *must* read.

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:

MARGARET KNIGHT HECTOR HAWTON
WILLIAM HAMLING, MP.

Chairman: DAVID TRIBE

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

Details of membership of the National Secular Society and inquiries regarding bequests and secular funeral services may be obtained from the General Secretary, 103 Borough High Street, London, S.E.1. Telephone: HOP 2717.