

# FREETHINKER

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## TO BELIEVE, OR NOT TO BELIEVE . . .

SECULARISTS AND HUMANISTS are, of course, only called UNbelievers in this country because the recognised, orthodox belief is Christian and we are non-Christians. The Pope himself would be an unbeliever among Hindus. However it is quite true that Secularists and Humanists do not readily believe anything to be true or a fact just because they are told by some "higher authority" (be it religious or political) that it is so. They need proof, and, if they genuinely live by the scientific method, they are always ready to re-examine that proof, and adjust their beliefs if need be. This is a fundamental difference between religious people and Secular-Humanists.

Those of us who suspected collusion between this country, Israel and France at the time of Suez and were then shouted down have been proved right. As we now try to make sense of the "facts" given to us about the assassination of President Kennedy, we remember Suez. We recognise how difficult it is to get the necessary information concerning events even only three or ten years ago.

Josephine Tey wrote a book called *The Daughter of Time* vigorously defending Richard III of England against his villainous reputation. Fifty-odd years before Richard was killed on Bosworth field, Joan of Arc was burned at Rouen. That is, if she was burned. In another fascinating book, *Operation Shepherdess*, André Guerin and Jack Palmer White suggest that Joan was not a d'Arc at all but of royal birth, the illegitimate daughter of the infamous Queen Isabeau de Bavière and Louis, duc d'Orleans, and, therefore, a half-sister of the Dauphin, crowned Charles VII. She had been sent to Domrémy as a child to be brought up by the d'Arc family to play a carefully planned part in the political strife of her country. The period is vividly described as a time of decadence and corruption, sorcery and squalor, faith and fear. Europe was a battleground on which saints and angels "reinforced by inspired virgins and visionary shepherds pitted forces against imps and demons . . ." Since 1378 the rival Popes had wrought spiritual and moral havoc, ecclesiastical institutions were in ruins, the clergy demoralised. France itself was divided between the Armagnac-Orleanists and the Anglo-

Burgundians, and Joan appeared on the side of the Orleanists. As Pope Pius II wrote in his memoirs, ". . . one of them, wiser than the rest, devised the expedient of alleging that the Maid was sent by God to take over the command . . ."

The book sets out to prove that Joan later married and lived into at least middle age. Victims were not burned for all to see on the top of the faggots, but surrounded by them. Someone else could easily have been burned in her place. There was no shortage of witches. It was said that King Henry VI of England put Joan to death out of zeal for the Christian faith. Priests all over Burgundy invited loyal Christians to share in the general joy of the Church.

In 1456, however, after eight months of investigation into the case of Joan of Arc, "it transpired that what a high-ranking prelate supported by the substitute Grand Inquisitor had pronounced in the name of Rome was within a quarter of a century reversed by another high-ranking prelate supported by the Grand Inquisitor himself, also in the name of Rome . . ." A "Definitive Verdict" was drawn up, claiming that the list of charges drawn up against the Maid of Orleans in 1431 was "corrupt, fraudulent, calumnious, perfidious and disloyal".

Two centuries later a renowned abbé historian was calling the idea that Joan had had visions, a "presumptuous belief". In 1894 Pope Leo XIII proclaimed Joan "Venerable". In 1909 Pius X pronounced her "blessed". In 1920 she was canonised at St. Peter's in Rome and became the Second Patroness of France.

For all its journalese style, *Operation Sheperdess* is well worth reading. The authors insist that the Vatican has always been in possession of the true facts regarding Joan's parentage, and that there is written proof that they implored certain historians not to use any evidence that would "destroy the legend".

Few of use are in a position to verify the story of Joan one way or the other, but are we to be praised for believing without question or doubt the orthodox version we have grown up with in face of what are most certainly interesting alternatives? Are those who believe the stories about Jesus that have been handed down by the same Vatican any more praiseworthy than those of us who have the gravest doubts about the reliability of the source and have studied the alternative theories and find they make much more sense? Of course not! And yet this is assumed, implied or actually stated daily over the air and TV, in the schools and in the press.

The prayer "Lord, I believe; help thou my unbelief" is often quoted to Humanists (out of its original context). It can so easily be taken as the despairing cry of a man who has lost respect for a friend and begs him to behave in such a way as to earn it again. Those who lose faith in

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"God" often wish that "he" were deserving of more respect. As Secular-Humanists, we have our own positive beliefs. Indeed, in our Humanist terms, Christians, being anti-Humanists, are the unbelievers. We do not pray, but we may often wish we were able to respect and to believe in the veracity of all those who set before us the "facts" of history, be it about a so-called god, a king, a French

girl, a war in Egypt or an American president. And it is a fundamental Secularist and Humanist task to work for a greater all-round honesty, an honesty for which (we dare to suggest) Christians are ill-prepared and which they may not even be able to contemplate because their happiness depends on believing what may so obviously be totally false.

## A BRIEF HISTORY OF NEW ZEALAND RATIONALISM

A. T. Parlane

*A. T. Parlane is a life member of the New Zealand Rationalist Association, and was its Hon. Secretary, 1935-1941.*

THE RATIONALIST MOVEMENT in New Zealand may be said to have begun in Dunedin around 1870 to 1880, when the impact of Darwinism created doubt in many inquiring minds concerning the validity of the biblical story of creation. Gradually the influence of free-thought spread to other parts of the country and found a ready response resulting in the formation of groups in many areas. In Auckland, the principal city of the North Island, and Christchurch the largest city in the South Island, in particular, there were very active organisations propagating Rationalism and publishing journals regularly. In Auckland the Opera House was the venue of largely attended meetings and many addresses were given and fiery debates were held before large audiences. One of the notable men who spoke from the Auckland platform was Gerald Massey, author of the booklet, *The Historical Jesus and the mythical Christ*, which was a popular freethought publication of that time. It is also recorded that some secular marriage ceremonies were held on the stage of the Opera House. They must have been interesting times, and feelings often ran high between believers and unbelievers. In Christchurch the well-known freethought lecturer W. W. Collins was also drawing many adherents to Rationalism, and his publication, the *Examiner* was widely circulated.

### Non-believing VIPs

It is said that two very prominent public figures of that time had also declared their non-belief in the Christian religion. They were Ballance and Stout (both of whom were Prime Ministers of New Zealand for short periods, while Stout was finally made Chief Justice and remained in that position until his death in the earlier part of this century).

The Freethought Movement in New Zealand, like its contemporaries in other parts of the world, had its ups and downs, and the recurring financial recessions before and after the first world war seriously affected the general progress of the Movement. However both the Auckland and Christchurch organisations continued to survive by the constant efforts of small bands of stalwarts who had plenty of enthusiasm but little financial means.

One notable lecturer to visit New Zealand in the 1920's was Joseph McCabe, who debated and addressed meetings in the main centres, which drew a fair amount of public support. H. Scott Bennett, that remarkable Australian lecturer and undoubtedly one of the finest orators of his time, was also one of the prominent speakers who visited New Zealand. The Auckland organisation managed to obtain a permit to hold Sunday lectures, followed by films, in one of the large Auckland theatres and these were very popular with the man-in-the-street. However this permit, which was granted by a Labour City Council, was with-

drawn when a Conservative Council was later elected. The Rationalist Association of that time defied the Council ban and were subsequently charged with this offence and heavily fined. With their slender means, the severe fine and the associated costs bankrupted the organisation, which then wound up and went into recess.

### Action and reaction

The depression which caused so much hardship in the 1930's also prevented any active resumption of activities, but as soon as some improvement was evident the Association was re-formed and has gradually built up its funds and activities without a break since that time. With the advent of the Labour Party to the treasury benches in 1935, a sympathetic City Council again granted a permit for Sunday evening lectures and films, which then continued to be held until early in the second world war, when a Conservative City Council again withdrew the permit! However, by this time the movement was more firmly established and it actually managed not only to keep going but to make considerable progress on both membership and finance.

Overseas lecturers who visited New Zealand from 1940 onwards included H. Scott Bennett of Sydney, Miss Ann Lennon of Adelaide, and Mr John Bowden of Sydney. The history of the second world war up to the present time has generally been one of gradual progress and consolidation, while the receipt of several legacies has materially assisted the organisation to become soundly established.

This being so, it was realised that a permanent headquarters building was becoming a necessity, and every effort was made to find one. With several legacies received during the past few years sufficient funds were finally in hand and a very suitable building was purchased in one of the best positions in Auckland. These premises (which contain two floors and a commodious basement) have been developed as a lecture hall, offices and library, while other rooms are leased to business firms and bring in a considerable sum in rents. Weekly lectures are held on Sunday evenings with attendances of up to 100, and social activities are also a feature of the movement today. Membership continues to grow, and a 16-page journal is published every second month. A permanent full-time paid office assistant and receptionist is employed and is kept busy with correspondence and the many visitors who use the large library and the excellent social amenities.

In a country with a population of two-and-a-half million, the New Zealand Rationalist Association has a membership of approximately 1,000. Beside the headquarters in Auckland, there are eight smaller branches in other cities. It may well be said that Rationalism is now soundly established, both in membership and finance. With good management it should continue to progress and extend its influence, so that the flag of reason will fly at an increasing height in the years to come.

## THE PROMISE OF PARADISE

Michael Gray

ALL THE RELIGIONS that this credulous world of ours has ever known, large or small, have had at least one thing in common—the promise that one day its followers would enter paradise. Of course the interpretation of the concept, and the name given to it, differ amongst the different creeds, from the “happy hunting-grounds” of the simple American Indian to the ultra-sophisticated Buddhist Nirvana, and from the old Norse Valhalla to the present-day Christian “heaven”. The name may vary but the idea is always the same.

There is no doubt that Man does have a psychological need for a purpose in life, and to pretend that our time on this earth is just a temporary sojourn, a trial to determine whether we are fit to enter the kingdom of heaven, is certainly a convenient way of providing a purpose that will keep the great unthinking masses happy. It gives them a reason for living and for hoping. It provides them with a crutch to lean on when life gets them down, for it tells them that they will be rewarded for the suffering they endure in this world, and that the more they suffer for the “Lord” the more they will be rewarded in the next world. It thus also teaches them dumbly to accept everything that befalls them and never to aspire to change things for the better for themselves, to accept a fate dictated by chance (personified as some anthropomorphic god) instead of shaping their own.

### The need for a purpose

The science of psychology has only become established this century, yet religions like Christianity have been exploiting it for many hundreds of years, though not for the enlightenment of mankind. The concept of a paradise gave them an ideal solution to the psychological need for a purpose, since it is no good giving men a goal in life if that goal is too easily achieved, for true happiness lies in the *struggle to achieve* and not in the actual attainment of the goal itself, which all too often brings only disappointment. The idea of paradise is therefore the perfect answer because believers are striving to attain a *non-existent* goal which in any case they do not expect to reach in this world. Thus they can spend all their lives in pursuit of one aim, with no risk of the disappointment achievement usually brings. Neither can it be actually proved empirically that the purpose is false, since the only people who can confirm or deny the validity of it are those who have (supposedly) reached it, and, despite some claims to the contrary, no-one has yet established a way of communicating with the dead.

Religion, of course, has always had powerful allies to help get its childish ideas accepted. Ignorance, its life-long partner-in-crime, and wishful thinking combined to convince the simple, uneducated and superstitious peasant folk who were the breeding-ground for religion (and who still make up the main body of the faithful) that its infantile ideas were true. People want to believe there is more to life than the chaos of here and now and when they cannot face up to reality they dream of how wonderful life could be and still might be . . . someday. Religion offers them the realisation of their dreams, it tells them that it is not the here and now that is important, but what comes after. It says that if its followers obey the rules and laws laid down by “god” (which usually include the stipulation that its disciples must enrich its coffers then, and only then, they will enjoy eternal happiness in the world to come. Of course while the faithful are living in poverty and squalor as a result of the demands of their faith, in order

to ensure that they are piling up riches for themselves in heaven, the priesthood is usually living in luxury on the riches piled up for itself on earth from the donations extracted from the faithful.

### The danger of self-deception

Few people ever achieve real happiness in this world, and so we most of us have our dreams—childish phantasies that are a harmless and usually much-needed outlet for our frustrations, but only harmless as long as we realise that they are just phantasies and *nothing more*. When we become so involved in them that, like paranoiacs, we project them into the outside world, then they become dangerous since we lose the ability to discriminate between phantasy and reality. It is this tendency to displace the wistful imaginings of our daydreams into reality that has helped the childish myths of religion to become so easily accepted. Freud, in his *Psychopathology of Everyday Life*, explains how he believes that “a large portion of the mythological conception of the world which reaches into the most modern religions is *nothing but psychology projected into the outer world*. . . . We venture to explain in this way the myths of paradise and the fall of Man, of God, of good and evil, of immortality and the like”.

All too often Atheists are accused of “taking the easy way out”, of pretending there is no god so that we do not have to obey his commandments and can indulge in all the “sin” and “evil” that we like without having to fear retribution. Religious people cannot understand a system of morals that is not based on religion—they have always been taught that there can be no morals without religion, and, since they cannot or will not think for themselves, they believe it. To them the words “irreligious” and “immoral” are synonymous. Because they try to do what they are told is right simply in order to obtain the rewards of paradise, and to avoid what they are told is wrong for fear of the everlasting torments of hell they cannot imagine any unselfish code of morals which causes a man to do right *simply because he considers it to be right*. Of course Atheists do not always do right (*we do not claim to be saints*) but we do try to live our lives according to a set of morals which we consider to be right and which we have formulated for ourselves—not by blindly following rules laid down by somebody else in the selfish hope of thus gaining the eternal happiness of some mythical paradise!

As for taking the easier way out, if religious people consider it is easier to acknowledge that we must make our own happiness, be our own hope, and find our own salvation, instead of sitting back and waiting for some super-Santa Claus to bestow them on us for being good little boys, then we must plead guilty. But it does not require much intelligence to see who is really taking the easy way out by fooling themselves that eternal happiness is just around the corner. Cynical of mankind though I am, I consider that there is infinitely more chance of turning the world we live in into a paradise than of finding one ready-made in the next world!

From JEAN ALLAN (Miss), London, NW6.

#### DEFINITION OF HUMANISM ON A POSTCARD

“HUMANISM” is a belief in human endeavour. (No great religion or philosophy really believes that man can achieve anything.)

[Your own definition in not more than 150 words is invited. Please send it to the Editor.]

## NEWS AND NOTES

THE National Secular Society has produced an admirable Centenary Brochure compiled by Mr W. McIlroy. Together with articles on "Looking Back" and "Looking Forward" by F. H. Amphlett Micklewright and David Tribe respectively, there are messages of congratulations, appreciation and good will from 59 notable Secular-Humanists and sympathisers. A dozen associations add their own messages, and it all makes proud reading. Although the brochure is being distributed free to all members of the NSS (and is available on request), it is hoped that the accompanying appeal for funds will arouse an enthusiastic response from everyone who recognises the value of the society and wants it to continue and to develop its invaluable work.

### The opposition . . .

TALKING OF FUNDS, the "Feed the Minds" (with Christian propaganda) campaign has, since it was launched two years ago, raised £350,000 of the total £3 million it is aiming for. Half of this goes direct to the Bible Society "to step up the circulation throughout the world of the Scriptures themselves . . . the other £175,000 . . . has gone to 'literature centres' set up in Africa and India to train journalists, writers, artists and broadcasters" (*Guardian*, Sept. 27). Considering their resources and opportunities, it is amazing how unsuccessful Christians are at persuading people that fairy-tales are true and edifying.

### By the way

NO bid has yet been made by Lord Thomson for the FREETHINKER.

### Who dunnit?

PUBLIC DETERGENT Whitehouse says that the BBC is largely in the hands of "atheists, humanists, and agnostics who engage in the manipulation of people's minds and thinking through slanted television programmes". And which of us atheists, I would like to know, are responsible for all those hours of religious brainwashing, hymns, sermons, clerical advertising and general hocus-pocus that comes out of our TV? Own up, whoever you are and let's have no more of it!

### ITA policy

IN THE *TV TIMES* Lord Hill, Chairman of the ITA Authority, admits that "Britain is now a divided society in matters of morals. He goes on, "It is a healthy thing that viewers should sometimes be disturbed, even shocked, by a play or by a feature. *But there is no place in Independent Television for material that affronts and outrages the feelings and beliefs of those viewers—and they are a majority—who adhere to the traditional standards*" (my italics). And then finally, to confuse the issue still further and please everyone, he adds, "We are required to preserve a reasonable balance in our programmes . . . we must cater for minorities as well as for the mass. And we do."

### A change (of drug) is as good as a cure?

THE Rev David Wilkerson told a packed Albert Hall recently that "the best, longest lasting cures are made by getting the (drug) addict to put all his dependence on God", and that the only hope for the dossers, drug addicts and rockers against a moral landslide is "divine intervention"; which is, of course, no hope at all.

### Catholics in universities

THE *Catholic Herald* (Sept. 30) publishes an article by J. B. Burke with some interesting comments on Catholics at universities.

"The Catholic Education Centre acts as a clearing house for details of sixth-formers going on to university—provided it gets names from Catholic schools. Some chaplains make a point

of tracking down every new Catholic—by diverse means."

It seems that Catholic marriages among students are few and "outstripped by mixed ones". Catholics, we read, expect to be "martyrs" at university, and there is usually "a general hostility to be found in such quarters as left-wing circles, the student press (compulsively anti-authoritarian) and such departments as economics and sociology. But the individual will mainly find his faith ignored as an irrelevant hobby, having only to contend with spasmodic, pointless and puerile bantering arguments".

But, I suppose, after Catholic schooling any argument about religion will be difficult to cope with, and best labelled "puerile and pointless" as a means of escape. For "sheer sensationalism" there are debates about abortion, divorce, birth control, The Bomb, and "currently, Vietnam".

### Rome "true to form" if to nothing else

WHILE discussion continues about the support given by Pius XII to the Third Reich and its atrocities, Pope Paul hits the ever-welcome headlines with his papal platitudes and pleas for prayers and peace. An attempt, perhaps, to try and avoid another verdict of shame and guilt against the papacy. Even President Johnson, however, feels safe in pledging his support to "any steps that the Pope might take that would lead to the end of hostilities in Vietnam". Meanwhile the river of human blood swells in a country where the slogan "Better Dead than Red" can still be heard above the screams of men and women and children, blinded and maimed and burned for the sake of nothing that will ever make any sense to them . . .

When a pope is crowned he is solemnly proclaimed "Governor of the World". Pius XII, while busy excommunicating communists, never thought that Hitler and Mussolini and their henchmen deserved such a punishment. How can we believe that Pope Paul wants peace without a Catholic victory?

### In the wrong gear . . .

THE MANCHESTER Transport committee has again refused to grant permission for Sikhs to work on the buses because, for religious reasons, they have to wear turbans. Canteen committees all over the country, however, insist on providing fish on Fridays so that non-Catholic housewives have to try and remember *not* to provide it for supper. Humanists must really be the most easy people to live with!

## AMERICAN RATIONALISTS HOLD NATIONAL

### CONVENTION

DELEGATES from member organisations met in St Louis, Missouri, USA, on August 26, 27, 28 for their annual convention of the American Rationalist Federation. Rationalist of the Year award went, posthumously, to last year's president, Sam Hill, who was killed in an accident in March. A fine tribute was given to his memory by James M. Kaigler in his opening remarks of a talk on the subject "Thinkers as Believers".

Attorney Jerome Sidel was the banquet speaker talking on "Federal Aid to Education and its Impact on Missouri Schools".

New officers were elected with divided responsibilities for a new trend in operation of the federation.

During the convention, the trustees of the Foundation of Rational Endeavour met and added a new trustee. The trustees voted to use the interest from the foundation on advertising for the movement.

The next annual convention will be held in Milwaukee in August 1967. In April 1967 the "Freie Gemeinde" of Milwaukee will celebrate their 100th anniversary.

## LETS MAKE SUNDAYS BRIGHTER!

Lord Willis

I AM GRATEFUL for this opportunity to put the case for Brighter Sundays in Britain. Naturally this will be an issue of intense interest to all people connected with the Secular Movement, and I look forward to and welcome their support of the Bill which I shall move in the House of Lords this autumn. But, of course, this is not an issue concerning Humanists and the Secular Movement alone. Indications already show that there is widespread support from all sections of opinion for a more liberal approach to how we British spend our Sundays.

The London *Evening Standard* (26.9.66) neatly summed up the Sunday situation with the remark:

"Each weekday, Britain takes a tiny technological step forward towards a truly modern state. And each Sunday, Britain steps backward 300 years into the world of the Sunday Observance laws."

Actually, the British Sunday was invented over 550 years ago with the Sunday Fairs Act of 1448. But it is the Sunday Observance Acts of 1625, 1627 and 1677 which really got things under-weight. It is one of these Acts which makes me a criminal every time I play tennis on Sunday mornings, for to do this I have to travel from the parish of Chislehurst, where I live, to the parish of Bromley. This would not seem to be a very serious matter, but there is a law in England whereby it is illegal for people to assemble out of their parishes on a Sunday "for any sport or pastime whatsoever". An offender against this law may be fined the sum of 3s 4d or placed in the stocks for three hours!

Fortunately for me, the law is now obsolete. Yet it remains on the Statute Book as part of the Sunday Observance Act of 1625—that mish-mash of statutes, orders and licences which makes the seventh day a happy hunting-ground for the Mrs Grundy's and kill-joys of this country.

These old laws are based on two principles. The first is that by barring most other activities on a Sunday you can encourage people to attend church. The second is that dancing, play-acting and indeed almost any form of entertainment on the Sabbath is wicked and sinful anyway. This pattern of misery has dominated Sunday for three hundred years, and all attempts to secure any major relaxation have been strenuously resisted. It wasn't until 1932 that the first major break-through was made, when an Act was passed allowing local authorities to grant licences for musical entertainment on Sundays, to open museums, picture galleries and zoos, and to allow lectures and debates.

But, despite the good intentions of the Sunday Entertainments Act of 1932, it has subsequently led to all sorts of confusions and absurdities. At the time of the Lynmouth flood disaster, for instance, a number of stars offered their services free at Sunday Charity concerts to help the Relief Fund. To their dismay, they were told by the police that they could not perform on a Sunday wearing any make-up, or using any stage properties, or wearing costumes other than ordinary clothes. Since many of the artists depended on special costumes and stage "props" for their acts, they were forced to withdraw. So much for charity on Sundays . . .

With the coming of television, the regulations have become even more absurd. You cannot go to a theatre to see a play, but you can see the same play on television. You cannot watch a live football match, but you can see a recording of one on television.

Most reasonable people would now accept that the existing Sunday restrictions are unnecessary, illogical and an offence against the liberty and commonsense of the individual, yet these anomalies continue and will do so until legislation is equated with the progress of civilisation.

### Bad laws—bad citizens

One of the worst aspects of our Sundays is that breaking the Observance Laws has become an accepted, almost respectable, British pastime. Tens of thousands of shop-corner newsagents and tobacconists open shop every Sunday morning, legally to sell newspapers and so-called perishable goods, and illegally to sell everything else they have in stock. Every Sunday, hundreds of paper bags and hundredweights of brown wrapping-paper are used to conceal and disguise these "black-market" purchases of items which are freely on display but which, by law, the shopkeeper is legally required not to sell. The public and the shop-keepers join together in a vast conspiracy to laugh at the law—just because it's the Sabbath Day. Yet can one blame the law breakers? Who can see the sense in laws which make it legal to buy cigarettes, but illegal to buy a cigarette-holder? Legal to buy sweets, but illegal to buy a toothbrush? Who can explain why it is all right for a man to buy a razor blade to cut his corns, but not to shave his face? Or why you can buy ice-cream for your children, but not cat food for your pet? The Shops Act of 1950, which was yet another half-way attempt at reform, takes us rather more than half-way to the edge of sheer lunacy.

The trouble is, however, that once people start laughing at one set of laws, it is very easy for them to start laughing at *all* law and order. We have an increasing delinquency problem in this country, and it is no help to the people we employ to enforce the law, that some laws are so idiotic that they can be regarded as a standing joke.

What's more, it is worth remembering that Britain is a democracy: and that means the laws of the land are supposed to conform, as nearly as possible, to the wishes of the majority of the public. It is doubtful if any of our Sunday Observance laws have ever achieved this. In fact, if there was ever a time when the majority of the people wanted everything to stop on Sundays, then why was it considered necessary to pass any laws on the subject? From the very beginning, our Sunday laws have been foisted on to an unwilling public by a small minority.

### The Fourth Commandment

According to the Lord's Day Observance Society "The Sabbath is binding upon all men, not just Christians". So it is not a question of my playing tennis while they go to church, nor of your watching television while they read the Bible. They are out for total control of all activity on Sundays. So let us just consider their source of Divine inspiration. This is what it says in Exodus:

"Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy.

Six days shalt thou labour, and do all thy work.

But the seventh day is the sabbath of the Lord thy God; in it thou shalt not do any work, thou, nor thy son, nor thy daughter, thy manservant, nor thy maidservant, nor thy cattle, nor thy stranger that is within thy gates."

I cannot disagree with the first sentence. Anyone who wishes to remember the Sabbath Day, and to keep it holy for themselves, is perfectly entitled to do so.

But "Six days shalt thou labour . . ." Does this mean that the five-day week is the work of the Devil? If so, why don't Christians demand that everyone should work a full

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## LET'S MAKE SUNDAYS BRIGHTER!

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six-day week? They don't because the majority of Christians are very sensible men and women who accept that the Bible is open to reasonable interpretation.

Now, consider the third paragraph. You, your children, your servants, your cattle and your house-guests are not supposed to work on Sundays. But what about your wife? It can be argued that she is the daughter of someone else and therefore the rule still applies. But the paragraph is so specific in listing everyone else, can we presume the omission of your wife to be deliberate? It is also worth noting that all your grandparents, your parents, your brothers and sisters, your aunts and uncles and your third-cousin twice-removed, are also allowed to slave for you all day on Sunday, while you lie back remembering the Sabbath Day.

If we are expected to accept a minority's literal interpretation of the Fourth Commandment, then let us carry the thing a step further and view the entire Bible in the light of absolute literal interpretation. Let us, for example, consider the precise meaning of the word "work". Doesn't a parson or priest work on Sundays? True, he is doing the work of God yet he is being paid for it. However, when the Commandments were received by Moses there were no paid ministers of religion; rabbinical

Judaism didn't start until centuries later at the time of the Babylonian exile. So from this one instance, we see that the Christians (and also, of course, the Jews) have already accepted a non-literal but obviously practical interpretation of "Thou shalt not do any work" on the Sabbath.

But really the die-hards and Mrs Grundies of Britain are not so much interested in stopping people working on Sundays as they are in stopping people from enjoying life. The Sunday Observance people raise no objections to policemen, nurses and doctors working on Sundays. They are willing to bend their principles here because they realise that to do otherwise would put them out of court completely. But in all other respects they want to put us back in the seventeenth century on the question of entertainment. Of course, they have a case if they wish to ensure that entertainers, professional sports people and shop assistants shall have adequate free time. I would be the first to demand this and to help make sure that people who work on Sundays are repaid by free time some other day of the week.

But this is not, I believe, the root cause for this minority wish to keep Britain shackled on Sundays. Deep down, there is a fear that all fun, that all entertainment, is wicked and sinful. Perhaps this comes from a time when quite a lot of typical English fun and pastimes were wicked, cruel, almost barbarous. But we are not living in those days now. We are living in the twentieth century—or, at least, we shall be, once our laws have been brought up to date.

## HUMANISTS HOUSING ASSOCIATION

M. L. Burnet

THIS ASSOCIATION was founded ten years ago as the Ethical Union Housing Association, when some members of the Ethical Union were considering what social work to undertake. The decision to go into this field was based upon the extreme need for elderly persons for suitable housing. Up to that time there had been a nearly total exclusion of small flats from municipal housing schemes. What little housing was being provided for elderly persons was by private bodies, many of which were associated with religious denominations. There was therefore a special need for help for those outside the Christian churches.

Investigation proved that by far the greatest need was for independent accommodation and the Association accordingly purchased a house in Hampstead (which was named Burnet House) for conversion into rooms with cooking facilities. A scheme for purpose-built flatlets in Wimbledon followed, and a new scheme for building flats in Hampstead is now at the drawing board stage.

Several guiding principles were decided upon in the first scheme, all of which have been found still relevant. The siting of a house, while providing gardens, should be close to transport and to shops. Heating facilities should be up to the best modern standards, and should be a provision of the Association as being more economic and therefore less costly to the tenant. The houses should not be institutionalised in atmosphere.

The first provision, the siting of schemes, makes what in any case must be a difficult search considerably more difficult. The non-institutionalised atmosphere was helped in the first scheme through the expenditure of £700 on carpets for staircases and landings, to take away the frosty look often associated with homes.

The Association did not see the scope of its benefits as being wholly confined to members of the movement, so there was no problem about accepting Council tenants for a period of years in the first scheme. In the scheme at

Wimbledon, one third of the places were offered to the local council, voluntarily. With the new scheme in Hampstead, only one flat will be occupied by right by a Council nominee, and this in return for the housing of a married couple in one of the houses purchased for the site.

With nominations from Councils, the practice has been for two or three times as many nominations to be made as there are units available, thus giving the Association the chance to choose people whom it thinks have the greatest need and who will fit into the community of the house. Prospective tenants are never asked about their religion.

With regard to applications from members of the Humanist Movement, length of attachment to the movement is a consideration, together with temperamental suitability; but the main basis for choice is need, and it doesn't matter whether the applicant is a member of the BHA, EU, RPA, SPES or NSS.

Tenants only move when requiring more help than is available in the Association's houses. A large majority of the flats are occupied by the original tenants. Unless a new house is opened, vacancies seldom occur.

In November, 1964, Ritchie Calder made an "Appeal" for funds on the BBC's "This Week's Good Cause".

### FREETHINKER FIGHTING FUND

THE FREETHINKER is the only weekly Secularist-Humanist paper in the country. It is still only 6d. How much do YOU care how many people it reaches? To advertise we need money, and our expenses are ever-increasing. Whose copy are you reading now? Have you got a subscription? Couldn't you contribute something to the Fighting Fund, say 6d or 6s or £6 or £60? How much do you really care about Freethought and helping other people to hear about it? Do, please, help if you can.

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**ANNOUNCEMENTS**

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

National Secular Society. Details of membership 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. Cheques, etc., should be made payable to the NSS.

Humanist Letter Network (International): send s.a.e. to Kit Mouat, Mercers, Cuckfield, Sussex.

**OUTDOOR**

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

Manchester Branch NSS, Platts Fields, 3 p.m. Car Park, Victoria Street, 8 p.m.: Messrs COLLINS DUIGNAN, MILLS and WOOD.

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**

Bromley Discussion and Social Group (14 Great Elms Road, Bromley), Friday, October 14th, 8 p.m.: W. E. LUCKIN, "China".

Leicester Secular Society (Secular Hall, 75 Humberstone Gate, Leicester), Sunday, October 16th, 6.30 p.m.: PERCY DOWNLY, "Some Aspects of Life".

South Place Ethical Society (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London, WC1), Sunday, October 16th, 11 a.m.: Professor T. H. PEAR, "The Place of Sentiment in Society"; Tuesday, October 18th, 6.30 p.m.: Dr. FAITH SPICER, "Marriage and Sex".

South Place Sunday Concerts (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London, WC1), Sunday, October 16th, 6.30 p.m.: London String Quartet, Beethoven and Walton. Admission 3/-.

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.

**ONE WAY TO ATHEISM**

Tom Price

Tom Price (b. 1928) is a free-lance journalist. He was baptised C of E, became an agnostic at 17, an atheist at 18, and a Socialist at 19. He feels that most people, especially Freethinkers, take life far too seriously.

ON A wild impulse, I decided to join the Army before the war ended. I went to the recruiting centre in Birmingham and, after a series of medical and educational tests, I was sworn in by a delightful old officer who presented me with "the King's Shilling" which for some obscure reason came to 5s 4d, though I think this included my day's travelling expenses.

Then I was taken into a little office so that an orderly could jot down my "particulars".

"Religion?" he asked. It caught me unawares. I had never thought very deeply about my personal position, though I had strong views on the uselessness of the priesthood. But here I had to make a definite declaration, and it suddenly became very serious. "I'm . . . er . . . Agnostic," I said.

"What the bloody hell is that?" said the orderly.

"Well . . . it means I don't either believe or disbelieve in the existence of God."

"I'm sorry, we can't have any ifs and buts. I'll have to put you down as C of E."

"Hold on—I'm definitely not C of E."

"Well, that's where we put everybody when we're not too sure."

And that was that.

After moving into barracks in Northern Ireland for initial training, I began to feel more and more cornered by this little label "C of E". It was engraved on a plastic identification disc attached to a piece of string which I was told to wear around my neck "in case you get blown up on the battlefield".

I wasn't so much worried about being blown up as I was of the disgrace of being buried under a classification I did not accept.

The dilemma came to a head when we were ordered to press our tunics and polish our boots for the Sunday church parade. About 200 of us were marched to the door of the Anglican church on the camp. The sergeant-major bawled: "Fall out, all Roman Catholics and Other Denominations".

A lot of Roman Catholics fell out and marched off to the camp RC church. This left a few Baptists, some Jews and one C of E-cum-Agnostic. The others were sent back to their billets, there being no place of worship on the camp for them. This left only me. I was questioned at some length by a young officer. "They put me down as C of E when I am in fact an Agnostic, Sir," I said.

He looked at me as if I was a rare specimen, and smiled craftily. "I think I know what you are doing," he said. "Trying to dodge church parade, eh? The sergeant major'll know what to do with you. Look after this soldier, sergeant-major . . ."

And so it was that I was marched to the cookhouse where I was issued with a small, blunt knife and confronted by what seemed like two tons of gnarled potatoes.

I staggered back to my billet late in the afternoon, by which time most of my religious companions had recovered from their devotions and were getting spruced up for a night on the town.

The following Sunday I did not fall out of the church parade. I went into the little Anglican church and followed its proceedings with a new awareness. I even joined in the hymns. But it made no difference. I was no longer C of E, or even Agnostic. I was a dyed-in-the-wool, militant, uniformed Atheist.

And it wasn't long before I was a Pacifist to boot, though that's another story.

"The fanatical enormities perpetrated in the name of religion are only to be put down to the adherents of monotheist creeds, that is, the Jewish faith and its two branches, Christianity and Islamism. We hear of nothing of the kind in the case of Hindoos and Buddhists. . . ."

"As a matter of fact, it is only to monotheism that intolerance is essential; an only god is by his nature a jealous god, who can allow no other god to exist. . . ."

"Hence it is that monotheistic religions alone furnish the spectacle of religious wars, religious persecutions, heretical tribunals, that breaking of idols and destruction of images of the gods, that razing of Indian temples, and Egyptian colossi, which had looked on the sun three thousand years; just because a jealous god had said, 'Thou shalt make no graven image.'"

Arthur Schopenhauer (1788-1860)

"Religion: a Dialogue"

## REVIEW

Christopher Brunel

**103. History of a House** by Elizabeth Collins (National Secular Society, 1s, illustrated).

MRS COLLIN'S booklet gives a history of the site where the National Secular Society now has premises in London, and in his Foreword to it, David Tribe, President of the NSS, adds a further justification for studying the past. "On this, the society's Centenary," he writes, "it is proper to look back. Not in any vapid or retrogressive way, but to see afresh historical orientations and draw inspiration from noble traditions." **103. History of a House** will cure anyone of the thought that history needs to be dull and lifeless—this is certainly not the way Mrs Collins presents it.

She concentrates on the history of the Tabard Inn at Southwark, that in the early seventeenth century was on the site of the NSS's present home, and she introduces us to John Harvard, after whom Harvard University in America was named. Harvard was born in 1607. When he was twenty he entered Emmanuel College, Cambridge, where he came into contact with men who were planning to emigrate to New England; there they hoped to establish a society dedicated to civil and religious freedom which was proving increasingly difficult in England under Charles I with his obsession with his "Divine Right".

To me an especially interesting section of the booklet is the one devoted to the rigorous censorship imposed on the printing trade in seventeenth century England, as this has not yet been eradicated even now, though the savage punishments of cropping of ears, whipping and the pillory are gone. Harvard built up a fine library of books, many, it seems, from booksellers and printers who were in the forefront of the fight for freedom of speech and publication.

In 1637 John Harvard took his library and his young bride to Charlestown, Massachusetts, where he was appointed to assist at the Charlestown Church. Many of the local citizens of the colony had been educated at Cambridge University, so they decided to give the college they were establishing the same name. But in September, 1638, John Harvard died of consumption and he left half his estate and his entire library of over three hundred books to the new college.

In recognition of Harvard's services to the young community in the cause of education, it was "ordered that the college formerly agreed on to be built at Cambridge shall be called Harvard College"—so reads an entry in the Town Records for 13th March, 1639. The 1650 charter dedicated the college to the "advancement of good literature, the arts and sciences, and the education of English and Indian youth in knowledge and godliness", and Mrs Collins rightly stresses the absence of racial discrimination.

Whatever falling from decent principles over racialism may have taken place in America since then, there has been a progressive story regarding the "godly" education at Harvard, culminating in the abolition of compulsory attendance at prayers there in 1886.

I hope I am not being churlish, when I say that I could have done with a longer booklet than we have; this comment is meant as a compliment to the research that Mrs Collins has done and the way she has presented it to us. I am greedy for more in the same vein. Five interesting illustrations appear on the front and back covers, and these help to make the booklet good value for one shilling.

As this is cheaper than a lot of Christmas cards that I have already seen in the shops, perhaps some readers could usefully get in a supply of the booklet to send out this year and do their small bit towards "a Secular Christmas".

## LETTERS

**Not a question of "brows"**

IN reply to Mr Fairhurst's letter (August 12) "it is obvious that there is a widespread misconception that 'academic' means obscure or impossible to understand".

The demand for clarity is surely always justifiable. But *can* we really always be simple? Mr Fairhurst complains of clerical infiltration, into social life, medicine, law, education, etc., all done by simple, untrained men, no doubt? The fact is, it is extremely dubious if these highly technical matters can be dealt with adequately *and* simply. If we are really to have nothing highbrow it seems a bit unfair on those of us who have had the disadvantage of a university education and profess atheism. Has Mr Fairhurst read Ingersoll, or Foote, or Bradlaugh? If we are to confine ourselves to words of one syllable, that seems to me the true obscurantism. (Miss) G. HAWTIN

AS an infidel who knows nothing about culture, since pipe music and association football are my mental level, I sympathise keenly with other readers who find some FREETHINKER articles a little too airy-fairy—we can't all be intellectuals. What we benighted lowbrows want is more stuff like Mr Oswell Blakeston's quite admirable review of *The Death of Jesus*. That was strictly to the point. J. A. S. NISBET

(Both points of view are respected. "Academic" writing can be "clear", "readable", and thereby "simple" to understand, as Gibbon, for one, proved. When it is—most of us are satisfied—even the Editor.)

**The New Freethinker**

BOTH as a newsagent and Freethinker I think the new editing an improvement. C. DURRANT

I NOTICE a change in the tone of the FREETHINKER, all for the better. I look forward to this weekend journal and would be lost without its cheery fire. Success in your efforts from one of the Low Brows.

HAROLD BENNETT BRADSHAW

YOU WILL no doubt be bombarded with protests against the long overdue changes which have taken place since the beginning of the year in the layout and content of the FREETHINKER. But please, on no account let it deteriorate again to the dreary level of the last few years. We have had enough of the historicity of Jesus, Bible obscenities, etc., and more than enough of that concoction of sour-gutted flummery *This Believing World*.

GEORGE GOSFORD

(In fact very few complaints indeed, thanks.—Ed.)

**Any offers?**

AN ARTICLE about the history and finances of the Salvation Army would be interesting. Did not one member leave a large sum of money over which there was a legal battle in America before the war? What happens to the money which is being collected all over this country every Sunday? We are told they have homes for old age pensioners, but are "army" members only admitted?

MICHAEL GRAY'S articles are splendid. LILIAN MIDDLETON

**Scottish statistics**

MY REFERENCE to "Scotland's 30 per cent Roman Catholic population" was taken directly from the BBC TV "24 Hours" programme which I recorded and reported. I did not check the figure and my thanks are due to MacDonald Morris for drawing my attention to the entry in the Scottish Catholic Directory.

Concerning his second point—if, as he maintains, the question of 75 or 80 per cent grants is not relevant to Scotland, the question of sectarian indoctrination and segregation is and this latter question precedes that of State aid. State grants to Church schools concern us primarily because they are directly responsible for more sectarian indoctrination and segregation than would be the case if all Church schools had to be built and maintained wholly out of Church funds.

Northants. DAVID COLLIS

**Appreciation**

I WOULD like to express my appreciation of Phyllis Graham's article (Sept. 16), "Co-existence with Cancer". I consider it the type of article most valuable to our interests as enemies of the dogmatic nonsense preached by the churches, Roman Catholic in particular. Miss Graham's able and stimulating article indicates that she is no panderer to the current trend towards compromise with superstitious faith. It is a vivid reminder of what we, as secularists, are up against, and a challenge to us to remember what we stand for. Thank you, Miss Graham. F. H. SNOW

Kent.

### PUBLIC DEBATE

## THE SUNDAY OBSERVANCE LAWS

**SPEAKERS**

LORD WILLIS

HAROLD LEGERTON

*General Secretary, Lord's Day Observance Society*

CAXTON HALL, CAXTON STREET, LONDON, SW1

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FRIDAY, 4th NOVEMBER, 7.30 p.m.

Organised by the National Secular Society