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EDUCATIONAL REFORM

Story of a Campaign

THE question of religion in the school is now a national talking point, and scarcely a day passes without reference to it in articles and statements. A special committee of the British Council of Churches, while not wanting to forfeit the benefits of legislative recognition, has recently expressed a desire to reduce religious brainwashing in the nation's schools (*Religion and the Secondary School*, SCM Press). The Church of England Board of Education—in association with the National Society—has set up a Commission under the chairmanship of the Bishop of Durham to report on religious education in schools, and has invited Secular Humanist organisations to submit their views. Mr Edward Short, Secretary of State for Education and Science, told a press conference that he was "worried by the pressure from some quarters to remove RE" (*Times Educational Supplement*, April 19, 1968); his assurance that it will not go while he is Secretary will comfort only those who forget that his term of office is unlikely to be lengthy.

One result of the 1944 Education Act was that for the first time in history, religious instruction and acts of worship became compulsory in British Schools. The Secular Education League* accepted this as a *fait accompli* "irreversible in the immediate future" (Annual Report, 1947), and for several years there was little interest and less action on this issue.

Many organisations and individuals have contributed to this revival of interest in secular and moral education, but the National Secular Society can justly claim to have initiated the current campaign. The first indication that the NSS was planning to bring the matter into the open again was in a press release for National Education Week (November 11-16, 1963), calling for the secularisation of education—"the disappearance of collective worship and the replacement of religious education with the teaching of ethics, anthropology and the history of ideas". This marked the beginning of the current campaign for secular and moral education which has been constantly pursued in the press and public halls, and on radio and television, where David Tribe has appeared in many discussions arising out of Government and Christian publications and his press releases. A letter-writing campaign, particularly to the educational press, has been most effective. Here are some of the highlights:

July 1964: A public discussion was organised by the NSS at Conway Hall, London, and attended by approximately 80 people. There was some press coverage.

October 1964: Margaret Knight's new version of *Morals Without Religion* was published as a FREETHINKER article and NSS leaflet.

November 1964 was designated Secular Education Month by the NSS, and public meetings were organised in Glasgow, Inverness, Reading, Nottingham, Leicester, Manchester, Birmingham, Richmond (Surrey), Highgate, Poplar and Tooting. An excerpt from the final meeting in London was seen on the television programme THIS WEEK. Messages of support were received from Lord Chorley, Michael Foot, MP, John Freeman, Margaret Knight, Kingsley Martin, A. S. Neill, Harold Pinter, Earl Russell (Bertrand Russell), Lord Willis and Baroness Wootton.

The outcome of Secular Education Month was significant. The wide publicity it achieved effectively got the campaign off the ground. There was a large influx of teachers and student teachers into the NSS, bringing the organisation new ideas and virility; in the period to follow they were to influence professional colleagues and others by the use of pamphlets, leaflets and other material issued by the Society.

December 1964 saw the publication of a leaflet by David Tribe: *Secular Education*. Large quantities of this leaflet, Margaret Knight's *Morals Without Religion* and *Christianity: The Debit Account* have been distributed in schools, colleges and organisations. They have all been reprinted several times.

November 1965: The NSS published its policy statement *Religion and Ethics in Schools*, written by David Tribe with a foreword by Lionel Elvin. This pamphlet has played a key role in preventing the Humanist movement becoming bemused by endless compromises with opponents leading to statements which could be—and later were—used by Christians against the movement.

December 1965: The Humanist Teachers' Association announced that it did not accept the joint Humanist-Christian statement (*Religious and Moral Education—Some Proposals for County Schools by a group of Christians and Humanists*) but supported the recommendations in *Religion and Ethics in Schools*.

January 1966: Speakers from the political parties represented in the House of Commons expressed their view at a public meeting organised by the NSS in the Alliance Hall, London.

February 1966: When the Secretary of State for Education announced his intention to raise the Government building grant to Church schools, the NSS issued a press release and organised a well-attended protest meeting in London.

April 1966: The Minister of State for Education, Mr Edward Redhead, received a deputation from the NSS.

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FREETHINKER

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ANNOUNCEMENTS

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, SE1. Telephone 01-407 2717. Cheques, etc., should be made payable to the NSS.

Humanist Letter Network (International) and Humanist Postal Book Service (secondhand books bought and sold). For information or catalogue send 6d stamp to Kit Mouat, Mercers, Cuckfield, Sussex.

OUTDOOR

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

Manchester Branch NSS, Platt Fields, Sunday afternoon, 3 p.m.: Car Park, Victoria Street, Sunday evenings, 8 p.m.

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

Enfield and Barnet Humanist Group, Lecture Theatre (Room 102), Southgate Technical College, High Street, London, N.14, Wednesday, May 15, 8 p.m.: PETER MARSTON, 'Adoption'.

Glasgow Humanist Group, George Service House, Glasgow, Sunday, May 12, 2.30 p.m.: R. TANNAHILL, 'Pollution'.

Herts County Teachers' Association, Offley Place, Great Offley, Hitchin, Sunday, May 19, 2.15 p.m.: Conference, "A Christian Basis for Education?" NSS speaker: DAVID COLLIS.

South Place Ethical Society, Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London, WC1, Sunday, May 12, 11 a.m.: Professor P. H. PEAR, 'The Marginal Observers of Society'.

The Trade Union, Labour, Co-operative Democratic History Society. Exhibition "The People's History", Central Library, Bancroft Road, London, E1. Open daily 9 a.m.—8 p.m., May 13—26 inclusive.

EDUCATIONAL REFORM

(Continued from front page)

They discussed the whole question of religion in the school with particular emphasis on the proposed increase in subsidies for Church schools, and the problems of parents living in single-school areas. After the meeting a member of the deputation, Brigid Brophy, was interviewed in the programme *THE WORLD AT ONE*. This was followed by a press conference, and reports appeared in the national and educational press.

July 1966: For some time the NSS had been collecting signatures for a letter to the editor of *The Times*, protesting

against the decision to raise the Government building grant to Church schools from 75 to 80 per cent. The letter was published on July 7 with the following signatories: Dr Cyril Bibby, Brigid Brophy, Professor G. M. Carstairs, Lord Chorley, Professor H. J. Eysenck, Professor Ronald Fletcher, Professor A. G. N. Flew, Peter Fryer, Margaret Knight, Marghanita Laski, A. S. Neill, Harold Pinter, David Tribe, Lord Willis, Colin Wilson and Baroness Wootton. A long correspondence resulted.

February 1967: The Fabian Society published Brigid Brophy's *Religious Education in State Schools*. The NSS was asked to promote sales of this important pamphlet in the movement, and has sold large quantities to branches, Humanist groups, and teachers' organisations.

February 1967: There was a capacity audience at London's Caxton Hall for an NSS public forum on religion in the school. Brigid Brophy, Peter Jackson, MP, Alan Humphreys and two prominent Christian educationists Dr Ronald Goldman and Mother Mary Norbert were the speakers.

September 1967: The NSS published a questionnaire to give parents an opportunity of registering their complaints and dissatisfaction with the RI system.

December 1967: The NSS convened a meeting of representatives of all the organisations in the movement to plan future activity.

March 1968: Much attention had been given to the claims made by Christians who had conducted surveys of parents and teachers, the results of which purported to show that over 90 per cent of them were in favour of RI and compulsory acts of worship in State schools. The NSS asked one of its members, Maurice Hill, to analyse two of these surveys and assess their real significance. His report was published as a pamphlet entitled *RI and Surveys*, and launched a press conference by Brigid Brophy, Lionel Elvin, David Tribe and Mr Hill.

The discussion on religion in the school is no longer confined to specialist publications and organisations, but there is still a hard struggle ahead to stop schools being used as part-time churches. As the number of committed Christians and congregations dwindle yearly, the more unscrupulous religionists will use every device to maintain their hold on captive audiences in the classrooms of Britain. The National Secular Society has been criticised for describing the subjection of young children to RI and compulsory worship as indoctrination. (Significantly, even some of our Christian opponents are now using this and similar terms.) While wholeheartedly supporting the principle of discussion and debate—preferably in public—our policy will continue to be a clear and forthright advocacy of the case for secular education and moral training with a more reliable foundation than Christian superstition.

* The Secular Education League was founded in 1907 and its members included prominent freethinkers and Non-conformist clergy. The NSS was closely associated with the League from the beginning, but was not told of its dissolution which took place at a meeting in London in 1964. There is a detailed study of the Secular Movement and education in David Tribe's *100 Years of Freethought* (Elek Books).

Obtainable from the National Secular Society:

RI and Surveys, Maurice Hill, 1/-.

Religion and Ethics in School, David Tribe, 1/6.

Religious Education in State Schools, Brigid Brophy, 2/6.

100 Years of Freethought, David Tribe, 42/6.

WILLIAM MCILROY.

MAN AND COMMUNITY

R. Stuart Montague

LIFE in primitive tribal society was at a low level of subsistence. Men were obliged to co-operate in the battle with the forces of nature. Low productive power of labour meant united effort and common distribution of the results of co-operative hunting and fishing. It was a system of collective or common ownership.

Reflected in his consciousness at this stage of evolution primitive man saw the natural world around him endowed with a similar life and consciousness as himself. Trees, mountains and rivers to stones and animals; all were imbued with spirits and souls.

At a higher stage in the development of agriculture and the rearing of cattle, fertility became of major importance and in his crops and animals and in his own family. Hence the first known dieties were mostly female: goddesses of birth, fertility and agriculture; also woman was dominant in the family and social structure.

There were various causes for the transition from the system of female to male kinship, from matriarchy to patriarchy. With the development of his intellect and progress in the material basis of society man became all-powerful in the tribe. Reflected in his early religious consciousness male deities becomes more prominent.

The female principle, the great mother goddess became the great father principle. Primitive man created religion in his ignorance and fear of the forces and elements of nature. He makes sacrifices and incantations to the god of thunder in his wrath.

With further development in the process of human labour men gain correct knowledge of the laws of the natural world and emancipate themselves from the domination of spirits and gods of nature. From many gods, male and female, evolved the great universal father god, creator and ruler of the world.

This almighty god is a mirror image of the essence of man himself and, falling on his knees to worship, man became a slave of his own creation in the religious sphere.

Progress in human labour and development of the forces of production produces a surplus value above the minimum needs of existence of individual man and the community.

From the system of primitive communism arose private property and at a later period the invention of money and finally commodity production. Society now became dominated by the economic laws of its own creation in the material sphere of productive relations.

With the development of private property man is divided against himself in the exploitation of man by man. The growth of industry while dehumanising humanity, as it did in nineteenth century England, also creates the essential material conditions for the final emancipation of humanity, materially and spiritually.

Primitive man slowly achieved correct knowledge of the laws of nature and so gained control over nature. Modern man will also understand the economic laws of bourgeois society. The anarchy of capitalist production produces booms and slumps, extreme poverty side by side with extreme wealth and potential plenty, world war, crime and other forms of anti-social behaviour and a state of permanent crisis everywhere.

Man will uncover the laws of the motion of history

which have enslaved him through the ages in the successive modes of production. In emancipating himself in the sphere he also emancipates himself in the reflected mental sphere in his religious consciousness.

The highly industrialised nations have reached an epoch in history in which the forces of wealth production have arrived at the stage of potential abundance for all on this planet. I believe 'freedom' is knowledge of the laws of necessity, that society will abolish the bourgeois system and replace it with world socialism which conforms to the laws of necessity today, in society returning to common ownership and the free association of men producing wealth according to the needs of a socialist world society.

For half a century the government of Russia has endeavoured to stamp out religion in the USSR. It will only vanish completely when the Russian masses understand and establish socialism. There is planned production by the state in so far as that is possible in a capitalist economy. This is not a socialist society of co-operation of free men but a state capitalist dictatorship from the top downwards. The workers sell their labour power for wages. The wages system has not been abolished for the forces of production have not yet reached the quantitative development necessary for socialism to be a practical possibility in Russia.

The Russian workers do not understand the economic laws of the society in which they live any more than the workers of the private capitalist nations. They willingly fight and die in their millions in war with their fellow workers in any part of the world they may be sent by the rulers of the Russian state.

Religion is strongest amongst the peasants and state farm workers; their life being dominated by the weather. The peasant at the mercy of the natural elements is traditionally superstitious. As Bertrand Russell so subtly expressed it: "Fishermen with sailboats incline to be religious, while those who boast of the possession of motor-boats divest themselves of religion". Religion is weakest among the class of educated intellectuals of Russia.

The ultimate purpose of humanism must be the goal of human emancipation from the present social-economic system of bourgeois society which is slowly being discovered to be irrational and immoral.

FREETHOUGHT BOOKS

KIT MOUAT is now acting as agent for Lyle Stuart Inc., New York, and will welcome orders for such outstanding freethought books as Avro Manhattan's *Catholic Power Today* (50/-), Vatican Imperialism in the 20th Century (49/6), Emmet McLoughlin's *Crime and Immorality in the Catholic Church* (41/3), *An Enquiry into the Assassination of Abraham Lincoln* (41/3), *Letters to an Ex-priest* (41/3), and, due out in May, *Famous Ex-priests* (41/3).

Telephone: Haywards Heath 4043.

NOTE

THE front page article *Human Society and Sectionalism* which appeared in the FREETHINKER of May 3 omitted acknowledgement to the contributor—E. G. Macfarlane. We apologise for this printers' oversight.

ASSORTED MIRACLES

J. Trower, New Zealand

A BOOKLET from the "Little Chapel", Dunkirk, entitled *Our Lady of the Dunes* by a priest, Eugene Van Eecke, tells us that in the year 1403 workmen were excavating ground for a fortress when "a spring of water gushed forth from the sand" and caused "almost religious admiration" because discovery of fresh water in that area was thought to be impossible. Imagine the zeal when, a few days later near the same spot, a workman dug up "A small statue of our Lady holding the Infant Jesus in her arms". We are informed that "the two discoveries were related and the people saw in them a mark of celestial protection". Rationalists will agree with the priest when he says "For those who know the faith of our fathers, it is easy to understand the impact . . . continuous coming and going of people . . . everyone wanted to see the statue and taste this marvellous water . . . like the inauguration of a pilgrimage . . . uninterrupted . . . still going on today". The workmen carried the statue to a home where families gathered around it for prayer but when they awoke next morning it had disappeared; it "had returned by itself to the place where it had been found". The excavators then had the ungrateful statue locked in the chapel of a nearby castle but again it escaped after one day and walked, ran or crawled back to the place of discovery. By this time the local priest "became concerned" and gave a ruling as to what was in the statue's mind. He "made the people understand that the Blessed Virgin's place was near her Divine Son" in St Giles Chapel (as she was holding her Divine Son in her arms one wonders how much closer she could have been). As a statue psychologist the Rev. Father was a complete wash out, for it broke out a third time and arrived once more at its place of origin. After those Houdini-like escapes, we are informed "It was then clear to everyone that our Lady was showing that she wanted to be honoured right there". So the people decided to build a chapel "on the very spot". The Virgin and Son were then taken to the City Hall and were well guarded by various societies pending the erection of the church. As no further escapes were recorded it is quite likely that it settled down and behaved like an ordinary well-brought-up statue. The little church was eventually built and we are treated with an impressive list of miracles throughout the centuries which are due to our Lady, the statue, and/or the "Little Chapel".

We now come to the generosity of a statute which was brought to public notice by a report in the *New York Times* (October 10, 1926). It appears that during the Austrian invasion of Northern Italy in World War 1, a soldier was charged with having stolen a pearl necklace from the statue of the Holy Virgin in a pilgrims' church. He admitted having taken it but insisted that it was gift from the Holy Virgin. He said that he had gone into the church to pray and had lamented before the statue about his destitute family that he had left behind. It then bowed and took the pearls from its neck and handed them to him. The military court was not prepared to reject the story as there was a general belief in the miracle-working power of the statue. The next step was to get an authoritative ruling from two bishops as to whether such a miracle was within the domain of possibility. Their Lordships were perplexed—a "yes" might protect a rascal, but, more important, a "no" would destroy the repute of that church for miracles.

Eventually the two celestial experts ruled that such statue behaviour was possible, and the soldier was acquitted; but the colonel of the regiment to which the soldier belonged issued an order that "In future no soldier under my command is permitted, under heavy penalty, to accept a gift from anybody".

The Catholic Truth Society's booklet *The Miraculous Medal* by Father William P. O'Keefe, CM (he is also an authority on the temperature and location of Hell and on that subject writes with depth and warmth), relates how Catherine, a young French novice in a Paris convent, was awakened one night in 1830 by her guardian angel, a boy "of four or five years of age", and requested to "come down to the chapel, the Blessed Virgin wants you". The chapel door was locked but "at the mere touch of the little guide's hand the heavy door swung back and they entered". The Queen of Heaven arrived later and she and Catherine had a heart-to-heart talk on many subjects. The Queen of Heaven apparently forgot about being a shy and modest maiden, for she commanded medals of herself to be made and distributed. "Have a medal struck . . . those who wear it when blessed will receive great graces . . . favours in abundance". That must have been Mary's understatement of her life, for, as soon as the medals were made and sold, miracles, large, small and medium, were reported from all quarters. About 68 million medals were produced and one of the first to receive some was the Archbishop of Paris who lost no time in coming to light with a real man-sized miracle. His Grace's fine advertisement was followed immediately by a Jewish character who, after being presented with a medal and taken to church, "saw our Lady as she is depicted on the medal. She did not say anything but signed to him to kneel down". Whether or not it was another unconventional statue is not clear, but the effect of it all was that he was converted and became a priest which "was a true and striking miracle . . . intercession . . . Virgin Mary". All manner of illnesses, "intractable" and otherwise, were cured; "People then began everywhere to ask for the miraculous healing medal". For example, an army commander bought five dozen for his officers who had asked him for them. A popular ruse was to secretly sew one into the clothing of a friend—and sit back and watch things happen.

Ecclesiastical investigations were held at Rome and Paris (nineteen sessions in the latter city), and "Everything was thoroughly probed" and, as could be expected, the miraculous nature of the medal was proved. In 1876 Catherine made it known that, at the heavenly meeting forty-six years before, "our Lady had told her to have a statue made representing her as she appeared". A sculptor had been engaged at the time (1876) so there is no doubt that the finished article has long since appeared—and walked, talked, signed, bowed or otherwise acted in a way that no self-respecting statue would behave. Fifty-seven years after Catherine died, her body was exhumed and found "incorrupt". "The eyes were still as blue as in life, the hands . . . the heart . . . were all intact". Unfortunately there is no clue in the booklet as to whether that particular miracle can be credited to the medal, the statue or Mary herself.

THE CONFUSIONS OF THE SOUL

A. J. Lowry

WITH a naïvety which I find difficult to condone, the majority of spiritualists appear to be under the impression that the dubious validity of their teachings solves all, or at least most, of the fundamental problems of philosophy. Instead of this, however, I think it true to say that the axioms upon which the belief is based are amongst the untidiest and least helpful yet advanced, and in view of the fact that the evidence to support them is of such a highly controversial nature, the reflecting public may hardly be blamed for refusing to embrace such beliefs in any significant numbers.

To begin with, spiritualism often sets itself up as a solution of the mind-body problem in philosophy; though in reality it is nothing of the kind. From Democritus onwards, we have been gradually progressing towards a wholly materialistic view of consciousness, and the body of knowledge we have accumulated seems to show that this hypothesis works tolerably well. Granted that many people (myself included) find it odd trying to believe that consciousness is a function of the arrangement of matter, but this is no more a serious objection to materialism than Ptolemy the Great's dislike of the heliocentric theory proved the sun moved round the earth.

Believers in the soul, however, would tell us that that is where consciousness resides. This means that instead of a mind-body problem, we now have a mind-soul-body problem. Worse, though we have some knowledge of 'body' and 'mind', the soul is a complete enigma. If we say that it is composed of some peculiar form of matter, then, despite the introduction of another premise into our system, we are no closer to understanding the relationship between matter and mind. (In fact, we are further away, for we know far less about 'psychic' matter than we do about the more normal variety.) On the other hand, if the soul is wholly non-material, we are then faced with the abominable task of attempting to work out its relationship to the material body.

Nor does belief in a soul help us at all in the understanding of the advent of individual life. Presumably, sperm and ovum do not possess souls (and even if they did, it would be difficult to see how the two could merge into one), yet from the moment of conception, the growth and development of the embryo can be understood in terms of biochemistry. The materialistic view appears to contain no insurmountable problems. But once we accept the existence of a soul, all manner of puzzles are set us. At what stage in embryonic development does the soul enter the body? In what way, a few minutes after entry, is the body alive as it was not alive previously? For a soul to enter a body suggests that the former has spacial extension; where, then, did it exist before it entered the body? Why cannot the soul remember the life it led previous to its fleshly incarnation? And finally, of course, in what way does this soul link itself to the developing embryo, and why, henceforth, will it be necessary for that body's continued life, when previously it managed very well without it?

In death, as in birth, a host of problems arise. If a person is blown up with a mine, and dies because of it, we can explain the process quite well without any greater need to propose the existence of a soul than is required in explaining how a candle is snuffed out. Why then, introduce the soul to explain a process which makes perfectly good sense

without one? Christians, who believe that men have souls, rarely credit animals with similar characteristics, and if the death of an animal can be explained by biology, why not the death of a man? And if, in the post-mortal state, souls may exist without bodies, what is the point of having bodies at all? The assumption of a soul in this process thus becomes a flagrant contradiction of the scientific principle that assumptions must not be introduced unless they are absolutely necessary.

In the history of life, too, the concept of the soul is a great nuisance in serious research. It may have seemed reasonable to the Hebrews that Yahweh blew Adam's soul up his nose, after making him out of dust, but today we know better. If man has acquired a soul, he must have obtained it somewhere on the climb upwards from sub-cellular life. We have a reasonable idea of how eyes and brains could have gradually developed, but the same is hardly true of souls. It appears to be something you either have or have not, and that's an end to the matter. We are sometimes told that it appeared when man attained self-consciousness, or first learned right from wrong, but this will not do. Both these processes are extremely gradual, yet the soul is an integral and indivisible unit. Infants and idiots possess neither of the aforementioned faculties, and yet they must be said to have souls, as there is an infinite gradation between them and competent adults.

On questions such as these, spiritualism is ominously silent. This in itself is suspicious, since, if this hypothesis is true, many of the finest scientists and philosophers, whom we believe deceased, are in reality still existing in some unspecified location, from which (through mediums), they could easily contact the earth. It seems hard to believe that such men would not set themselves to understanding the new conditions they found themselves in, or that, having solved the host of philosophical and scientific questions surrounding the existence of the soul, they should wilfully withhold such knowledge from those who still live.

Mediums, whilst providing interviews with Uncle Fred and Auntie Clara in seemingly unlimited quantities, do nothing to alleviate this confusion. They do not summon up the ghost of Dalton to lecture on the principles of astral physics, nor have we yet heard Plato applying his two thousands years of practical experience to his theory of the soul. It is conceivable, though unlikely, that Spiritualism has something of use to tell us, but until such times as it attempts to organise itself into a science, and to dissipate the confusion surrounding its fundamental axioms, this doctrine cannot expect serious investigation by intelligent persons who have better things to do.

100 YEARS OF FREETHOUGHT

By DAVID TRIBE

"He is neither uncritical of the secularist record nor unreadable; and his copious and reliable annals of the period make a useful compilation."—*Books and Bookmen*

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FREETHOUGHT AND FAITH

Phyllis Graham

THERE was a time when, still possessing Faith, I had begun to feel it as a burden rather than a blessing. In consequence my critical faculties were roused, and I was frequently struck by a curious quality in the 'Faithful', which started an uneasy suspicion in my mind that I, too, inherited the quality with the blessing!

It was a subtle thing, difficult to pinpoint. Tentative terms such as 'artificial', 'unreal', 'pose', occurred to me vaguely at the time. Yet it had nothing to do with conscious insincerity. I perceived it in my dearest friends, and in those I regarded with respect, even reverence. It was not by any means always in evidence. It was something that came down like a mask over a familiar face, or sounded like a false note in a melody. It happened when the 'super-world' of Faith intruded on the world of facts: when conversation took a pious turn, or some religious principle was brought to bear on a situation.

During such interludes (it seemed to me) the humans involved automatically ceased to be themselves (the selves that I knew) and appeared to be animated by alien forces. In fact they ceased to be free agents: they became puppets. They spoke parrot-language: sentiments mimicked from sermons or pious books. Often the arrogance of the pulpit declaimed through their words and gestures: a false expression settled on their faces.

As I see it now, they were playing a part, though as unaware of it as the sort of actress who habitually 'puts on an act' in everyday life. I have come to accept this as characteristic, in varying degrees, of all types of religious people.

The Mystery of Faith is indeed mysterious. If the minds of believers could be examined under some immaterial electron-microscope, what would their belief turn out to be? My guess is that it would approximate, as near as nothing, to 'make-believe'. The whole area of religious consciousness would show up as a kind of psychological playhouse, where the ego disports itself in a burlesque performance. For no one could *genuinely* believe the 'truths of revealed religion' and stay sane. Could any normally reasonable and humane mind convince itself that a 'loving God' runs a non-stop torture-camp in the next world? Or that he vents his spite on the whole human race because two of them disobeyed him? Since the majority of believers are not raving lunatics, we must assume that some part of their intelligence, somewhere, is cute enough to exercise 'suspension of belief' in favour of survival.

"Don't upset their Faith if it makes them happy", plead the soft-hearted (or soft-centred). It may delude them into thinking they are—for a time, anyway, till 'the egotism of faith' comes up against the grimmer facts of life—or death. I remember having an *awfully jolly* time as a young Catholic convert. Faith was fun, shared with others in a rich camaraderie; a sparkling effervescence called 'holy joy' bubbled in the cup of life and filled us with irresponsible gaiety. But, as Bertrand Russell rather sourly but only too truly observes: "The fact that a believer is happier than a sceptic is no more to the point than the fact that a drunken man is happier than a sober one. The happiness of credulity is a cheap and dangerous quality".

The comparison is singularly apt, for surely the believer can only persuade himself that he believes by imbibing the

narcotic of Faith to the point of intoxication. This form of auto-hypnosis can hardly be healthy for the mind: in extreme cases it can be lethal. A terrific outcry goes on against the peddlars of dangerous drugs: but what of those who carry on the dubious trade of doping the intelligence and deadening the will, starting their nefarious work in the nursery and the infant-school? God Mammon gets the profit from both types, but Jehovah-Jesus, I imagine, gets the long-term advantage.

It is difficult to see the wisdom of tolerating, even in the name of brotherly love, a state of society where a fair proportion of the members are permanently 'under the influence' of the mind's most insidious hallucinogen. A small élite, with their wits about them, may be merely playing a comedy of fools in Double-Think vaudeville . . . certain Catholic intellectuals, for instance, who openly regard the game of Faith as a sport for mental enjoyment. One might be tempted (misled by their pseudo-mockery) to say "Good luck and good hunting!"—if one didn't suspect that they're more dangerous than all the herd put together. Verbal monkeying may be fun for them, but their prestige gives it weight for the less enlightened. Their skilful weaving of stale theology with bright threads of scientific knowledge creates fresh illusions, lending Faith a new flexibility—and a new menace. The sly antics of the *avant-garde* should not put us off guard.

Whatever shades of opinion divide the ranks of those who—in principle—prefer truth to falsehood, there cannot be any doubt that Freethought is the antithesis of Faith. Should it give the limp handshake to its adversary? Or unequivocally oppose it in every way?

Faith is surrender to invisible forces: not imaginary gods, but dark forces in the psyche that can open up abyses of horror, where 'those who believe absurdities will commit atrocities'. This is what actually occurs when Faith is armed with power. But should we, in the words of E. M. Forster, "tolerate most religions when they are weak"? I cannot think so. I find them all quite intolerable! So did E.M.F. when he added, "But I dread them all, without exception, as soon as they become powerful".

Weak or strong, I think we should give them no quarter. But—"We know that doing away with gods and supernatural persons and powers is not an end. It is a means to an end—the real end being the happiness of man". (Robert Green Ingersoll.)

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ROMAN CATHOLICS AND ABORTION

David Tribe

THE 1967 Abortion Act, which is now coming into force, rightly includes a conscience clause. It would be most unjust if doctors were obliged to perform an operation which for deeply-held personal reasons they found not just distasteful but morally shocking. We hope that everything possible will be done to arrange surgery referrals and hospital timetables so that doctors can opt out with the minimum of embarrassment to themselves and, what must be the prime concern of everyone, the minimum delay for those women needing an abortion.

In most sections of the community 'conscience' is taken to be the spontaneous reaction of the individual moral sense, but the recent statement on abortion by the Roman Catholic Hierarchy emphasises that for Catholics it is blind obedience to the dictates of the Church. It may be argued that this is a voluntary body and those unprepared to accept the conditions of membership can simply leave it. The issue is not however as easy as this, for Catholics are taught from their earliest years to venerate the Church as Holy Mother, and it is as inconceivable for most of them to defy her as for most of us to disown our parents.

Catholic gynaecologists and GPs are instructed not only to dissociate themselves from abortion in most cases, but to refer their patients to other doctors whom they expect to raise difficulties. This is clearly interfering with the right of the patient to have free access to objective medical advice and treatment in accordance with the law, and will mean that some women will in desperation go to a back-street abortionist or waste so much time being shunted from one unsympathetic doctor to another it will be too late to have a safe abortion. The unfortunate mother and the community will then have to pay the price of deformed or unwanted children.

The National Secular Society has been campaigning hard

in this Human Rights Year for removal of questions about religion from the employment or social life of the individual. In most cases these are completely irrelevant and act only as an opportunity for releasing prejudice and discrimination. But as science advances and legislation becomes more permissive, there may be the need of exceptions to protect unsuspecting members of the general public. So much that is novel and repugnant to medieval moralists can medically be done today: artificial family planning or insemination, abortion or sterilisation, organ replacement or biochemical rejuvenation. In the future this will increase. Many ordinary people will not want to avail themselves of the new techniques, but some will. If they consult their doctor they will expect honest medical advice and not an echo of some priestly injunction. If the Catholic Church persists in its attitude it may be necessary to oblige Roman Catholic doctors to reveal their religion before accepting NHS patients. Already a woman is well advised to think twice before having a Catholic doctor. This is not discrimination but self-protection.

Another issue suggests itself. The solidarity of views on social issues displayed by almost all practising Catholics is not a matter of chance but the result of a planned system of indoctrination literally from the cradle to the grave. In this country—despite its bankruptcy—most of this is provided at the expense of the community. All religious premises escape rates and taxes. Even clergy homes are half-rated as 'charities'. Catholic schools, which are completely sectarian, get a gift from the State of 80 per cent of their building costs and generous loans for the rest, and their running costs are entirely met from public moneys. A democracy protects the rights of unscientific and reactionary minority views, but should it be expected to finance them?

Sunday Entertainments Bill

MPs who care about civil liberties should make every effort to support the Sunday Entertainments Bill in its closing stages, and ensure that it is not axed or mortally wounded by assassins from the Bible Belt before it reaches the Statute Book.

In last Friday's debate the emphasis was put on the nuisance to church services of organised sport. One sympathises with any preacher or meditating churchgoer beneath whose window passes a motorcycle scramble. The problem of noise is one of the great curses of our society. But this affects the secularist lecture as well as the Christian liturgy; it is a problem of Wednesday afternoon and Friday evening, Saturday night and Sunday morning. It needs separate legislation, education and public protest. A specific concession has already been made to the churches in that the Bill will not emancipate from sabbatarian control the main churchgoing time, Sunday morning. I wonder if Sir Cyril Black rages at the forced baptism of sound the community undergoes on Sunday from the tinny tintinnulation of thousands of untuned church and chapel bells flooding the air from the earliest hours, the Salvation Army bands in the cities and the gospel salesmen with mega-

phones at the beaches. Let no one be deceived by the sabbatarians, now posing as the champions of the individual against big business. Their concern is primarily theological, and the greatest danger the individual faces in the Bible Belt is the big business of organised religion.

The Home Office seems anxious to extend the powers of local justices to determine how the Act will operate in their areas. This principle is not unreasonable. But it must be pointed out that many magistrates in country districts are clergymen, church warden and chapel elders. Any powers granted them in the Act must be conditional on clear sociological guiding lines and a proper appeals mechanism. Speaking of seventeenth century Puritans, Macauley said they hated bear-baiting 'not because it gave pain to the bear, but because it gave pleasure to the spectators'. The Puritans of today are not very different. They will gladly stop even amateur theatricals and the quietest sports and amusements on purely doctrinal grounds if the community continues to defer to their arrogant demands.

DAVID TRIBE.

Significant Omissions

FREETHINKERS, who frequently send letters for publication to the local or national press, have become familiar with the sort of censorship of any anti-religious material which is generally imposed. It is sometimes argued that severe cutting is common to all types of letters and should not be taken as denoting partiality. Mr. D. Molyneux (one of our contributors) has sent a copy of a letter which, he informs us, he sent to the *Scottish Sunday Mail*; he also enclosed a cutting from that paper of the letter as it appeared in print (April 14). By making a comparison between the two, readers may judge for themselves whether impartiality was strictly upheld. Mr Molyneux's letter was printed among several others clearly written by supporters of the Kirk.

The letter unedited

"Do the moderators, the leaders and the members of the 'Kirk' not recognise that they would not have their 'Kirk' if there had not been a series of so-called heretics fore-thinking Reform? There has been a continuous evolution of thought regarding the beliefs of the Christian doctrine ever since the Revival of Learning erupted into the Reformation. The beliefs in the mythologies incorporated in the story of Joshua the Carpenter of Nazareth have been, are and will go on being gradually eroded until true historical fact will emerge despite desperate efforts of Church, Kirk and Chapel to keep them alive in the minds of children and grown-up children. The people ought, from this day forward, to be in a position from which they can demand the Truth; Philosophical and Magisterial Apologetics must become less and less necessary for a people who are becoming more and more educated to have minds of their own. A belief in romantic stories must be replaced by a belief in factual history. The data concerning the Crucifixion and Resurrection are so flimsy that, in the course of the next hundred years or so, the people will come to regard them as malwitnessing and the word Crucifixion will be spelt Crucifixion."

As the above appeared in print

"Do leaders and members of the Kirk not realise that there would be no Kirk if there had not been a series of so-called heretics thinking reform ever since the Reformation?"
—and that was all!

Letters to the Editor

NOTE: Letters exceeding 200 words may be cut, abbreviated, digested or rewritten.

Freethinkers needed in South Africa

IN support of Don Baker's plea (March 22) for more freethinking teachers to come to Africa, I wish to urge also the special need for freethought in South Africa. This is a country where reactionary ideas are not only tolerated but exalted into divine purpose and enacted in the laws of the land. A Christian national ideal is the theme of our education; racialism is expressed in our legislation; complete separation of racial groups is the declared aim of our long-term policies. Moreover, South Africa claims to lead the world on the path towards peaceful co-existence of various racial groups, a co-existence to be achieved by the strictest separation with limited tolerance of migrant labour.

In the prevailing climate here, one of caution, fear, of unwillingness to utter any sound of non-allegiance to these ideas, there is a great need of enlightened thought. Keeping groups of humans apart cannot lead to mutual understanding, though with suitable enforcement it may achieve the more limited aim of at least

temporary avoidance of inter-racial clashes. Clearly it is no long-term solution.

In these circumstances, non-racialists in South Africa count it a grave setback that certain university lecturers in England have stated publicly their resolve not to apply for posts in South Africa. We do not consider this a helpful gesture. Our need is for more and more free minds in the whole educational fields, but especially in our schools.

(Mrs) WINIFRED M. ROUX (Johannesburg),
Editor, *The Rationalist* (South Africa).

"Immigrant Power Today"

AVRO MANHATTAN'S new book *Catholic Power Today*, reviewed April 26, raises, I think, questions relevant to the present debate on immigration.

Catholic power in Britain and the USA is almost entirely the creation of Irish and South European immigrants and their descendents. Now we are faced with the growth of large Moslem and Hindu communities through Commonwealth immigration, more subtly, the religious character of Britain may be affected by the mushrooming of fundamentalist West Indian sects. I suggest that all this is bad for the prospects of the Freethought movement in this country. So, at the risk of shocking some of the left-wing members of the NSS, I submit that it would be in the ultimate interests of Freethought in Britain if Mr Powell's views were to prevail.

JAMES MCMAHON.

Well-directed dynamism

WITH reference to Mr M. J. O'Carroll's letter (April 19), let me assure him that I am *all for* "well-directed dynamism"—and my tiny commendation of Mr Straker's wriggle against the follies of British censorship ties up very well with a more enlightened future for human beings in Vietnam. (As they struggle in the mud, some Rab Butler may be plotting an equivalent 1944 Education Act for them!)

I see the removal of censorship as an *essential element* in the progress of freethought against the superstitions and fetishes of religions. And I bet Mr Straker can see this too.

Mr O'Carroll could easily be construed as *pro-prudery*. Is he? Anyway, his diversionary tactics suggest to me that he does not understand the "significance and emphasis" of censorship in general, otherwise he would understand that public hair is just a convenient point of *impact*.

E. G. MACFARLANE.

William Morris

ERIC GLASGOW (April 5) draws a sorry picture of William Morris as an "idealist". He was no such thing. He was a determined Marxist-socialist who believed that socialism could only be established through revolt.

As for Mr Glasgow's assertion that "we hear less praise of William Morris than was once the case"—we are actually hearing more about him than ever before. Three excellent books about Morris have been published during the last year, and none of them portrays him as an "amiable crank" or a "futile reactionary". On the contrary, he is shown as a pioneer of freedom in art, work and life, and he will be remembered for his lectures and essays on these themes long after *The Earthly Paradise* is forgotten.

As Raymond Williams has said: "Morris is a fine political writer, in the broadest sense, and it is on that, finally, that his reputation will rest".

IAN ALLAN

Hell's Bells

THE form of existence so amusingly and sympathetically portrayed by Isobel Graham (April 5) was mine for nearly thirty years. This was a topic new to the FREETHINKER and I was delighted to read it.

I was a GPO night telephonist during that period and lived within 50 yards of a set of braying church bells which, in addition to giving utterance (sometimes for two hours) during the daytime, also announced the time at 15-minute intervals day and night, thus disturbing those nights which I spent at home "off duty".

I approached our local vicar on this matter to receive the dusty answer that "most people liked it" and that I would "get used to it"—presumably on the principle of Adaptation to Environment which suggests that we get used to Hades itself after the first ten-thousand-billion years. In thirteen years—I didn't, but was provoked into sending some verses to the FREETHINKER called "Hell's Bells" for which the Editor kindly gave me space (January 14, 1951). I thank you for publishing Miss Grahame's admirable essay.

ARTHUR E. CARPENTER.