

Freethinker

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INSULT TO INJURY

IT appears from a disclosure made in *The Times* on September 4th, that the Pope had little confidence in his divine power, and felt that to issue an encyclical was not sufficient to ensure that Catholics would adhere to his teaching. "Secret instructions to bishops and other Roman Catholic leaders" were issued in a letter from Cardinal Cicognani, Vatican Secretary of State. The letter, which was circulated a week before the publication of the encyclical on birth control, is reproduced in full in *The Times*.

Naturally, it makes heavy reading and is very difficult to follow, and it is made more obscure by euphemisms such as "the transmission of life". After explaining that the Pope is aware of the problems affecting married people, Cicognani comes to the point. "But it became daily clearer

dangerous pronouncement needs to be propped up with furtive letters.

The rest of the letter exhorts "all priests . . . to put forward this delicate point of Church doctrine, to explain it, and to vindicate the profound reasons behind it". Let them put it forward, let them even explain it if they can, but I defy anyone to vindicate the profound reasons behind it, simply because there are no reasons of any kind there. Behind it lies a hypothetical faith—and that same faith, one would imagine, must be severely shaken in many of those who hold it, not only by the frightening content of the encyclical itself, but by the underhand means in which it, and the unforgiveable delay of its arrival, are supported.



"No change, Lord. You must be joking."

to him (the Pope) that the greatest service he could render in this field to Christianity and to the whole of mankind, was to propound again in all its purity, while taking into account recent scientific discoveries, the social evolution of our time and the increased appeal to 'responsible parenthood', the constant teaching of the church . . ."

Cicognani goes on to state that "The holy father is aware of the bitterness, which this answer may cause to many couples who awaited another solution to their difficulties. It is precisely the care of these souls in distress, the burning desire to bring them light and comfort, which has caused the long delay in giving this answer." Not only, then, does the Pope admit that some of his flock are in distress—though he makes no mention of the millions who will be in distress in a few year's time suffering from empty stomachs—and do nothing about it, but also because he cares about that distress, he brings about a long delay the results of which are precisely nil, beyond raising the hopes of many Catholics unduly. One begins to realise why this

A.H.A. PROTEST

THE American Humanist Association resolved in San Francisco on September 4 to hold no national or regional meetings in Chicago for the next five years. Tolbert H. McCarroll, the president, said that this decision was a protest against the "massive affront to human dignity" perpetrated by the Chicago police during the Democratic National Convention.

Chicago's Mayor Daley, whom it seems runs the city in a way not unlike that of the crooked sherriffs of the last century, had no comment to make on this. No doubt those of his citizens, who are socially acceptable and in many parts of America that means god-fearing do not feel the loss.

The brutality in Chicago seems little less of a denial of human freedom than that in Prague. In these days when the world's people are caught in a net between two opposing powers one begins to wonder just who is the devil and where is the deep blue sea.

Fund for Renegade Priests

ON September 3 it was announced that an appeal fund had been launched by the lay *ad hoc* group to aid Roman Catholic priests under censure or suspension for opposing the Pope's encyclical. This is an illuminating gauge of leading lay-Catholic opinion. The trustees, headed by Lady Asquith, a non-Catholic, comprise Dr Anthony Boyle, lecturer in law at King's College London, Mr Anthony

(Continued overleaf)

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, Sunday, September 15th, 6.30 p.m., 57 Sheringham, London, N14. First Birthday Celebration. Admission 6/-. Children 3/-. Telephone Margaret Kelly (01-360 4157) for further details.

Humanist Teachers' Association, Friends' Meeting House, Euston Road, London, NW1, Saturday, September 14th, 3 p.m.: 'RI in the Primary School—What Alternative?' JUNE SMITH.

Trade Union, Labour Co-operative—Democratic History Society, Central Garage Hall, Leeds, September 14th-20th: Exhibition to mark the 100th anniversary of the TUC.

FUND FOR RENEGADE PRIESTS

(Continued from front page)

Spencer, lecturer in sociology at the Roman Catholic college of education in Cavendish Square, and, not unexpectedly, Mr Norman St John Stevas, MP, who has already made his views on the encyclical widely known.

As Peter Crommelin has pointed out in a letter to me, the appeal fund will help to fill a gap, which secularists have been unable to fill, by providing a source of income for those who hitherto have gained their livelihood from the church.

With at least eleven priests already either under censure or suspension and more than eighty others committed to disagreement with the encyclical, this fund is a welcome measure. In fact a permanent fund of this nature would seem to be very much in the interest of the furtherance of Freethought.

TOWARDS HUMAN RIGHTS

Annual report of the
National Secular Society

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"PAPA WHY?"

DAVID REYNOLDS

ONE of our staff has passed me a letter, posted on August 28 from a Czech doctor, whom she and her husband met while holidaying in Italy. In order that readers may obtain a first-hand view of the situation, she has kindly permitted me to quote it almost in full.

"As I write to you at this moment, we are camped with a number of my countrymen in —, guests of the Yugoslav government. By the grace of our friends here, we are living gratis and in good health. We have no idea when we will be able to return home, since the border is now closed to us. We are shocked at what is happening and share our countrymen's violent opposition to the intervention and occupation. The foreign troops are not "friends" whom we invited, but our enemies. My daughters have asked, "Papa, why is all this happening?" I have no explanation to give them. What comes over the radio from Moscow is not the truth but a fabrication. *The greatest service you could possibly render would be to explain to others the truth*—that you for instance have met a physician from Czechoslovakia who is an officer and a Communist, but who is violently opposed to all that is taking place—the invasion of our land and the suppression of our people. These thoughts are not mine alone, but shared by all of us here and by our people at home. We find no joy in the events which have occurred, but we are extremely proud to acknowledge the hopes and the generosity of people everywhere—from the common people here in camp, from England, and from all over the world.

I will write to you again as soon as I return home and hope that you will receive my letter. I simply do not know if mail from there will be allowed to cross the border. Although I have nothing more to write at this time, I sincerely hope that this will not be my last letter to you.

Your Czechoslovakian friend . . .

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AN UNSUNG HEROINE

DAVID COLLIS

THE EARLY 1840s saw a spate of vicious prosecutions for blasphemy. In 1840 John Cleave was sentenced to four months imprisonment; in '41 Henry Hetherington to four months; in '42 Charles Southwell to twelve months, G. J. Holyoake to six; in '43 Thomas Paterson to three months and later that same year, in Edinburgh, to fifteen.

Several hundred miles to the south, way down in the big metropolis of London, a woman's anger had been growing along with the persecuting fervour of those righteous guardians of public morality who wanted to rid Society of such blasphemous devils. For Matilda Roalfe the particularly vindictive sentence on Thomas Paterson was the last straw which broke the back of her long weakening tolerance of injustice. She packed her bags and set out on the tiring trek to a city besmirched with bigotry. She was to begin a remarkable fight to which history will one day accord its proper due. Arrived in Edinburgh, the scene of her chosen battle, she issued a manifesto to the civic authorities. She told them that she would not stand idly by and see freedom of expression thus threatened by unjust religionists and that she, to this end, would publish the sort of material for which Southwell and Paterson had been incarcerated. She wrote later that

'... the law against which I have rebelled has no parallel in ancient times, either for baseness or absurdity. It is called a law against blasphemy, and really is a law against truth. It was made by Christian Judges in ages of darkness as a fence for Christianity. Knowing that religion would not stand the test of unshackled discussion, they hit upon the cunning expedient of making it "part and parcel of the law of the land", so that enlightened and virtuous men who discovered the falsehood of that religion might be deterred from exposing it, by fear of acquiring the character and enduring the penalties denounced against law breakers. . . .

. . . Laws are rules of action—good laws (as I declared in the Manifesto which so enraged the authorities of Edinburgh), all the good will respect; but none, save those in whom false education has quenched every lofty and generous emotion, will tamely submit to the tyranny of *bad* laws. To resist bad laws is no less our duty than to respect good ones; and those who condemn law breaking may be told, that if laws never were broken, they would seldom be mended. . . .

It is important to bear in mind that 125 years ago there was no feminist movement. This was a fight which Matilda Roalfe had initiated herself and which she was likely to win or lose single-handed. Within a few weeks she was

arrested, tried on a charge of blasphemous libel, found guilty and sentenced to sixty days imprisonment, which period of suffering she spent immured in Calton Jail, Edinburgh. With unbroken spirit she emerged from this unlovable cage and recommenced her dissemination of the forbidden literature. She continued to publish material, notably pamphlets written with proselytizing fire by the atheistic Charles Southwell, from her base at 105 Nicolson Street, Edinburgh. She wrote at the time that

'... imprisonment has neither changed my opinions nor damped my ardour in the glorious work of promulgating them; and not only without hesitation, but with intense pleasure, I take up the pen to *justify* the breaking of bad laws, and to repeat with emphasis the promise made before Christians conferred upon me the high privilege of suffering for the cause of principle, that *I never will voluntarily obey any law which is an outrage upon human reason* . . .

. . . Authority may do its best, or its worst—it may again legally rob—it may again revile and imprison and torture, but to *silence* it must *murder* me. The law which forbids the publication of heterodoxy shall never be obeyed by me. I will publish irreligious opinions, be the consequences to myself what they may. If conduct so just is unlawful, so much the worse for the law. It is no fault of mine if proper conduct is not lawful conduct. And this I know, if the many odious laws enacted by tyrants as necessary props for their enormous schemes of oppression are not resisted, they never will be brought into the contempt they so richly merit. . . .

Soon, though none too soon for those who had been victims, the blasphemy prosecutions ceased and Matilda Roalfe, her courageous work done, quietly faded from the scene of her triumph. She had won a great battle for the liberty of the individual to write and publish what he believes to be true. Today her work is known only to a few. Her publications are very scarce and her highly interesting pamphlet *Law Breaking Justified*, written and published by her in 1844, is scarce to the point of extreme rarity. It is here she argues most persuasively that it is the duty of citizens to break bad laws since this is invariably the only way of achieving their reform.

Matilda Roalfe obeyed the call of duty, as she saw it, to secure freedom of speech and publication. She was realistic enough to realise that freedom fighters often face a painful dilemma. You must be prepared to lose what freedom you do have to win the freedom you would like to have.

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A GUIDE TO ABORTION LAW

THE Abortion Law Reform Association has brought out a 24-page *Guide to the Abortion Act 1967*. The guide, which is edited by Cambridge medical don, Dr Malcolm Potts, has been produced to provide a better understanding of the provisions of the 1967 Abortion Act, which came into effect on April 27th this year.

Perhaps the most noteworthy conclusion to emerge from the Guide is that:

'Prior to the Act it was sometimes thought that termination of pregnancy was lawful only when it was necessary to prevent the patient from becoming a "wreck". The Act makes it clear that this is not so. It is enough if the continuance of the pregnancy involves a risk greater than if the pregnancy were terminated. Since there is no evidence that the medical termination of pregnancy involves any substantial risk, it follows that a pregnancy may lawfully be terminated in order to secure a relatively small improvement in the woman's medical condition.' (p. 11.)

Copies can be obtained from Alra, 48 Sherrard Road, E7.

PLUS CA CHANGE . . . ?

KIT MOUAT

Kit Mouat has scanned some annual volumes of the National Reformer, edited by Charles Bradlaugh and has extracted the following quotes from the editions of 1889. Similar selections will appear in future issues of the FREETHINKER.

Letter from Peter McDiarmid: "I have withdrawn all my children from religious instruction for the last three years, and my children are not in the least disadvantaged, but the reverse. After sending notice of withdrawal, I had a very courteous letter from the teacher, saying he did not like their coming later, as it was a bad example to the others; but if I would allow them to come the same time as the others they could have arithmetic in another room. I, of course, consented; and, instead of being looked on with disfavour, they were envied by the other children. I believe I am the only avowed Atheist in the place; but I think I am respected by the many all the same." (Alyth, Scotland.)

The Rev. Stewart Headlam writes in the "Church Reformer: . . . "The fact is that Mrs Besant with her clearness, vigour, and courtesy has already made herself such a power in the Board that the more open-minded of our 'opponents' are convinced by her." (Board=New London School Board.) (January 13.)

J. M. Robertson on Censorship of Zola's "La Terre": ". . . Are we to face and reckon with the truth, or are we simply going to keep it out of print? If the latter, there is no further room for doubt as to who are taking the really immoral course. In that event, the suppression of the Zola translations is not so much a vindication of decency as a burking of outspoken criticism of the social order . . ." (January 20.)

Rough Notes from the National Secular Society: ". . . It is to be hoped that every Freethinker will now avail himself of his legal right, and, claiming his right to affirm, will refuse to take an oath . . ." (January 20.)

News from Sweden. "Our readers will have noticed the persecution of Freethinkers that has been going on in Sweden for some time past. At the present moment a young man named Viktor Lennestrand, the founder of the Swedish Freethought Society, is lying in prison in Malmö, for the high crime of lecturing against Christianity . . ." (January 20.)

'D' on T. H. Huxley: ". . . I cannot do better than (to quote Professor Huxley's 'Apologia') . . . 'Agnosticism is a stage in the evolution of religion'. 'No two people', says the professor, 'agree as to what is meant by the term 'religion'; but if it means, as I think it ought to mean, simply the reverence and love for the ethical ideal, and the desire to realise that ideal in life, which every man ought to feel—then I say Agnosticism has no more to do with it than it has to do with music or painting. If, on the other hand (religion means) theology, then, in my judgment, Agnosticism can be said to be a stage in its evolution, only as death may be said to be the final stage in the evolution of life.'" (February 17.)

From Is One Religion as Good as Another? ". . . The truth is, what reverend writers are pleased to call infidelity is as much opposed to indifference as anyone thing can be opposed to another . . ." (March 31.)

Protest in Favour of Real Woman Suffrage: ". . . 'We hold that on no reasonable ground, on no claim of political or social justice, can marriage be held a bar to the possession of political rights, nor can any distinction be made which should deprive a duly qualified married woman of a privilege conferred upon duly qualified unmarried women and widows. We protest and repudiate any such inequality, and declare our determination to resist this, or any other measure, containing so ill-advised and unjust a limitation'. (The subjoined protest in course of circulation . . .) CB. (March 31.)

"John Bright is dead. In 1880, on June 21st, in the House of Commons, he spoke for my conscience and honour as none other spoke, and I, with uncovered head, pay most grateful and most reverent tribute to his memory." (Charles Bradlaugh, Editor.) (April 17.)

Some Words of Explanation (by the editor). "The review of Madame Blavatsky's book in the last *National Reformer* . . . brought me several letters on the subject of Theosophy. . . . I very deeply regret that my colleague and co-worker has, with somewhat of suddenness, and without any interchange of ideas with myself, adopted as facts matters which seem to me as unreal as it is possible for any fiction to be. My regret is greater as I know Mrs Besant's devotion to any course she believes to be true. . . . The editorial policy of this paper is unchanged, and is directly antagonistic to all forms of Theosophy . . ." (June 30.)

From Annie Besant: "Many statements are being made just now about me and my beliefs, some of which are absurdly, and some of which are maliciously untrue. I must ask my friends not to give credence to them. It would not be fair to my friend Mr Bradlaugh to ask him to open the columns of this journal to an exposition of Theosophy from my pen. . . . I am therefore preparing a pamphlet dealing fully with the question . . ." (August 4.)

"Women and Darwinism" by 'D'. "Mr Grant Allen must take care . . . (he) is arguing for the maintenance of the economic dependence of woman on man, and for her maintenance by man as her sexual partner. . . . We are told that, 'at the present moment, a great majority of the ablest women are wholly dissatisfied with their position as women, and with the position imposed by the facts of the case upon women generally' . . . "women have Mr Grant Allen's permission to say anything and do anything, so long as they are pretty enough to please men, do the duties of maternity and housekeeping, and have six children each. But they must not aspire to economic independence . . ." (October 27.)

On the State of Freethought in Holland. "The Netherlands being one of the smallest countries of Europe, the number of Freethinkers there is not large, and the greater part of them are mere indifferentists and do not come under the banner of 'De Dageraad' (The Dutch Freethought Society). . . . In the Dutch country you will seek in vain that exciting Freethought life which you Englishmen have." (November 3.)

From the editor: "The *Methodist Times* speaks of the anti-slavery movement as 'the most intensely Christian movement the world has yet witnessed'. Such a statement needs courage that touches audacity, in face of all the Christian opposition to the abolition movement both in England and in the United States . . ." (December 15.)

CONDITIONING AND CONSCIENCE

D. L. HUMPHRIES

THE problem of freewill versus determinism may perhaps be elucidated by a consideration of the meaning and operation of the term 'my conscience'.

Most people can make a moral choice on a more or less intuitive basis, explaining their subsequent actions as being dictated by their 'conscience'. They may be able to give reasons for their decisions, or they may not, and may be unable to explain what they mean by their 'conscience'. However, they would generally consider that their choice had been a 'free' one in that they were not aware of any coercion by other people, and that they made the 'right' decision insofar as they were able to do so.

If we reject the idea of 'free will' in the sense of implying uncaused behaviour, then it is apparent that all choices have determining factors of some sort—without any necessary implications of fatalism. Hence we may say that a person with a conscience is one who has a set of guiding principles (or powerful inner determinants) which effectively control his actions. Such factors may be the result of social conditioning alone, in which case the person may say he knows what is 'right' but perhaps cannot explain why; or such factors may be the result of much thought by the person himself, in which case he does what *he* thinks is 'right' and can give reasons for it.

In both cases the final actions are the result of ideas *within* the person, such ideas being the result of *prior* causes and which are *strong* enough to outweigh determinants impinging on the individual in the current situation. A highly moral person could be considered thus as being 'inner-directed', 'very conditioned', or 'strong willed'. Conversely, an immoral or person-without-a-conscience type is unreliable, expedient, opportunistic, and subject to the fashions of the times.

RANDOM NOTES by "Comet"

THE FIRST reaction to the Papal Encyclical against artificial contraception is perhaps over. The debate and the revolt will no doubt continue for a long time. From the thousands of words that have appeared in the Press I have picked out a few random but interesting points.

Cardinal Heenan's letter to the Faithful was read out in all churches on August 4. In this he asks those who have become accustomed to artificial methods not to despair, not to abstain from the sacraments and to ask for God's grace to find the strength to obey His law no matter how often they fail—no doubt, a concession to the revolt. One very intelligent Catholic has raised this difficulty, however. If people come up for confession repeatedly, having little or no intention of giving up contraceptives, would that not be a mockery of the Confessional? In the eyes of the Church then, it must be far less sinful for them to undergo sterilisation after having produced the offspring they wish to, since the very drastic nature of the method would make intention to reform virtually useless, repentance and confession *once* being sufficient, thus preserving the dignity of the Confessional! I have not seen any answer to this interesting line of reasoning. I hope this single confession idea appeals to the Roman Catholics in India, because then they could easily fall in line with their compatriots among whom male sterilisation after producing three children seems to be the most popular method.

Of course this does not mean that the 'moral' or 'good' man is *necessarily* right—for we know of 'The Harm That Good Men Do' (Bertrand Russell's essay)—he only *thinks* he is right.

All we are trying to do here is to *explain* the phenomenon of conscience, in the light of determinism, not justify it.

As to the nature of the final summation of determining factors consciously or unconsciously arrived at in any moral decision, these depend on the time and place of one's social and intellectual upbringing. (Hence cannibalism may be quite moral in some communities, and refraining considered wrong.)

And our final decisions can be partly conscious and partly unconscious (or intuitive). But they are *all* determined, or caused, by something or other. The point to be made here is that the desire to be moral is *itself* a causal factor, and that in the moral person such desire, and the subsequent application of the set of principles and social conditioning, is *stronger* than countervailing internal or environmental forces.

For a *society* to be moral it may be assumed that an analogous situation to that within the moral individual should prevail, and it is just this that many upright citizens tend to advocate in their attempts to 'clean up society'. However, we have the Law, and Ideals, and Society Necessity, and Manners, and Good Books, etc., which act to promote good living without the restrictions on freedom and development characterised by censorship, dogmatism, and the party-line. These latter being mistakenly assumed to be analogous to 'conscience' by the righteous.

The *Sunday Times* reports that a 'significant majority' of Bishops have issued directives of 'remarkable generosity' and some priests are imposing a penance of three 'Hail Marys' for married couples (with children), who use contraceptives. This is reckoned to take one minute to perform—though I wouldn't know! It has not been revealed as to what penance is to be imposed on married couples without children, unmarried couples with children and unmarried couples without children!

The *Irish Medical Times* conducted a poll of Irish doctors. Over 500 have replied of whom 65 per cent disagree with the encyclical.

The one method acceptable to God, under certain circumstances, according to the Pope is the Rhythm Method, and the Pope exhorted scientists to find a secure basis for this method, alluding undoubtedly to some drug which would regularise the menstrual cycle. It is odd that God should be expected to reveal such a secret drug to a medical scientist rather than to the Pope! And one fails to see why the new Wonder Pill should not be regarded as an artificial one! In the meantime, an Irish Catholic doctor claims that apart from its unreliability in restraining conception, the rhythm method is more likely to produce deformed babies than if no particular precautions are taken.

Misfortunes never come singly!

BOOK REVIEWS

By H. J. BLACKHAM

ON SCIENCE, NECESSITY AND THE LOVE OF GOD by Simone Weil. Essays collected, translated, and edited by Richard Rees. Oxford University Press, 42s.

SIMONE WEIL, who died in 1943, made a reputation in the fifties almost comparable to the current reputation of Teilhard de Chardin, but her cult was more exclusive, her teaching more forbidding, her appeal less popular. She condemns modern culture unsparingly by exposing it to the light of antiquity. Teilhard points to an exciting future.

This last collection of her work to be published contains unfinished fragments from her notebooks as well as some material previously published. One is reminded of Pascal's *Pensées* by the piercing French intelligence of the author and her similar intellectual and spiritual preoccupations, as well as by some of the fragmentary notes and pieces. She is as authentic as he, and her single reference to him here is to point out his error.

To book is divided into two parts. In the first she is a philosopher of science, finding in the Greeks the essentials of modern mathematics and physics, and criticizing the characteristic concepts of modern physics, not in their technical use but in their popular misinterpretation. She is anxious to save 'necessity', the strict determinism of classical physics. For this, in her interpretation of Greek science, is the link with religion, the symbol of an absolute obedience to the divine will. In the second part of the book, by a detailed examination of passages in Plato and from earlier Greek thinkers who influenced him, she tries to show an anticipation of the essential teaching of Christianity. 'Truth is only manifested in nakedness and nakedness is death; it is the breaking of all attachments which constitute every man's reason for living: the people he loves, public esteem, possessions both material and moral, everything'. Wisdom is supernatural in Plato.

From the point of view of any freethinker or humanist, nothing could be more perverse. And for us it is impossible to read Simone Weil without impatience. All the same, she is worth reading for her sharp reminders of facts of life everyone is apt to evade. Her unflinching attitudes and uncompromising statements compel one to think again, to re-examine one's own assumptions. As a radical Christian she is close to modern young people who have no use for established institutions. Of Christianity after Constantine she says:

"For neutralising a faith, there is no more admirable method than to begin by exterminating the majority of those who hold it and then to make it the official doctrine of an idolatrous State. After which, one exterminates the heretics; and nothing is easier than to include among them those who are trying to conserve the authentic faith. And one canonises people like St Augustine."

She finds in Plato and 'authentic' Christianity allies against society, public opinion, the 'great beast' that moulds everyone willy nilly into conformity with its own approvals, and disapproves of every deviation. For Simone Weil the only alternative is to turn from it all to absolute dependence on God. For us there have to be compromises. But to take time off to see things through her eyes as stark absolutes is a healthy gymnastic for relativists.

NOTE FOR NEW READERS

THE FREETHINKER may be ordered through any reputable British newsagent. The newsagent may order it through most of the larger wholesalers and distributors (Marlborough, Menzies, W. H. Smith, Wyman, Marshall, etc.)—though some newsagents are not yet aware of it and may need it to be pointed out to them. If you wish to order through a newsagent (rather than subscribe to the publishers) please notify your newsagent of this; you will be helping yourself, and helping widen the FREETHINKER'S circulation.

By G. L. SIMONS

God's Obituaries

A FEW YEARS AGO, when Dr John Robinson popularised certain theological trends in *Honest to God*, people became aware that something significant was happening within the Church. But to many people the nature of the turmoil was obscure. Book titles suggested radical change but were not explicit: Tillich's *Shaking of the Foundations*, Jenkins' *Beyond Religion*, and Robinson's own *The New Reformation*?

Two current publications, growing out of the theological ferment, could not have clearer titles: *Radical Theology and the Death of God* (Pelican, 5/-) by Thomas J. J. Altizer and William Hamilton, and *God is No More* (Pelican, 4/-) by Werner and Lotte Pelz.

The first of these is a collection of self-contained essays, most of which have already appeared in American journals. The common theme is exposition of and contribution to "the American radical or death of God theology". References are made to the usual authorities and sources, to Tillich, Bultmann, Barth, Nietzsche, Dostoevsky *et al*, and there is the inevitable chapter on Dietrich Bonhoeffer. The main purpose of the book is explanation, and it must be judged accordingly. I deem it to have failed.

Whilst agreeing with Altizer that "no-one could deny that a terrible crisis is upon us", the "us" presumably referring to fellow reflective Christians, how can I sympathise with his sentiment that "Without doubt theology must abandon Christendom, and . . . Christendom may well include all the meaning which the word 'Christian' carries to our ears"? Here is the persistent paradox! God may be dead but theology must soldier on!

Such a position cannot be made clear because its inherent self-contradiction renders it meaningless—unless, of course, the terms are redefined to achieve consistency. But the sorry vegetarian with a hankering for meat cannot solve his dilemma by calling steak "lettuce". These theologians are clear in one thing only, to preserve the central paradox: Hamilton, for instance, maintains that "the death of God theologians claim to be theologians, to be Christians . . ."

The second book, by Werner and Lotte Pelz, is an attempt to show the relevance of Jesus to our lives, whether we are believers in God or not. To a great extent rationalists can welcome this aim: we can learn from significant historical (or mythical) individuals; we can gain insight into their experiences; we can identify their feelings. But the exercise can only be fruitful if it is pursued with clarity and honesty. The present work falls short.

There is constant reference to "the words of Jesus"; a mystical significance is assigned to them; the phrase drifts through the text in ghostly fashion, intended to move and make significant. But the words of Jesus are never quoted in any detail. Which words? When Jesus was damning the scribes or cursing the fig-tree? When he was predicting perdition for speaking against the Holy Ghost? When on the Cross he lost his faith?

The authors are profoundly moved by the image they have of Jesus. But the image is unreal, and the human problems that they discuss through the framework of a godless Christianity are scarcely approached. They discuss marriage and creativity and responsibility but the method is oblique and trite. The questions are cast in an ethereal way, and I can hardly recognise the problems of ordinary men and women in a difficult world. And why must our "deChristianised" theologians always discuss the world in terms of Jesus Christ? When are they going to rhapsodise on the profound ethical significance of Buddha, Socrates, and "the words of Bertrand Russell"?

The dilemma of our struggling theologians and reflective Christians is plain. They are outstaged and clutch at any way to make crumbs of their philosophy relevant to life. And they are estranged equally from the movement of history and the still believing laity. We must try to ease them into the rational humanism which they are really seeking.

FILM REVIEW

By AL SCHROEDER

"THE BOFORS GUN"

Circumstances permitting

THE WEATHER is a circumstance which today, with the data received from orbiting satellites, can be predicted with a great degree of accuracy. The behaviour of a man of an unbalanced mind is a circumstance difficult to predict, and left unchecked can create a degree of havoc which can, even, alter the course of history.

This unpredictability of an unbalanced mind is the main point of dramatic tension in *The Bofors Gun*: how, one night during guard duty, an Irish soldier decides to test the nature of his existence in an absolute rejection of all authority, all order and all dignity and self-respect.

Set in a British Army camp in Occupied Germany in 1954, the film is based on John McGrath's play *Events While Guarding the Bofors Gun*. The events in the film do not alter the course of history, but they make a decided shift in the destiny of a young English national serviceman, the corporal of the guard.

He has hopes of returning to England and trying for the commission he has already once failed to win. But the psychopathic behaviour of the Irishman proves to be a circumstance which compromises the corporal's position with his superiors with the result that the hapless corporal is arrested and court marshalled.

The disturbing point of McGrath's statement is that life in this earth-bound existence is not worth, in the words of the tormented Irishman, "a monkey's fart!" This is born out by the Englishman who seemingly wishes to re-

turn to his mother's womb, and the catholic Irishman's desire to join, or, at least meet, God.

The other characters in the film, except one who prefers his erotic dreams had while sleeping in the guard hut, seem particularly unaware of any world outside the perimeter of the camp, cigarettes from the NAAFI being their perennial concern.

With its action mainly confined to the guard hut, the screen play is more suited to the stage. But when we see the remarkable performance by Nicol Williamson as the Irishman, there is no doubt that only the cinema could contain the complexity of this characterisation. The smallest traces of humour, horror, sadness and fearless comprehension are captured on the film, and, yes, it is cinema. He manages to convey to us that we are all poor humans told too much too soon, that seldom do we have the opportunity to choose our loyalties, that all of us are manipulated by some regime or other, social, political, spiritual or our personal one, that our fathers failed for us, or fought for us, and that we are all too often reminded of the functions of our lower intestines.

As the Englishman, David Warner does little more than knit his brow. And that little more is to unravel it. He does it all with extreme difficulty.

The director, on this, his first film, is Jack Gold. He has done a good, solid workman-like job, but there is no real style in his work. (Joseph Losey has style—*King and Country*.)

This film is an extremely unpleasant one in that its message reminds us that the business of living is a sordid ugly one. Adventure and romance, entertainments and excitements are not to be found in the lives of these characters. This film purports that without these diversions the spirit of man, and the energies of the individual can only establish themselves through violence and destruction, and that this very violence and destruction to these men is their very humanity.

to get an easier life inside and what to get it with, was played in 'camp' style by Al Mancini; the climax of his performance being the hilarious Christmas Concert drag act.

Smitty, the small time thief, discovers homosexuality and what it can get him, under the expert tuition of Queenie, and becomes the king in a den of queen's. Robert Howay portrays with conviction the change from the green Smitty to the cunning Smitty who eventually rules the roost.

Rocky (Peter Marinker) is despicable because he is the nothing who makes himself out to be the big man. He takes Smitty under his wing for purely perverted and egotistical reasons, until Smitty turns on him (under Queenie's influence) and beats him up.

Mona, who is inside on a trumped up homosexuality charge, would probably have turned queer outside prison as easily as he did inside. Because of his total lack of forcefulness, any trouble in the dormitory is pinned on him and he takes it lying down—as he does everything else. Louis Negin gives a suitably insipid performance as Mona.

The limitations of the theatre were well overcome with simple but effective lighting by Roland Miller, and direction by Charles Marowitz. The aura of the play was caught by the audience as soon as the tickets were checked at the door, being then hustled rather than ushered by uniformed warders through cells to the auditorium, and thumb printed to get a programme.

Altogether it is an interesting, entertaining and stimulating performance.

THEATRE

By QUENTIN SEACOME

'FORTUNE AND MEN'S EYES' at the Open Space Theatre provided as realistic a look at prison reformatory life as is likely to be seen in any theatre. The overriding theme of the play was homosexuality, and how it affected the non-lives of the four inmates of the dormitory.

Homosexuality has been dealt with quite liberally in theatres, films and television recently, but probably not with such frankness as there was in this performance. Full credit goes to the management, the director and the cast for the reality with which this bold piece of writing was brought alive. It is high time subjects which are supposedly obscene were dealt with in their true light. This is the role that experimental theatre clubs should play. The Open Space does. However the clientele of theatre clubs are generally broad-minded enough to appreciate so-called obscenities, so now with the lift of censorship we can hope for more reality in the theatre, but only if it is in context and not just thrown in to shock audiences.

The four inmates, three of whom are petty hoodlums and the fourth a bewildered frame-up case, are under the charge of a too normal warder (George Margo) who is aware of the goings-on, and views them with great distaste.

Queenie, the complete 'lady' of the dormitory, who knows how

LETTERS

Billion ?

JUST A SMALL POINT, referring to the article "The Solar System—the Universe and Man" by Bernard T. Rocca, Sr. (August 30).

On the first page of the article he says "it is now estimated that the earth is probably over four billion years old". On the second page he says "our earth has been here at least 40 million centuries . . .".

The word 'billion' as here used is meant to signify a thousand million, as used in the United States and elsewhere, and not a million million as in England. The second reference makes this clear but in my opinion the term 'billion' is best avoided because of the liability of misinterpretation.

This is not intended to criticise Mr Rocca's excellent article but merely to help anyone who might be puzzled by the inconsistency.
S. S. A. WATKINS.

Attention, Atheists

I REGRET to have to inform readers that my project for providing income for a massive and sustained attack upon the doctrines that disgrace modern society, as mentioned in my article "Opportunity Knocks", has had an inadequate response, and, if it is to go forward, will need better support. My project is the establishment of a chain of retail businesses throughout the country. It is a very safe project, as I am prepared to explain to any interested secularists. Atheism has got to be put on the map. Secular-Humanism will fail in its aspirations unless its present tepid policy is replaced by a dynamically atheistic one. It is up to Freethinkers, Humanists, Rationalists, to dedicate themselves to the task of constructing a powerhouse to destroy the superstitious creed that hagrises so great a portion of our population. So let there be a greater response to my proposal.

I am glad to be able to say that a valuable suggestion—in my view—has been put forward by a correspondent from Darkest Africa. Mr Don Baker, of the Botswana Humanist Association, has a foreign stamp scheme which, he says, may be worked at little financial risk. He will be returning to England in September, and I shall be meeting him to explore its possibilities. Will those interested in either of these projects write to me at 67 Broadmead Road, Folkestone, Kent.
F. H. SNOW.

Blasphemy or Obscenity

DAVID TRIBE tells us (August 16) that blasphemy features in many statutes and is also a common law offence.

The need to repeal such measures is surely relative to evidence of their enforcement and of the effects of their form.

The need to repeal the 'most outrageous' indecency-obscenity Acts is evident in the many destructive effects suffered under both their form and enforcement.

Jean Straker has given us the evidence. It is up to us to give him support.
CHARLES BYASS.

Objective, not absolute

THE space given to the Rev. J. J. Thompson's article (August 16) dismayed me. He did not understand what was meant by 'absolute'. His theory is claimed as the total and only basis for ethics—that is what was meant. Granted, his theory is objective (in the generalised 'global' sense as opposed to 'local').

Is there any undeclared connection between J. J. and A. C. Thompson? The latter's 'Social-Survival' theory I criticised in the FREETHINKER (November 3, 1967) in my "A Mathematician's Complaints About Writings on Ethics", where I also discussed absolutism more fully, and further, pointed out that the unfortunate effect of Thompson's ideas is a population saturation in abysmal conditions.
M. J. O'CARROL.

[There is a connection between J. J. and A. C. Thompson—they are one and the same—but not an 'undeclared' connection; it was declared on the front page of the May 17, 1968, issue.—Ed.]

More on morality

I WOULD like to express my great pleasure in reading the article

"Sexual morals—A Personal View" by Connaire Kensit and Ruth Buchanan in the August 9 issue of the FREETHINKER. It expounds so clearly my own convictions about morality, which I never seem able to communicate to other people. What pleases me so much, however, is the fact that it is written by young people, with many years before them for spreading their ideas, which to my mind will enrich human life far more than all that mumbo-jumbo in J. J. Thompson's Philosophian Church.
(Mrs) M. HEADEY.

The myth of democracy

"THE representative process will only operate fairly if the populations of the constituencies are of at least approximately equal size" is not really true, for that provision, although important, is by no means sufficient. For instance, there have been two recent cases (Liverpool and Sheffield) of a town revising its wards so as to make them more equal but getting, in the consequent election of the whole council, a result that was worse as regards party representation—the party with the most votes lost.

It is essential also to have the proportional representation to which Mr Lowry refers later in his article, and that, besides giving fair representation to the parties, will have other far-reaching effects in the direction of giving greater reality to democracy.

At present, the voter's control over the machinery of government is minimal. For instance, the prospective Conservative candidate, and probably the next MP, for Eton and Slough has recently been chosen by a vote of 55 to 52; anyone who wishes to vote Conservative there will have to vote for the man chosen by this bare majority of 107 people, whether or not he considers him personally fit to be an MP or agrees with his views on immigration, the Common Market or any of the other matters on which opinions vary within the party. And, because an MP thus depends for his seat on the party organisation which chooses him as its candidate, and not on his constituents, he can be subjected to what seems to most of us an unreasonable degree of party discipline.

If, however, we had PR (in its single transferable vote form, of course), the voters would have a free choice among candidates of different shades within each party, and if they preferred the independent-minded "rebel" to the obedient toe-cr of party lines, nothing could prevent their electing him. This is by far the most important of the reforms needed to place real power in the hands of the people.
ENID LAKEMAN,

Director, Electoral Reform Society.

A Fortnightly ?

I AM over 90, and have enjoyed reading the FREETHINKER for the past 65 years.

I was particularly interested in your article on "The Freethinker's Future" last week, and I am writing this to say that I think your proposal to issue a larger magazine fortnightly is dead right, and I hope the NSS will back it.
A. W. COLEMAN.

RE the FREETHINKER's future; I would like to express my support for Mr Hyde's ideas (and Mr C. H. Godfrey) for making the paper a viable publication.
STANLEY GOODMAN,

Hon. Sec., Havering Humanist Society.

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