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DURHAM REPORT LACKS STAYING POWER

THE MUCH TALKED ABOUT report of the Bishop of Durham's Commission on Religious Education was published last week, under the title, *The Fourth R*. It is a very comprehensive document, 400 pages long, and in many respects it is fair and unbiased. It sets out the arguments against religious instruction and also admits that religious education has been over the centuries a process of indoctrination. It even includes appendices in which the views of the British Humanist Association and the National Secular Society are given.

So reasonable in fact is this part of the document that its conclusions constitute a mammoth anti-climax or, one could say, a *non-sequitur*. Though it recommends that "the statutory provisions relating to religious instruction and school worship in the 1944 Act" should be repealed, its principal suggestion is as follows: ". . . that any new Education Act should attempt to define more precisely, though only in brief outline, the essential basic components of the education to be given to all pupils at School and that religious education should be placed within this general educational context. The Act might, we think, lay down that all pupils in county and voluntary schools should be provided, . . . with education in the arts and sciences, in religion and morals, and in physical and practical skills. In doing this the new Act, like the present one, could then place a general duty upon LEAs to ensure that such educational provision is made . . ."

Though the Commission sets out as its first recommendation that: "The term 'religious instruction' should be replaced forthwith by the term 'religious education,'" it suggests that school worship should also continue to receive statutory recognition.

Thus, where one would expect the Commission to suggest the RE should be downgraded and cease to be statutory, one finds a plea for the upgrading of all other subjects so that religion no longer sticks out like a sore thumb. The only real changes that the report would bring about were it to be implemented, are the abolition of the LEA's agreed syllabuses and the resulting freedom for each school to adopt its own method of teaching religion. Very few other changes are suggested, "Conscience clauses for teachers and withdrawal rights for parents should be preserved . . .". The Commission dodges a number of issues, notably that of immigrant children by calling for further bodies to be set up to inquire into them.

However, there can be no denying that this report is the first to come from a religious source which even attempts to face the facts, even if it only faces them in theory. Commenting on the report, David Tribe, the President of the National Secular Society, put the humanist standpoint thus: "If the difficulties admitted in the report are given their full value there is, in our submission, an overwhelming case for abandoning religion in maintained schools except as a background to history, literature, art and social studies".

CHURCH SCHOOL SEEKS MONEY FROM SECULARISTS

THE Bishop of Durham's report also lays emphasis on the church's financial straits and one of its recommendations is that ". . . the Church of England should continue to accept its commitment to voluntary aided schools, but—because of the financial burden—should plan to do so on a proportionately reduced scale".

David Tribe was recently invited to contribute towards the cost of an extension to a church school. Before deciding whether this was a worthy cause, he went into the matter very thoroughly. His findings are set out in the following press release, which he entitled 'More Blessed to Receive than to Give' and issued on June 1:

"A few days ago I was a little surprised to receive not one but two letters from a vicar, the Rev Bartholomew J. Kendall of St Jude's, Southwark. They were directed to two publishing companies, one of them Secular Society Ltd., that are associated with the National Secular Society, and they invited the boards 'to support a project that is bound to benefit the community for generations to come'. If we did so our names would appear on a Subscription List that 'will be published and circulated to all National and Local Newspapers, to Subscribers, and other interested parties'. Could we survive economically or live socially if we did not figure when the roll was called up yonder, or down yonder, at St Jude's? A century or so ago, probably not. Today my name will circulate nationally and locally, but under this press statement.

Now, 103 Borough High Street is not in the parish of St Jude's but—I think—the furthestmost corner of the neighbouring parish of St George-the-Martyr. We are apparently two of the '1,000 business men in Southwark' (*South London Press*, 19 May) in three parishes (the third is Christ Church) whose Anglican primary schools are amalgamated, and for all I know in regions beyond, who have thus been circularised. And we are invited to be generous. Presumably Mr Kendall, like a good chairman of managers of a church school, rarely if ever reads the educational press or he might have known the views of secularists on such institutions and foreseen that our comments would be more copious than our cash. But all is grist to the mill of the begging bowl of St Jude's.

As I shall very shortly (19 June) be appearing at Conway Hall with the Lord Bishop of Durham, Archbishop Roberts and Miss Brigid Brophy in a forum on 'Should the State Support Church Schools?' and then be writing a pamphlet *The Cost of Church Schools*, I don't propose to say anything here about the general principals of state-maintained indoctrination and segregation. I shall confine myself to some local researches I was moved to make on receipt of these tear-jerking appeals.

'We', said the covering letter, 'are pioneers of education. We have been so for centuries.' No mention of the fact that for centuries the Church banned all education outside monasteries and

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up till very recent times only people approved by the Church of England could set about 'teaching and instructing youth as a tutor or schoolmaster' (Act of 1779). The letter recalls the Education Act of 1870 but not the fact that a similar Act would have become law in 1807 if the Bench of Bishops hadn't intervened. Instead we get a glowing tribute to the educational work of the 'Society for the Promotion of Christian Knowledge'. Actually the society is called 'for Promoting', but what is a minor lapse in nomenclature in a document so generally misleading?

Accompanying the letter is a brochure with photographs of the first extension to St Jude's School, Colnbrook Street, four years ago (after some houses had been demolished) and the site of the proposed second extension. From the latter illustration it looks as if the four houses on this site are derelict, though their structural soundness could not be camouflaged. On investigation it turns out that two of them are still occupied and the other two were vacated very recently. Presumably the two families that have gone were persuaded to take the first council flats offered, though they would be likely to be half the size, double the price, and less convenient in many ways than the houses these families were thrown out of. The Church has not, by the way, had to incur the opprobrium of notices to quit and possible evictions, as the council obligingly bought the houses on its behalf and at its expense before, it seems, local residents were informed of the proposal to extend the school. The Government will pay £18,000 of the £23,000 building costs and the premises, which will be owned by the Church of England, will have all their running costs (including salaries and wages) met by the council. I am told that the parents of the children at St Jude's School have declined to contribute to the £5,000 outstanding (probably feeling they are already making enough sacrifice to the parish by sending their children there, as it has never, in its entire history, enjoyed a high repute in the neighbourhood). Equally tight-fisted, apparently, have been the billionaire Church Commissioners and the Diocesan Board of Finance. Thus the Church authorities are hoping to make good the discrepancy—perhaps with a surplus—by cadging from local businessmen of any and no religious beliefs. And so the Lord looks after his own.

In my wanderings in the area I came upon some other interesting facts and assertions which the vicar may like to comment on. On two occasions—one of them a Sunday midday—I found the church locked when I tried to visit it. Outside is a notice board which lists three Sunday services. There is no mention of any other services. I am informed a midweek one was discontinued as there weren't enough there to make it worthwhile. That, I am told, could be said of the Sunday ones, but they are a legal obligation. Nor is there any mention of other activities—such as a Sunday school. I could see no announcement of the vicar's name, address or telephone number. Those wanting forms, churchings and to make enquiries are invited to go to the church at 10 a.m. Wednesday or 8 p.m. Friday 'if possible'. The vicarage is actually attached to the church, but it isn't identified in any way that I could see and appears to be one of a terrace of houses having no connection with it. Through the begging letter, any Southwark businessman knows better than a hungry parochial soul how to contact the vicar save on those rare occasions when his church is actually open (I presume for the services and the visits). Not surprisingly Mr Kendall enjoys a higher reputation among those I spoke to in the parish for his appeals than for his pastoral ministry.

With the acute housing shortage in London, especially South London, it is instructive to see what interest the Church has taken in rehousing those unfortunate families whose homes it has unceremoniously grabbed to ensure that St Jude's is full at least once a week (when, I suppose, the school population is dragooned for a special act of worship). The vicarage is a five-storeyed villa, but there is no room for the homeless in that inn. In the street which runs out of Colnbrook Street, Gladstone Street, I am told the parish has up till recently owned three houses (readily identifiable by their state of maintenance). When one of these became vacant at the happy time when a conservation order raised local property values, it was promptly sold on the open market; for, I am told,

£7,600—more than enough to meet the outstanding debt on the school extension. And what of the sites of the two abandoned church schools in the locality? St George-the-Martyr Parochial School was closed in 1966 and now appears to be part of the Students' Union of the Borough Polytechnic. Christ Church Parochial School is described as having given an education 'first class by any standard'. That isn't how local residents remember it. Be that as it may, it was closed in 1967 and demolished in 1968. For the erection of low-cost housing? Not a bit of it. For a development by Messrs Stevenson and Howell, essence distillers. How much, the cadged businessmen of Southwark will want to know, did the Church make in these deals and what happened to the money, so that even £5,000 is now too much for them to face in expanding the amalgamated school? A school which, apart from Anglican brain-washing, is utterly superfluous to the needs of Southwark, which has a large county primary directly opposite St Jude's and other primary schools near the abandoned schools. Indeed, children coming from the catchment area of Christ Church have to cross two busy and dangerous main roads, Borough and London, to get their indoctrination sessions ("children need the basis of faith as they discover the facts of the world around them and the powers latent within them") at St Jude's.

There is another piece of information most Southwark businessmen won't have. Both the local Albert Association and the Southwark Archaeological Society object to the demolition of rather attractive early Victorian terraces and are 'determined to halt this trend' (*South London Press*, 3 April). On 19 May the Southwark Deputy Borough Planner was able to reveal: 'The planning application regarding the extension of St Jude's School still requires further consideration as the original proposals were unacceptable from the Civic Design point of view'. But what does that matter so long as the children can continue to be piled into the existing accommodation and Southwark's businessmen give generously. The Church could, no doubt, find other uses for the money.

So there it is. On top of segregation and indoctrination, we have destruction of amenities and buildings of character, the uprooted lives of sick and worried evacuees, and a series of financial manoeuvres and impertinent solicitations that would leave the shrewdest forces of Mammon gasping at their audacity. This is the Church of England in 1970."

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

Humanitas Stamps: Help 5 Humanist charities. Buy stamps from or send them to Mrs. A. C. Goodman, 51 Percy Road, Romford, RM7 8QX, Essex. British and African speciality. Send for list.

Humanist Holidays. Youth Camp, the Wye Valley, late July and early August. Family Centre, Aberystwyth, Monday, August 17 until Tuesday, September 1. Full board just over £2 per day with reductions for children. Details from Mrs Mephram, Fairview Road, Sutton, Surrey. Telephone 01-642 8796.

COMING EVENTS

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.

INDOOR

Leicester Humanist Society: At the home of Mr and Mrs P. Simon, 5 Guilford Road, Leicester: Thursday, June 18, 8 p.m.: A wine and cheese evening.

South Place Ethical Society: Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London, WC1: Sunday, June 14, 11 a.m.: "Scapegoats", Kathleen McColgan. Admission free. 3 p.m.: Humanist forum

—"Aircraft v. People", Richard Wiggs (Anti-Concorde project) and Gordon Lansborough (CHAOS). Admission free (tea 2s).

Wigmore Hall, London, Wednesday, June 24, 7.30 p.m.: Recital by Derek Wilkes (tenor) with Bruno Raikin (piano). Tickets: 12/6, 8/6, 5/-.

RACIALISM AND RELIGION

BILL HUGHES

RELIGION has an appeal to those who wish to preserve power in the hands of an elite. Elites owe their strength to the fear that they command over their subjects by emphasising the threat that different groups pose to their own identity. Religion is therefore a very useful device to emphasise nationalistic mania, and invents differences between people in order to justify war between nations. So we see the spectacle of Jews slaughtering Arabs, Moslems fighting Hindus and so on. The war crimes of Christians are too well documented in past issues of the FREETHINKER to warrant me going through all the atrocities of them, each European country thinking that they were defending the Lords' interests by promoting chauvinistic battle with ecclesiastical blessing.

Religion proved to be very useful for colonisation and made fine slaves in America and Africa (Asians proved more difficult to indoctrinate). Today the evil influence of Baptist and other fundamentalist sects are still powerful in the Southern States of America and the West Indies. Religion teaches submission and tolerance of adversity in reward for better things in the 'next life'. The plantations were hotbeds for any evangelical preacher or 'saved' layman who could whip up emotional frenzy among the receptive black workers. Lacking any other recreational facilities religion and negro spirituals became one of the main forms of entertainment.

In South Africa it is the extreme Protestant Dutch Reformed Church that reinforces the belief that the blacks are an inferior race and should be treated as slaves. The Anglicans are not far behind in their connivance in promoting Apartheid policies. The visit of the Archbishop of York Dr Coggan to South Africa in the winter and the blessing he gave to the Church of England's work there plus cordial talks with Mr Vorster all goes to tarnish any image that 'progressive' churchmen like Trevor Huddleston may try to promote to criticise Apartheid. The majority of the Church of England clergy in South Africa uphold the principal of separate worship and any that may have any Christian 'conscience' about the brotherhood of man and that sort of thing have either left the sunny land altogether or put up no opposition whatsoever whether it be through the Progressive Party or through more effective means.

Christians in Britain have shown the same disarray over policy regarding the visit of the white South African cricket team as other political and moral spokesmen. The Lord's wishes or wisdom has had as many interpretations as the political prejudices of His servants. On the one hand the High Tory C of E blimps scream about 'keep politics out of sport, freedom of speech, play and who we invite, law and order' all in the same breath, while the pink South Bank set remain calm but censorious over the 'moral principles' and standard of 'civilisation' and that we must do something (provided it's peaceful and won't upset anybody) to condemn South Africa. This is all fine as long as a General Election is not suddenly announced. As soon as it became clear that Peter Hain and his merry men were beginning to make things look interesting in British politics for a change, suddenly Mr Callaghan and Mr Wilson became overcome with shock and indignation at the barbarity of the South African method of selecting their cricket team (Rugby is OK) and also noted in passing the sufferings of the Bantu. The tour was promptly called off, morals

won the day, bishops patted each other on the back and said how worthwhile all those fine letters to the *Times* and *Guardian* were, the Liberal Party basked in the fame their 'Red Guards' (previously condemned) had brought them. No, the real reason was that Labour saw that the Conservatives (except Edward Boyle) had found a real issue on which they actually differed and which might possibly have made the pendulum swing away from Transport House over Selsdon Man's law getting out of order. What with all the stocks of CS gas shipped over to Northern Ireland, Anguilla and elsewhere and spare CID men all rather occupied, prudence proved to be a greater attraction than democracy (invite who you like, majority decisions of the Cricket Council).

The result of all this excitement is that Mr Vorster has made a whacking great propaganda drive out of the British Government giving in to 'blackmail'. One lot of clerics are angry but relieved that law and order has not been broken (cricket's only a game after all), while the other lot of clerics may now be turning their minds to trade, investments and the British Navy's Simonstown base in South Africa but for the moment will do nothing until some rather more energetic Red Guards start campaigning. While the atmosphere of pulpit and vestry has become calmer the sufferings of black, white, brown, yellow and other shades of men throughout the world continue despite the beneficence of 'Our Father' who art rather thoughtless in the political regimes he favours his peoples with. As long as there are vast wealth and privileges to be defended, religion will be close at hand to keep the people in their place.

PUBLIC FORUM

SHOULD THE STATE SUPPORT CHURCH SCHOOLS?

BRIGID BROPHY

THE LORD BISHOP OF DURHAM

(Dr Ian Ramsey)

ARCHBISHOP ROBERTS, SJ

DAVID TRIBE

(President, National Secular Society)

Chairman: MAX WILKINSON

(Editor, *The Teacher*)

CONWAY HALL, Red Lion Square, London, WC1

(Nearest Underground: Holborn)

FRIDAY, 19 JUNE, 7.30 p.m.

Admission free; reserved seats 5/-

from the organisers THE NATIONAL SECULAR SOCIETY

103 Borough High Street, London, SE1

Tel.: 01-407 2717

MASTER THOMAS OF LONDON

ELIZABETH COLLINS

'ALL POWER' CORRUPTS Lord Acton's famous words could well have been applied to the 12th century conflict between Henry II and Thomas Becket, or Master Thomas of London as he preferred to be called. A contest of power to decide who should rule England, King or Archbishop, Church or State? Both motivated by the corrupting influence of financial greed euphemistically alluded to as 'rights' 'justice' and 'customs'. Henry was naturally angry and astonished when a man whom he had raised to high office, treated as an intimate friend and confidant should suddenly turn and defy him. Thomas had cunningly waited for the opportune moment after his consecration as Archbishop with its achievement of power, in order to do his coat-turning act; then claiming that he served a higher court than that of king or emperor!

One could call Thomas Becket's life a good theatrical performance on the European stage. He played his parts well and his end was as dramatic as his life. Let us take a look at this man who became a saint practically overnight 800 years ago; who was concerned in a dispute that reverberated through Europe, the echoes of which are still with us today. Thomas was born to well-to-do Norman parents who had settled in London in Cheapside. In his native village of Thierceville in Normandy his father, Gilbert Becket, had been the boyhood playmate of Theobald, later Archbishop of Canterbury, and in England their friendship was maintained. Thomas was born in London, and educated at Merton Priory an Augustinian house. He then went on to Pevensey Castle, home of his father's friend Baron Richar L'Aigle for training in knightly pursuits, hawking, hunting and courtley ways. Finally he went to the theological schools in Paris, but never attained academic distinction.

Returning from Paris he worked for a short time as a notary for l'Aigle and then in the office of Osbert Huitdeniers, an eminent City man, where he received good training in accountancy and business administration. Through the good offices of Archdeacon Baldwin of Boulogne who recommended him to Theobald he entered the Archbishop's service as a clerk. From that moment his success was assured, for he immediately won the personal favour of the Archbishop who treated him with great confidence. He accompanied the Primate on a special mission to Rome and then Theobald sent him to the Law schools of Bologna and Auxerre. In 1154 he was appointed Archdeacon of Canterbury which meant presiding over the Episcopal Court, to qualify for which he had to be ordained deacon, the lowest minor order. He was then 35.

To provide him with a suitable income Becket was presented with numerous livings, Deaneries, and Prebends in two cathedrals, St Paul's and Lincoln. There is no evidence to show that he had any vocation for the religious life, rather he inclined to the secular. He was an unlovable character, cold, self-centred, vain, ambitious, obsessed with a craving for power and all the theatrical trappings that in medieval times went with it.

Then in 1155 the King needed a Chancellor. This was the highest office under the Crown and naturally Henry consulted Theobald who suggested Becket, no doubt feeling that the affairs of the Church would be in safe hands with his protégé as Chancellor. Henry agreed, and in January 1155 Thomas Becket received the custody of the Great Seal of England with all its responsibilities. This

meant personal attendance upon the King in a confidential capacity. Soon the two men became friends, sharing the same love of sport, certain intellectual pursuits and the good life generally. However both were ambitious, of a despotic temperament, a mercenary streak, and both bent on maintaining absolute power in the respective positions they were called upon to occupy, but for which neither was really fitted. Becket became the polished courtier, the warrior leading 700 knights to battle in the Toulouse campaign 1159, jousting with French knights, leader of fashion—his rich robes with their heavily embroidered sleeves sweeping the ground—a gambler, living in extreme luxury to the neglect of his Archdeacon's duties for which Theobald reproved him. He now had great wealth and had reached an eminence which gave him a reputation outside England, as the Abbot of La Celle reminded him, 'Who doth not know that you are second to the King in four kingdoms?'

Long remembered was the Chancellor's pompous embassy to Paris to arrange a French marriage for Henry's eldest son. The magnificence of what was a triumphal procession from the French coast to the capital. A spectacle of 350 liveried footmen, eight huge waggons each drawn by five cavalry horses, carrying chapel and room furniture and kitchen equipment—packs of hounds and harriers—a troop of baggage horses bearing rich presents of plate, jewels and coin, with a monkey sitting on each package—pages, butlers, falconers, stewards—then knights and clergy, and lastly in great state the Chancellor himself. Then followed costly banquets in Paris. The whole episode gave rise to questioning at the time as to where the money came from for this display.

Archbishop Theobald died in 1161 and for a year Henry left the post vacant. He wanted Becket for Archbishop although he knew he was no Churchman. He had been a good Chancellor and King's man, but it was not certain that he would so remain. Becket also was reluctant at first but gave way in the end. After all he was a business man and the Church was essentially a business. Pressure was brought to bear on the monks of Canterbury and Thomas was duly elected. Then the farce preceding the consecration got under way. On June 1st, 1162, Becket was ordained priest in Rochester Cathedral, two days later he was consecrated Bishop at Canterbury! The Pope in exile confirmed the election and sent the pallium. This action of Henry's in creating Becket Archbishop over the heads of more eligible men caused great offence in the country.

Thomas then began to play the ascetic role as Archbishop as perfectly as he had played the courtier. The Pope was now his overlord. Every shadowy claim his Church could make was pursued and investigated. Those who resisted were excommunicated. Then came the clash with the King, and the Council of Clarendon, which was not felt to be a quarrel between Church and State by the majority of clergy, but an assertion of the right of the King's Court to define the limits of ecclesiastical jurisdiction.

Becket did not see it like that and refused to seal the written Constitutions after having given his verbal consent. Not wishing to offend Henry or desert Becket the Pope remained neutral.

The real crisis came when Thomas was summoned to appear before the King at Northampton for an alleged

failure of justice towards John the Marshal in his own court. The proceedings there and his dramatic behaviour are well known. To avoid a harsh sentence he managed to escape to the continent and started his six-year exile at Pontigny. Then began the efforts of Pope and legates, the King of France and others to patch up the quarrel. But Becket was adamant. The Church must be supreme in England. Henry also was adamant. He was the King. At last the Pope, now back in Rome and sure of his position, allowed Becket to use the threat of excommunication and Interdict against Henry, and *that* was something the King really feared. Meetings were arranged—terms were discussed—and finally at Freteval a peace of sorts was arrived at. Becket would go back to Canterbury and resume his See, but although he and Henry met and talked amicably the King refused the 'kiss of peace' which was a solemn binding act and seal of a promise. Becket realised then that it was only a truce between them, but still went ahead with his plans to return to England.

He carried with him letters of excommunication which the Pope allowed him to use at his discretion, but urged moderation. Reaching Wissant he learned that a body of armed men awaited him at Dover 'to have his head'. Also that the Bishops of London and Salisbury were there. He immediately sent over letters of excommunication against the two Bishops and suspended the Archbishop of York!

A HUMANIST ATTACK ON ABSOLUTE DETERMINISM

F. M. SKINNER

THERE ARE MATERIALISTS, it seems, who cannot get away from the dogma of determinism and claim that all things are essentially predictable if the data were available. Certainly the majority of physical phenomena appear predictable and evidence gives us a high probability of correctness. Even human behaviour is largely predictable given enough of the background information and much (perhaps most), of what we think we do of choice is caused by our heredity and environment. However if there was no possibility of real choice we should be little more than puppets being controlled by circumstance. There would be no point in attempting to alter what most of us consider to be undesirable conditions or in alleviating pain and suffering. (Shades of God's will.)

It would be intolerable if Humanism was based on such a dogmatic premise as absolute determinism. My Humanism has as its basis the idea that each and every form of matter or life is a new experience. Each animal, each flower, each mind, each supernova is a set of circumstances and states of matter that has never existed before (we cannot turn time back), and as such is essentially unpredictable with absolute certainty. To suppose that all is caused by history *ad infinitum* is no more rational than to suppose that all is caused by a perverse and wicked tyrant from another dimension.

The relationships about to take place between particles set up in a certain proximity and order cannot be established if that particular pattern has never occurred before. There *will* be causes for the establishment of the new conditions but these will not be apparent until *after* the event. Thus I may write a strong letter to FREETHINKER and cause someone to reply but this could not have been predicted absolutely, neither my mind nor theirs ever having existed before in their respective states. If an absolute prediction is to be made, it is necessary to have knowledge of the complete set of states of all matter (as each particle

A tactless move? He then embarked for Sandwich, landed there and rode to Canterbury. Before sailing he had told his chaplain that he was going to his death, and on December 29th, 1170, the fate he had continually envisaged overtook him. The story of his death in the Cathedral at the hands of four knights is too well known to relate here.

It is likely that Becket was the prime contributor to his own death; he constantly referred to it in terms that suggested a wish for martyrdom, which would certainly set the seal on his remarkable career and contribute to his vanity. The angry, frustrated and abusive letters he sent to the Pope and the Curia at the failure of the peace moves to fulfil his own desires showed a tendency to mental unbalance, and he may already have decided on the role of victim. His death was a gift to the Church. It immediately saw its opportunity and sprang into action. Miracles were reported within two days and quickly multiplied in that superstitious age to increase the power and prestige of an unscrupulous Church over an illiterate people.

The Becket story is one episode in the continual struggle for power between religious and civil authorities, with a cynical disregard for the common people who were, and in some cases still are, its dupes. Those considerations hardly worried ecclesiastical authorities in 1170, for the tomb of Master Thomas of London attracted one of the most lucrative pilgrimages in history.

affects each other by however small an amount) and to know the result of this situation from previous experience. If the situation is different in the tiniest degree from the earlier experience, then there is a finite probability that the result will be different to the last time. This being so, the prediction cannot be absolute. (I have ignored the fact that to have knowledge of all present states of all matter and knowledge of their past, requires the storage and manipulation of this data in another medium, to achieve a prediction. For this reason no medium can have entire knowledge of itself, hence the impossibility of omniscience.)

In each new circumstance we use our past experience to set up yet another new circumstance with the intention of creating our desired ends. Our purposes are the result of the creation of abstract circumstances in our minds, most of them being initially impossible, and by the use of reason visualise a set of conditions which, if prevailing at the right time, will give a high probability of success. This process of creation in our minds is essentially irrational, non-logical (dreams being an obvious example), and often leads to concepts of non-existent causes such as astrology, gods, the efficacy of 'good luck' charms and superstitious practices like prayer.

What we consider desirable will, of course, depend on our past experience for the most part but will also be influenced by our imagination of things that have not yet happened in physical terms. Sometimes the results will lead to joys beyond our dreams and sometimes to catastrophe but each is a new experience. It was not predictable in total but probable in part.

The causes are observable after the event (or rather the results of them), but the future is a mixture of past cause and continuous creation: by random chance in most of the universe and perhaps by random chance in our minds

(Continued on page 191)

NATIONAL BACKWOODSMEN

NIGEL H. SINNOTT

TRADITIONALLY, the Humanist and Freethought movement in Britain has, as a matter of policy, remained unaligned in the field of party politics, though it is a safe generalisation to say that a substantial majority of members of the national bodies and local groups incline to the left of centre. In exceptional cases, however, the movement has committed itself on a contentious political issue, notably when in 1938 the World Union of Freethinkers, then representing the National Secular Society, Rationalist Press Association, South Place Ethical Society and the Ethical Union, publicly declared for the Republican side in the Spanish civil war, and denounced the anti-Semitic and other measures of the Nazis and Fascists. Since the War, we have often heard it said (of Fascism) that "it couldn't happen here": well, twenty-five years after the unlamented demise of Corporal Schicklegruber's Third Reich, it is happening here, and it is called the National Front.

The National Front is by no means a new organisation; it owes its origin to the amalgamation of a series of ultra-rightist organisations (such as the League of Empire Loyalists) which were a public laughing-stock ten years ago. In recent months, however, the Front has built up considerable reserves of funds, and a (still smallish) core of well "drilled", loyal adherents. It intends to make an all-out bid for votes and publicity in the General Election, and I think it likely that the public are going to hear a good deal of the NF in the next few weeks.

I believe it is generally agreed that a committed Humanist can also be a member of various political parties or none; certainly we have Freethinkers who support Conservative, Liberal, Labour, or various Celtic nationalist parties; we may even have the odd "liberal" Communist. In each case, the individual concerned can reconcile the aims and objects of his party, as he understands it, with his Humanism. It is the object of this essay to show, in my submission, that the same is not true of the National Front, and that this party is by its own declared policy diametrically opposed to all that Rationalism and Humanism stand for.

Firstly, the National Front is publicly and specifically opposed to what has been termed "the permissive society". It seeks to do away with all the recent permissive, and in Humanist eyes very humane, social legislation that has been enacted in the last few years; its spokesmen are for ever droning on about the moral degeneracy of Britain, and unwashed drop-outs and students. The Front's leaders have publicly denounced the "liberal brainwashing" put out by the BBC and condemned "liberalism" and "intellectuals". In particular, I think, Freethinkers should note that one of the candidates the Front is putting up for the General Election in one of the North London constituencies is a Baptist minister, a close friend of Ian Paisley and his boys in Ulster. Another clerical member of the National Front, the Reverend G. H. Nicholson has written: "The Front is the only party which follows the teachings of the Bible. We must have a pure race and the Bible says it is wrong to integrate".

The Front's views on race are already well-known: they advocate mass repatriation of coloured immigrants to their countries of origin (rather painful in the case of "half-castes"!) and trot out a mass of scare stories and pseudo-scientific racist sociological arguments, most of which were exposed as fallacious thirty years ago, only this time

it is the Sikhs, Jamaicans and Pakistanis; not the Jews and Slavs who are the scapegoats. However, the omnipresent Communist conspiracy theory is still trotted out, and much of the country's social ills are laid at the feet [or vaults?] of the banks—perhaps there is an insidious Zionist conspiracy there too, waiting only for the upstanding, clean-cut heroes of the NF to reveal it to the unsuspecting public! Several of the leading lights of this party have a history of fascism and anti-semitism (e.g. "Yes, Hitler was right. The Jew is the maggot of society."—Martin Webster (1962), now National Activities Officer of the National Front.) The Front is also bitterly opposed to the Common Market, an issue upon which the Humanist movement may well be divided on rational grounds, but the Front's alternative is sinisterly distinctive: an economic bloc consisting of the "New" Britain, Australia, New Zealand, and (—you guessed it!) Rhodesia and South Africa!

Whatever the faults of a minority of its children may be, there is no doubt that the "permissive" or "humane" society is the progeny resulting from many hard years' work by the Rationalist movement and its allies; it is in my opinion, the source of a major contribution to human happiness. The time has come again, as it came in the 1930's, for those who believe in Liberty to stand up and be counted!

Already the Catholic church has come out against the Smith regime in Rhodesia; it is my earnest hope that in Britain the Rationalist movement will take the initiative and lead the way in publicly opposing the new irrationalism of the National Front and its intellectual thuggery. This is one occasion where the national Humanist bodies can and must form a common front against the new ultra-Right; I call upon the BHA and the NSS (neither of which is politically restricted by charitable status) to issue a strongly worded joint statement against the activities of the National Front, and thereafter collaborate with other interested parties such as Jewish lay organisations, immigrant associations, and progressive elements in the major Christian churches. [There need be no compromise of principles relating to our differences with some of these bodies if the negotiations are carried out sensibly! We have already collaborated with liberal Christians and others in securing the abolition of the death penalty.]

Let us not be deceived; if ever the National Front gets within striking distance of power, organisation such as our own will be the first to be liquidated on one pretext or another. If the Front should succeed, I believe that the new era of "Law and Order" will consist of more orders than laws, bringing in its wake horrors far, far worse than those in the seamiest quarters of "permissive" modern Britain. Everything that the Humanist movement has stood for in its long and honourable history is going to come under fire. Will this movement do its utmost to see that the National Front ends the same way as the Mosleyites and their ilk?

*"... Or take up arms against a sea of troubles,
And by opposing, end them?"*

OBITUARY

WE REGRET to announce the death, after a short illness of Mrs Edith Hassell, a life long member of Leicester Secular and widow of the late Albert Hassell.

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A HUMANIST ATTACK ON ABSOLUTE DETERMINISM

(Continued from page 189)

but all essentially new. To me absolute determinism can only be a poor excuse for contributing nothing and a defeatist philosophy. I visualise its proponents wringing their hands in despair and saying 'If only we had known!'

If my reasoning is invalid, the fact that neither determinists nor others can at present envisage a rational alternative is no reason to suppose that one will never be conceived. After all, lightning was inexplicable in the Middle Ages. Greater happiness, by far, is achieved by assuming creativity, acting on it and enjoying the results.

LETTERS

Q

BARBARA SMOKER (May 30) and Q are really saying the same thing. She proposes that countries should be divided into smaller regions which would each have a seat in the UN Assembly. England could, she suggests, be divided into about four regions, so that what is now the United Kingdom would have seven seats in the Assembly: Scotland, Wales, four bits of England and (presumably) Ulster. Since the population of the UK is about one seventieth of the human race, the Assembly will end up with about 500 members, which is exactly what Q proposes.

The only difference lies in the approach. Barbara Smoker believes, if I understand her rightly, that the change will come about through UNO reforming itself. Q believes that this is unlikely to happen and that it is necessary to re-think the problem and come up with an entirely new scenario. **TONY MILLS.**

FROM THE COMMENTS contained in Barbara Smoker's letter (May 30), she is not Q-ing up to vote for a world government. She prefers that the geographical area of the world be split up into smaller self-governing sections. What a "panacea" that would be! Each smaller section could then set about splitting itself up into smaller and smaller ones until we might even reach the stage when the cry "every man for himself" would ring out and any ladies that happened to be about could look after themselves. Barbara apparently does not understand the underlying significance of a world government, because she compares it with government as we know it today, which admittedly, stinks to high heaven. World government cannot be achieved or seized overnight. A transition period would have to be worked out and conferences held during which agreement would have to be sought concerning the major problems confronting mankind. Institutions would have to be set up to deal with the specific requirements of various peoples and countries. Methods of co-operation as opposed to competition would have to be devised and a thousand and one details settled. A foolproof charter would have to be drawn up binding every member and, unlike the constitution of UNO, it would have to contain the ingredients to make it work. I do not think that it could be accomplished within the lifetime of any adult of my generation, but oh how grand the feeling would be when the greatest meeting the world has ever known takes place, to be able to acclaim the world members when they first take their seats in triumph and dignity in the first world parliament. **H. RICH.**

THE RATIONALE of World Government is not what Barbara Smoker says it is. The rationale of World Government is that when Nationalism is in force there's a tendency to power politics—because nations have to keep up great armed forces to stop other nations over-running them and pushing them about, and also to make sure they get the economic resources they need.

If Barbara Smoker's panacea of splitting up the present nations into even smaller ones, were put into operation, what would happen? Some of these nations would conquer others and we'd be back to where we are now!

As regards Greece—I should think the Greek people wish there was a World Government to save them from their own tyrannical gang of militarists. And if there'd been a World Government in 1933—when Hitler seized power—a lot of suffering would have been prevented.

Barbara Smoker puts up several boogies (may I be pardoned if I call them Smoker-Screens?). For instance she suggests the World Government would blow up large areas of the world. May I point out that the USA doesn't blow up parts of the United States and the Soviet government doesn't blow up parts of the Soviet Union and the British government doesn't blow up parts of Britain. If there was a World Government we would look on each other as parts of the same race—the human race (I am sorry Barbara Smoker fails to be inspired by the ideal of the Brotherhood of Man).

As regards that other Smoker-Screen about "genocide on an unprecedented scale"—may I point out that if national sovereignty continues and the USA, the USSR and China start throwing hydrogen bombs about we will have "genocide on an unprecedented scale". And this is more likely to happen than the thing Barbara Smoker talks about, as the history of this century should make clear.

Frankly, I don't think Barbara Smoker has read the Q Manifesto. If she had, she'd know that it provides for a system of checks and balances that would prevent the horrors she talks about.

Finally, may I point out that not only thinkers like the late Earl Russell believed that we ought to have World Government, but also experienced and eminent statesmen, **I. S. Low.**

Gradualism and Vietnam

I WAS intrigued to read Claud Watson's solemn pronouncement that "the whole point about parliamentary democracies is that they progress by evolution which is peaceful, stable and rational . . ."

I can only reflect with sadness how much teachers of history, like myself, have failed.

One wonders how the founders of parliamentary democracy, the men who defeated absolutism, like William the Silent, Oliver Cromwell, John Lilburne, George Washington and Tom Paine, Robespierre and Danton would think of such a strange misreading of their lives work.

This is not to suggest that there is necessarily a case for violence in future (although there may be, tragically enough, in the Third World) but that we should rid ourselves of blinkers about our own past. This country is on the bottom and still sinking. It is no time for being smug.

I remember back in 1958 when, for my sins, I was the Cambridge delegate to the Labour Party Conference at Scarborough. Some little man got to the microphone and gave us the same old thing about our 'gradualism'—doing this right under the lee of the shattered castle on the Scar where one massive ten-foot wall was blown right out by Cromwell's lads after the siege of 1647. Or did they use gradual gunpowder!

PETER CADOGAN.

ISN'T IT about time people stopped tearing poor old Claud Watson to pieces. Poor old Claud—he can't see the forest for the trees. It's about time we, freethinkers, agnostics, atheists, rationalists, humanists, etc., tried to understand Claud. Readers, you must surely see this after reading his letter (May 23)!

To teach people effectively we must teach them how to think reasonably. So, instead of telling Claud Watson anything (he wouldn't listen anyway) I shall suggest ideas which (if he is interested enough) should stimulate his thinking power and make him seek rational answers.

1. Mr Watson talks of our 'freedom of the press'. How free is the press? It is owned by big business. Who is it likely to speak on behalf of then? In any case, is freedom not a comparative term or do you, Mr Watson, think it an absolute term?

2. Mr Watson says (when talking of the Pearl Harbour incident) that the Japs were no fools. Were the Americans? What was the *real* reason for the Pearl Harbour attack? (Hint—it was economic.)

3. Mr Watson says parliamentary democracies are the progress of 'evolution which is peaceful, stable and rational'! Was he thinking of America? (Fifty million poor, race riots, fifty million million tons of waste in the rivers each year.)

4. This section is devoted to a general line of thought.

We must make up our minds about comparative values and absolute values. Are things really black or white, good or bad or are they relative to circumstances?

Is it reasonable to compare fifty years of Soviet Communism with our much older system? Can we take factors like religion, size of country, culture, etc., into account? Is it not a case of—it could be right in that country but it is not good for this? Would you support a communist movement in Britain? Would you support one in South Africa, or would you prefer dictatorship?

Would you go to Vietnam to fight for the American case for freedom? Would you go at all (If your answer is no to both these questions—then—why are the Americans there at all?)

The Americans soldiers get medals in Vietnam which read 'kill a Commie for Christ'. Would you, Mr Watson, kill a commie for Christ?

Are the Americans really the goodies, or have you been watching too many films?

5. Mr Watson foresees the extinction of the human race. He also talks of the American peace talks in Paris. The human race could be brought to an end by nuclear weapons, pollution, chemical warfare, etc. Who are the more likely to bring this about, the American peace men or the Vietnamese?

One last word of advice and teaching to Mr Watson is on his first paragraph. He says: 'I seem to have stirred up a hornet's nest'. Don't flatter yourself Mr Watson. Most people were not indignant about you or your letter—most people didn't write at all—they laughed at you.

DAVID PETRIE.

Conway Hall

IN HIS CRITIQUE on the South Place Concerts Bernard Levin describes Conway Hall as "a not overwhelmingly attractive building."

In its present state, it is true, the Hall leaves much to be desired, but when it was newly built there can be little doubt that it was one of the most tasteful halls in London, and the acoustic properties were well in advance of the standards of the day (1929).

Your readers may care to know that the Committee of South Place Ethical Society has voted the sum of £2,000 for drastic re-decoration of the Conway Hall building, including restoration of the wooden floors, paintwork, etc. It is also hoped to rearrange and (re) catalogue the SPES archives, which are a unique primary source of information on the early history of the Freethought, Humanist, and Unitarian movements, especially in the early nineteenth century.

Incidentally, our "ethics" are as much "in evidence" on Sunday evenings as any other time.

N. H. SINNOTT,
Hall Manager/Lettings Secretary.

The RSPCA

THE RSPCA has indeed become a "shabby mockery of its own title". The basic trouble is its close sympathy with the hunting fraternity and its in-growing vision. It has come to believe itself more important than the ideals it should be promoting. This is evidenced in the words of its chairman, John Hobhouse, to the AGM of its South Hampshire and Portsmouth Branch recently. He stated, "at the moment the society is in the position of weighing up the good people can do us—even though they may go hunting". This is not a very ethical, or indeed dignified, "position" for the RSPCA to be caught in. It should be concerned by the good people can do to *animals* rather than to "us" (the RSPCA).

The latest development is that Mr Hobhouse has sent a circular letter to members asking them to give him a mandate to refuse to allow bloodsports to be discussed at the coming RSPCA AGM on June 20th! What a "back to the wall" appeal from the chairman of such a society! Who's chicken?

GWENDOLEN BARTER.

AFTER LIFELONG ASSOCIATION with the RSPCA, very regretfully I must confirm that "The RSPCA is a shabby mockery of its own title" (May 23).

Alderman Charles Smith-Ryland, Lord Lieutenant of Warwickshire, entertained the North Warwickshire Hunt, provided a fox to be hunted and, in reply to my letter of protest wrote, "I hope to enjoy hunting and other field sports for many years to come". Therefore, at the recent Annual General Meeting of the RSPCA South and East Warwickshire Branch I objected—unsuccessfully—to his re-election to the Presidency of the Branch. The matter eventually was placed before the London Council as was the fact that the Joint Master of the North Warwickshire Hunt, an RSPCA member, had organised a foxhunt for children in country where foxes must be encouraged to breed to provide sufficient for hunting.

The RSPCA Council has taken no action whatsoever in either case, yet supposedly, the RSPCA condemns the participation of children in any form of hunting; it is opposed to the preservation of foxes for hunting and to the hunting of wild animals for sport!

VERA SHEPPARD, RSPCA Member.

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