

FREE THINKER

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THE COST OF GAMBLING AND HUMANISM

"GAMBLING PROMISES the poor what property performs for the rich" wrote Bernard Shaw—"something for nothing." Recent headlines have linked crimes of violence with the underworld of drug peddling and gaming. Horse racing, however, remains the "Sport of Queens" and we spend four times as much money on backing horses as we do on aid to the under-developed countries. The gambling turnover in this country is estimated at some £915 million a year.

Christians frequently suggest, if only by their actions, that so long as the "end" is the promotion of their faith, all "means" are justified. They may preach against trying to get "something for nothing", but in practice Churches are busy with raffles and games of chance. The August Newsletter of the St Ignatius' Church, N.15, for one, advertises "*BINGO: Wednesday and Friday evenings at 8.0. Come and win a Golden Scoop—it might be worth well into the £1,000*". It is all part of the Christian panic to "lay up treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal..." And the idea of "reward" for what Humanists would consider very little indeed, is, of course, intrinsic in Christian theology. "*Whosoever shall give to drink unto one of these little ones a cup of cold water only in the name of a disciple, verily I say unto you, he shall in no wise lose his reward.*" The reward being I suppose, a stake in the Divine lottery for Eternal Life amongst some of the most unpleasant immortals it is possible to imagine.

"I go to Bingo once a week" the woman in the green-grocers said to me. "Where else can I go to get away from the family and meet a few friends? Women can't go alone into a pub, and the cinema is just like the TV..." She at least has a husband who tells her how much he earns, and she is not driven to trying to "win" enough to straighten out a quite unfair housekeeping allowance.

We are clearly back with the problem of trying to help people to enjoy their leisure, and the more education (self or state) the easier it is. Far too many people, however, leave school without having "caught" what can be a most

infectious incentive to learn, or the ability to investigate and to adopt new ideas and skills. Bingo provides one outlet for such people, and the acquisition of objects seems to be one antidote to boredom and insecurity.

The companionship and social life offered by some churches is Christianity's best weapon against Humanism. It has nothing to do with faith or even God; but then who cares, so long as potential friendship exists? In her article this week Margaret Green describes how she, as a Humanist, experiences this situation.

If we accept that the desire to gamble is in some degree "natural", and that both gambling and drinking in moderation are fair entertainment, there is surely no reason why our governments shouldn't divert this human frivolity into constructive channels. In 1753 the extensive collection of objects of natural history, works of art, books and manuscripts belonging to Sir Hans Sloane were offered by bequest to the British government for a sum of £20,000. The offer was accepted, the money raised by a national lottery, and six years later the British Museum was opened. In many countries there were such national lotteries long before "Ernie" was thought of. With "research" (peace, medical, sociological, penal etc.), the "arts", "universities" or "youth clubs" as yearly (or perhaps five yearly) targets, the public could settle some of its major problems while at the same time enjoying a "risk" and living in "hope" of what could be much-needed but not exaggerated monetary rewards.

The Gaming Act of our Conservative government in 1960 turned gambling into a Boom Business, and we now have some 16,000 betting shops in the country, and hundreds of gaming clubs in London alone. The Chancellor will probably not dare to do much to try and improve what is a shaming situation; one that is potentially very dangerous inasmuch as it encourages money-lending, out-sized debts and the incentive to "dispose" of creditors.

Well, what can we Secularists do? We can continue to stress that "reward" should not enter into the teaching of ethics, and that schools which over-stimulate the competitive spirit may well be brewing trouble. The British have always tended to be anti-intellectuals and to over-estimate sport for its supposed value as an antidote to sexuality. The inability of so many people today to use their leisure constructively is surely a reflection of this. Humanists want more recognition that the mind, eyes, and ears need as much daily exercise as the muscles. The Churches dare not encourage the process of thinking too much, for it is lethal to their faith, but Secular-Humanism can only benefit from trained and lively minds.

As often happens, we can see what needs to be done,

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but have not the power (i.e. the money) to do it. Christians sometimes suggest that because they own so many private institutions this proves that Rationalists have never made the same efforts. In fact until this century Rationalists and their organisations were not legally allowed to inherit the sort of wealth Christians relied on! We haven't yet made our millions, although perhaps we can be grateful not to have grown fat on the profits of the slave trade or by other such nefarious means.

DEVILS THEN AND NOW

IN *The Domain of Devils* by Eric Maple (Robert Hale, 25s), he tells the terrible story of Christian man's obsession with devils and Hell, which is largely neglected by historians and philosophers. It is surprising that something which affected the life of the past so deeply has received so little consideration. Early man had believed that all natural forces were subject to spirits and as nature was sometimes harmful the spirits were seen as capricious and unreliable, and means of propitiating or controlling them were sought. At first no distinction between good and bad spirits was made, and gods and devils were one; but the Persian prophet, Zoroaster, preached that the world was a battleground of Good and Evil, in which it was man's duty to take the side of Good. In one aspect this was a moral break-through, making possible for the first time ideas of goodness that were based on something more than the convenience of one's own tribe; but, like most steps forward in human history, it brought with it terrible dangers. If some spirits were identified as completely good, the evil ones must be utterly evil, so that the fear of devils was increased rather than lessened. Moreover, if one dutifully supported the good spirits, might not there be some human beings who had allied themselves with the devils?

Christianity came into a world haunted by the fear of demons, and Christian theology reflected this universal fear in the emphasis it gave to them, and particularly to Satan, the prince of them all. Satan, as the tempter of Eve, bore a primary responsibility for all the evil in the world. The original Ransom theory of the Crucifixion stated that Adam's sin had made Man subject to Satan, but in compassing the death of Christ Satan had blundered, for, as Eric Maple explains,

"Christ had not sinned, and had, therefore, been punished unjustly. Satan had thus exceeded his authority, and by that act had forfeited his right of authority over that part of mankind who accepted Christ as the Saviour."

The infuriated devils therefore busied themselves frantically in wresting souls from Christ, their favourite means, apparently, being temptation to sexual misdemeanours. To make matters worse Christians sweepingly branded everyone else's gods as devils, and treated the wretched worshippers accordingly.

Madness through Faith and Sexuality

It is easy to laugh at tales of the desert hermits and the filthy saints, such as Simon Stylites on his pillar. But what depths of misery such abnormalities reveal! These people were indeed possessed by the devils born of the morbid imagination of Christendom. Their fear of Hell and of their own sexuality had driven them literally mad. The fact that they were regarded as holy, and that many of them were actually canonised, shows how universal such obsessions had become. All Europe lived in fear, and

To provide an alternative for Bingo and Religion we need money as well as members and a policy. Perhaps Humanists should be asked to give 1/- to their own organisations for every 1/- they have handed over to Christian projects in the past? This, I am sure, would help us a lot. Or perhaps Christians should be asked to help us as much as they expect us to help them? I don't know. All I do know is that the Freethinker Bookshop stubbornly refuses to start selling fish . . .

Margaret McIlroy

while the stronger-minded could put these horrors behind them when in health, there could have been few who were not tormented by such thoughts in sickness.

"Art mirrors life", says Maple, "and in that mediaeval world, where Satan was conceived as waiting at the bedside of every dying human being for the exit of the immortal soul, no death-bed scene was complete without its bevy of devils wrestling with the priest for the soul of the expiring sinner." (One of this book's many excellent illustrations shows such a scene.)

Immeasurable mental agony must have resulted.

With the end of the Middle Ages one might have supposed that the obsession with devils would diminish, but in the fifteenth century belief took a still more sinister form and the Church officially accepted the superstition it had earlier rejected, that, in Maple's words, "all natural disasters, heresies and dangerous movements of thought were organised by demons in alliance with witches". Naturally the fear-crazed population eagerly turned to the hunting down of the supposed witches. It was bad enough when people went in terror of imaginary devils; it was still worse when every man's eyes were occupied in watching to detect the neighbour or relative who had allied himself, or more probably herself, with Satan to procure the sickness or death of his cattle or his child. Now to the real and unavoidable miseries of life were added not only the tormenting fear of Hell and devils, but also the agonies of thousands, perhaps millions, of victims of witch-hunts, who were tortured into fantastic confessions and then burned.

Protestant acceptance of demonism

Luther, who seems in most respects so modern, believed in omni-present demons as firmly as any illiterate peasant, and when he wrote

"And were the world all devils o'er,
And watching to devour us . . ."

he actually had literal devils in mind. In the unhappy period of religious wars, Catholic and Protestant alike accused their opponents of being in league with Satan. This was used to justify every atrocity, and witch-burnings were added to the other horrors of war.

However, the triumph of reason was coming, and only two generations after the worst excesses of the witch-finders the belief in witchcraft was laughed at by all educated Europeans. But Maple points out that evil is still very much amongst us, though we no longer see it in such crude terms as did our ancestors, who were given to visualising demons as queer composite animals. So Maple describes the aggressive revolutionary nation-state as "the most satanic of all the works of Hell" and describes the H-bomb as "man-made Hell fire". With the destruction of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, "those old-time religious fanatics who had so earnestly speculated upon

the actual location of Hell now had their answer: Hell was here on earth." Science had justified the mediaeval theologians' branding of it as satanic.

The teaching of Hell continues today

Besides the horrors of scientific warfare, Maple finds much that is disturbing in contemporary life. There is some evidence that satanic cults are increasing, and that their activities include ritual murder, as well as animal sacrifice and the desecration of grave-yards and churches. The Roman Catholic Church continues to teach the actuality of Hell to young children, and the diaries of the progressive Pope John reveal the misery caused to the most decent Christians by the monstrous doctrine. "The thought of Hell terrifies me; I cannot bear it. It seems almost impossible to me."

This book shows clearly the full horror of the past from

THE FRUSTRATIONS OF A COUNTRY HUMANIST

Margaret Green

Margaret Green (b. 1934) has, since her school days, gradually broken away from the C of E, and recently joined the BHA. Before marriage she was a Medical Laboratory Technician and she is now married to a Production Buyer with ITV.

THERE IS much to see and appreciate in the country, even the new motorway forging a line through the countryside holds an interest, and I love it all. But one needs more than the basics of life, however wonderful or commonplace they may be. So what of other aspects, the intellectual and social outlets?

It is a fast developing, active community where I live centred around two equally new and active churches; near enough to London not to feel completely self-reliant, yet sufficiently far away not to make use of all that London offers. There is the usual variety of small clubs, housed in one of the Church halls and sponsored by or connected with the respective Church. The majority of club members are Churchgoers and many belong to several of the local organisations, so that membership of one club is often similar to that of another.

Discussion Groups take place in the houses of the congregation, with a clergyman taking part. The subjects include the Archbishop's travels abroad, stewardship, life after death and so on. No wonder I feel frustrated! What is there for the Humanist in such an evangelical community? Naturally I don't just wait for something to come along. I go to the discussions and put my point of view across, although usually this means my view versus the rest. I go to a club, despite the church services, religious talks and prayer before each meeting, (including committee meetings, I was astonished to find.) I help with the Old People's Club (one of whose objects is "to promote religious activities") and with other local organisations with similar aims.

I am not anti-Church. Socially the two Churches here are fulfilling a very useful purpose. But everything has this religious bias. Even the State Primary School has a prayer before lunch and at the end of each afternoon session, in addition to Morning Assembly, and a strong interest in the local Scripture Union.

At a recent discussion the question "How can we provide a good Christian Morality in our homes?" was raised. I queried the words 'Christian Morality', and it was somewhat grudgingly conceded that it need not be a

which we have emerged, and reveals the foolishness of the sentimental reactionaries who look backwards to the "Age of Faith" as a time when men were serenely happy in the bosom of Mother Church. But Maple does not encourage any easy optimism, for he shows firstly that the ancient evil superstitions are still far from dead, and secondly that there is an equal viciousness in the secular superstitions which allow modern men to obliterate thousands of human beings whose nationality, race or political institutions differ from their own, with as little compunction as their ancestors felt in exterminating those accused of heresy or witchcraft. This emphasises the continued necessity for the Freethought Movement, dedicated both to the destruction of superstition and to the maintenance of international peace. Eric Maple has written a book of fundamental importance to the understanding of history, and it will be of permanent interest to Secularists.

Christian one. But why was it said at all? And why must it go on being said.

Fortunately I have made many good friends although I'm regarded as rather eccentric for my unorthodox views. But this is inevitable in an area where there are *two* active modern Churches dominating the scene. Some country districts have equally active Humanist groups, but here there is no Humanist organisation and I can find little evidence of Humanist interest in the immediate locality. As a housewife and mother of three young children, I find it difficult to join in Humanist activities, because of distances to be travelled, but it would be nice to participate in something where I am not always the "odd one out".

I feel the answer lies in living a "Humanist life". By my taking part in Christian functions and helping Christian-sponsored organisations, the Humanist view will gradually be seen, not as the "easy way out", as is often thought, but as a way of life for people who care about people.

WORLD UNION OF FREETHINKERS

(in association with the NATIONAL SECULAR SOCIETY)

INTERNATIONAL CONGRESS

LONDON—SEPTEMBER 1st—SEPTEMBER 5th, 1966

CONWAY HALL, RED LION SQUARE, WCI

(by kind permission of the Committee)

Friday, September 2nd

10.0 a.m. INTERNATIONAL COUNCIL (Private)

7.30 p.m. PUBLIC SESSION

FREETHOUGHT IN THE FUTURE

HAROLD PINTER MARGARET KNIGHT

MICHAEL FOOT, MP PROFESSOR HYMAN LEVY

PROFESSOR POMEAU DAVID TRIBE

Saturday, September 3rd

9.30 a.m.—5 p.m. PUBLIC SESSION

FREETHOUGHT IN THE PAST

F. H. AMPHLETT MICKLEWRIGHT

PROFESSOR WALTER ARNSTEIN DAVID TRIBE

PROFESSOR O. LUTAUD DR G. CONFORTO

H. FREISTUHLER PROFESSOR POMEAU

Sunday, September 4th

10 a.m.—5 p.m. PUBLIC SESSION

FREETHOUGHT IN THE FUTURE

Monday, September 5th (Public)

9.30 a.m. CLOSING SESSION (RESOLUTIONS)

2.00 p.m. INTERNATIONAL COUNCIL (Private)

3.00 p.m. EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE (Private)

NEWS AND NOTES

THE LATEST Press Release from the NSS concerns the death sentence passed by the Greek Government on a young member of the Martyrs of Jehovah religious sect, and joins Amnesty International in urging that the sentence be commuted. Christos Kazanis has conscientious objections to military service. "As far as possible these wishes should be respected. Religious freedom is a basic democratic right."

But not, as we know, in the world of religion

FR MARC ORAISON, who was a physician until he became a priest at the age of 34, has been barred from lecturing and writing moral theology. France's Bishops have been 'asked' by the Vatican to refuse their *imprimatur* to his book *The Human Mystery of Sexuality*. In 1953 his *Christian Life and Problems of Sexuality* was placed on the Vatican Index of Forbidden Books (which, of course, no longer exists!) Eight years ago Father Oraison was responsible for setting up a sanatorium in the Pyrenees for priests requiring psychiatric help. He said

"Men who are leading lives of celibacy must obviously have particular sexual problems. I feel they should have the right to some help and advice from someone like myself... I feel I am specially qualified to do this."

No doubt he is, and that might be extremely dangerous for faith. **Father Oraison has been given no hearing.** He now expects to be summoned to the Vatican to give an account of his sins.

Fr Arnold McMahon, the twenty-six-year-old priest who wrote an article (and generally advocated) the right of Catholics to practice birth control, is on his way to West Africa for a five-year assignment which he feels is partly 'corrective training'.

"While in Rome" he said "I thought seriously of resigning. In the end I decided against it, because it would not have solved anything. But I still hold to my views and feel the same way about it."

In Holland

A PUBLIC OPINION POLL has shown that 81 per cent of the Dutch people would rather have a married, than a celibate Catholic clergy. The poll included members of all and no denominations, and showed that 68 per cent of the Catholics queried preferred a married priest.

Sisters and brothers in Christ

NUNS, it seems, are considered the most valuable of women. The combination of virginity plus a ludicrous get-up draws for more sympathy than a mere pram-full of babies or even a Mary Quant 'creation'. It was the nuns who were raped in the Congo who really made the headlines, and it was the nun, Sister Mary Angelica, who got special mention when attacked by the mob in a civil rights demonstrations. The *Catholic Herald* reported (August 12)

"Among the crowd who attacked the negroes were many Catholics, and the fact that a nun in the march was injured has sparked off an indignant editorial in Chicago's weekly Catholic newspaper *The New World*..." The nun, however, "was not seriously injured, and has since taken part in other freedom marches".

We can at least applaud that, but what if she had been a black nun? Archbishop Halliman of Atlanta blames the churches for lack of support for the negro. "Religious institutions have permitted white power to run wild in suppression of the negro" he says.

The *Observer* (August 21) reports that two priests have been arrested and charged at Meaux with robbing 79 churches in the Ile de France area since 1962. They are Abbé Pierre Breaux, 35 and the Abbé Michel Demissy, 36.

Their tiny pay is frozen

HUNDREDS OF C of E clergymen (*Guardian* August 20) have had their pay increases of between £1 and £2 a week frozen by the Church Commissioners because of the Government's incomes policy. Or rather because some dioceses "have discussed ways and means so long that they have now been caught in the freeze." Well, if anything will teach the C of E to move more quickly, it could be this...

Sacred population control

INDIA is to start a birth control scheme for her sacred cows "the holy symbol of motherhood for Hindus" (and one I am glad we do without.) *The Guardian* reports

"The Government faces strong opposition from India's predominantly Hindu population. Hindu holy men are at present squatting outside Parliament with pet calves demanding that cow slaughter should be banned. The campaign is expected to concentrate on millions of aged, underfed cows roaming the streets and bazaars..."

If cattle could be used to feed some of the aged and not-so-aged millions of underfed human beings, we might begin to respect their religion a little more.

Those who are fortunate enough to have BBC-2

MAY HAVE BEEN lucky enough to see 'The Witches of Salem,' the Sartre version of Arthur Miller's play *The Crucible* on Friday, August 19. A splendid French film of a story that catches the essence of superstition, bigotry, faith and the witch-hunt and will never, I am afraid, date. It should be shown every Easter to show how some nine million people died in the name of Jesus, in place of the traditional presentation of how one possible Jesus died mythologically for 'us'.

A missing link?

ARCHEOLOGISTS have found "Samuel", (nick-name for Vertessollos Man) who is believed to have been closer to Homo Sapiens than to Homo Erectus and is probably twice as old as Swanscombe Man (ie about 400,000 years old). This means (say experts) that our own species is about 150,000 years older than has been thought.

And about time too...

MR PAUL MARRIOTT, a TV engineer, "is prepared to go to law" to prevent the bells of his local church (Nenton-le-Willows, Lancs) being rung on Saturday evenings. *The Guardian* (August 20) reports

"He said yesterday: 'It is definitely in the Noise Abatement Act, 1959, that it is an offence to ring a church bell after 4 pm on Saturdays'... Mr Marriott, as befits one baptised and confirmed in the church, maintains that he has no objection to bells ringing on Sunday".

Perhaps he doesn't live as close to them as I do, and anyway, I haven't been either baptised or confirmed, and ours ring so as to drown radio, TV and even thought, on Tuesday evenings as well as Saturdays and Sundays. Can someone produce a law I can invoke

KM

WORLD UNION OF FREETHINKERS

NATIONAL SECULAR SOCIETY

CONGRESS DINNER

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THE CRESCENT HOUSE YOUTH HOME

Nigel Bruce

Nigel Bruce (Vice-Chairman of the Edinburgh Humanists) was, in 1964, the originator of the idea behind this Humanist project. He is now also Chairman of the Directors of the Home.

ONLY A FEW DOORS away from Crescent House, the pioneering Youth Home launched by the Edinburgh Humanist Group, lives a minister of the Church of Scotland. I called on him some time ago, to explain the aims of Crescent House and to assure him that he would be welcome to visit any of the boys to whom he might feel a responsibility. He smiled and thanked me, but added, "I don't think it is likely that they will want to see me". I have often wondered what was in his mind when he made this forecast. Was it perhaps an assumption that all the boys we try to help will already be damned? Was it a conviction that we should somehow brainwash them before he was able to meet them? Or was it—the most likely hypothesis—that his experience of working-class boys of low scholastic attainment taught him that they were not interested in the Christian message?

We shall not know until we get under way whether his forecast was accurate. This will be only a matter of months. The reconstruction is complete. The redecoration is going well. The house-parents are moving in in August. Our finances are still inadequate, but we are just afloat. Of our target of £15,000, we have raised £10,500, which is not too bad for a handful of amateurs. **We must try to find the remaining £4,500 in the course of the next twelve months. That, however, will not be the end of our financial worries. By that time we shall have come face to face with the awkward reality which we would give anything to avoid—the cruel necessity to turn away the young applicant who has no means of his own.**

To keep a boy in Crescent House will cost over £8 a week, far more than any unsupported lad could afford. Most of those who come to us will be sponsored by a local authority, or by a voluntary body, or by an Approved School; agencies such as these are accustomed to paying £10 or more a week for children in their care. But it is obviously most unsatisfactory to have no income of our own to help the deserving case who has no one to sponsor him. This haunts us at night, I must confess.

The type of boy we shall take will be directly related to the type of service we can give. We can provide a warm family setting, with adequate material and human resources; beyond this there will be the extended family, the committee members and their friends in the neighbourhood; and in the background, a team of advisers with great experience and intuition. Therefore we propose to take the type of boy whose troubles stem primarily from lack of an adequate family setting.

Prototype for progress

People naturally ask us often whether it is not the duty of the local authorities to do what Crescent House is proposing to do. The answer is Yes, but they have not yet woken up to the fact. It is in this sense that we are pioneering. We are moving ahead, on a tiny scale, in the hope that the State, with its vast resources, will one day follow us. It is in this sense that we can speak of Crescent House as a prototype, which, if successful, could be repeated a thousand-fold.

And yet, though it may sound paradoxical, the local authorities, by themselves, could never do what Crescent House hopes to do. For the essence of what we are doing is to welcome children in trouble into the community.

Reversing the normal process, we are going to show that the community is capable of offering its friendship to the anti-social child. Local authorities are not the community, and never can be. We, the community, are the subjects over whom the local authorities exercise their powers. They, the local authorities, as the name implies, are our rulers as well as our representatives. A Children's Home run by a local authority is bound to be run, managed and inspected by officials. It is part of the Establishment, and so, to some extent, are Children's Homes run by the Churches.

Crescent House, in this regard, will resemble an unusually large foster-home rather than a Children's Home, because it will be run entirely by ordinary people with no official standing. To emphasise the difference, there will be no "staff" at Crescent House—just Mr and Mrs Clamp and their helpers. This is not an unimportant distinction, because the type of child who will come to Crescent House, will frequently be strongly resentful and rebellious in his attitude to authority and to institutions run by authority. The House-parents at Crescent House will have the extremely delicate task of gaining acceptance and respect from the boys, not as authority-figures but as parents or relatives.

A change needed in priorities and attitudes

Let me draw this brief article to a close with two philosophical observations which should, I believe, be of interest to free-thinking readers. Firstly, to say that society needs to rethink its attitude to crime and delinquency is now quite a familiar statement; but what does it imply? To my mind, it implies what I might call a reversal of sympathy or a transposition of priorities. Delinquency is something against which, according to our present attitudes, we have to protect society. **The humanist attitude, on the contrary, should be that delinquency does most damage to the delinquent; it is he that suffers most, except in a completely material sense. The present attitude is based on fear; the humanist attitude on human understanding.**

Secondly, the vast bulk of delinquency is caused, ultimately, by inadequate family relationships. Delinquents are almost invariably the children of parents who are either ignorant or immature or neurotic or over-selfish or lacking in human affection. To parents such as this, children tend to be regarded as the inevitable but unfortunate result of sexual relations. To them, it is Nature taking her course, or sometimes Providence decreeing what must be.

Here again I suggest that we need a complete reversal of attitudes. In the first place, society should recognise that children are a responsibility; consequently irresponsible people should be prevented from having them. Secondly, as the myths of Heaven and Hell pass into folklore, we should be openly professing the alternative theory of immortality, that men live on in what they leave behind them, whether it be works of art, schools, hospitals, laws, scientific discoveries or deeds of great nobility. The majority of mankind do not leave behind them things of such great intellectual or spiritual quality; but they can, and they do, leave children, friends and memories. Therefore, for most of us, the path to immortality lies in our children. In the middle classes, this is already to some extent accepted; in lower working-class culture, it certainly is not. And it is from this culture that most of our delinquents are drawn.

GOD'S WORD

F. H. Snow

F. H. Snow was once an ardent Congregationalist but rejected belief in God some years before the first World War. He joined the NSS and RPA in 1939, helped to found the Radio Freedom League (of which Chapman Cohen was chairman) and is the author of several books.

CHRISTIANS CLAIM that the Bible is God's Word to man. I could not disagree more with any assumption, and hope that my objections to it may appeal to the latent reason of those believers who may happen to read this article.

To begin with, by no mental effort can I see the word of a God in the host of "begats" and stories about human personalities that bulk so largely in the Bible. A God would surely not want to tell the world such things as how David slew Goliath, and took to himself another man's wife. And he would hardly relate the story of Job, and how he (the Lord) asked Satan for information about that afflicted man which, as an all-knowing God, he already knew. And can one conceive his Omniscience asking Satan whence he came, and standing for the nonsensical reply: "From going to and fro in the earth, and walking up and down in it"? Is it remotely possible that the Lord of Creation would put that sort of thing over as his Word to man?

Would a God, for instance, speak to his subjects in the language of someone talking *about* him? He would surely address them directly, and the persons to whom he dictated his word would write it down as from him, not from themselves, as in the conglomeration of tribal history, wars and massacres, the doings and machinations of kings, chieftains, seers, patriarchs and prophets, the psalms, genealogies and epistles which mainly compose the Bible's enormous literature. The complexity of scriptural writings indicates that they express merely the word of men.

The time lag

Even if one who could create a universe can be credited with no better notion of imparting his message to earth's inhabitants than that of getting it inscribed by some of those inhabitants, he can hardly be credited with letting it take thousands of years to complete, passing, an accretion of blackened scripts from generation to generation of priestly custodians, unknown to dying millions of the humanity for whose enlightenment and salvation it was designed. It is a safe speculation that something better than that would occur to an Almighty. It is safe to speculate that it would occur to him that while he was putting it into certain men's minds to write down his word, he could put that word into all men's minds. What need of a Bible?

However, for the sake of those who feel unable to rid themselves of the notion of Holy Writ, let us look again at what they believe to be God's Word, and ask ourselves: shorn of the tribal history, genealogies, psalms, epistles and multitudinous anecdotes, what is left of it that can be regarded as the essential information of God to man? As I see it, this would consist of the Creation Account, the Fall of Adam and man's legacy of sin, the Commandments, the announcements of God's almightiness, goodness and kindness, his wish to be glorified and supplicated, the punishments for disobedience of his ordinances and insufficiency of homage, his love, pity and mercy and plan of salvation by which humanity might escape the

eternal hell he had prepared for them.

That information need be expressed in less than a fiftieth of the Bible's space—less than that occupied by the first of its sixty-six books. I put it to believers that the notion that a God wishing to inform the prospective human race of his ordinances—Adam and Eve having done the wrong thing and ensured a world population—would keep them ignorant of those ordinances for many centuries by embodying them in a vast mass of historical and other matter, rather than issue them concisely for humanity's early instruction, is as nonsensical as any that could be dreamed up.

Half-hearted act of God

I imagine that, in any case, a divine author would do better than the fellows who wrote what they conceived to be his word, on papyrus or animal skins (a real Almighty would surely have provided something better?) I imagine that a non-fictitious God would have informed humanity more fully than does the sketchy Bible account, of his wonderful Abode, which would be also that of those who did his will. To describe the blissful amenities and glorious features of his Heaven adequately would require much more space than scripture accords it. And he would surely say something more than the almost nothing that is in the Bible about Hell—if any but a mythical God would associate himself with such a place. The God of Judaism and Christianity was evidently very foggy about his fiery jail, as he didn't even mention its whereabouts to his human clerks.

It is the soundest and simplest of reasonings that a diety possessing powers of transmission transcending the broadcasting efforts of modern mortals, would have transmitted his message to earth's inhabitants without recourse to the written word. And those powers would have kept humanity cognisant of its celestial ruler's will and pleasure, whereas many millions are still unacquainted with the supposed Word of God contained in the Bible. There would have been no need of interpretations or theologians; there would have been no multiplicity of religious beliefs such as now vexes the world; there would have been no righteous wars and probably no wars at all; there would certainly have been no atheists.

Christians awake!

I ask believers to ask themselves how they can entertain the notion that a God would choose a means of informing man of his will that would prove as ineffective as the bloody and barbarous history of humanity and the confusion of religious beliefs demonstrates. If they could think independently of the conclusion that the God alluded to in Scripture is an undisputable fact, they would see that far from furnishing evidence of that God's reality, the Bible is the most powerful argument against it.

Many people, it seems to me, fear truth—evidential truth, that is—too much to give honest thought to criticisms of Scripture, lest they should discover it. Most, however, through sheer ignorance of the sceptical viewpoint, continue to believe that the collection of stories labelled Holy Bible (which, to them is almost a museum piece, rarely or never read is the Word of a living God.

And we are told that there is no longer need to attack religious beliefs!

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ANNOUNCEMENTS

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

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

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

OUTDOOR

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

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

Merseyside Branch NSS (Pierhead)—Meetings: Wednesdays, 1 p.m.: Sundays, 3 p.m. and 7.30 p.m.

Nottingham Branch NSS (Old Market Square), every Friday, 1 p.m.: T. M. MOSLEY.

INDOOR

Bromley Discussion and Social Group (14 Great Elms Road, Bromley), September 2nd, GILLIAN HAWTIN, "The Menace of Catholicism Today" at 8 p.m.

South Place Ethical Society (Conway Hall Humanist Centre, Red Lion Square, London, WC1), Sunday, September 25th, 3 p.m., Annual Reunion. Guest of Honour: Professor A. J. AYER.

West Ham and District Branch NSS (Wanstead and Woodford Community Centre, Wanstead Green, E11). Meetings at 8 p.m. on the fourth Thursday of every month.

INTERNATIONAL RALLY

THE INTERNATIONAL CONGRESS of the World Union of Freethinkers is being held at Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London, this weekend. The first public meeting will be on Friday, September 2nd, when the speakers will include Harold Pinter, Margaret Knight, Micheal Foot, Professor Hyman Levy and David Tribe.

There will be a public session on Saturday from 9.30 a.m. until 5 p.m. when Professor Walter Arnstein, F. H. Amphlett Micklewright, Professor Pomeau, Professor Lutuad, Dr G. Conforto and David Tribe will speak on "Freethought in the Past".

Kathleen Nott and Dr Faith Spicer will be speaking at the Congress Dinner to be held at the Horse Shoe Hotel, Tottenham Court Road, London, on Saturday evening. Tickets are 23/6 each and reservations should be made in advance.

The Sunday session will now terminate at 1 p.m. and in the afternoon there will be a visit to Kensal Green Cemetery, where a wreath will be laid at the Reformers' Memorial. There will then be a visit to Highgate Cemetery. The coach leaves Conway Hall at 2.15 p.m. and seats should be booked (6/- return).

On Sunday evening at 7.30 p.m. there will be a Concert at Conway Hall when a largely professional group of actors and musicians will appear. They include Constance Cummings (now in "Private and Confidential" at the Duke of York's Theatre) Miles Malleon, Bill Owen, Elizabeth Frazer, Joan Miller, Catherine and Isabel Giles, Bernard Miller and Geoffery Burford. Tickets are 4/- each. Enquiries: Tel. HOP 2717 or CHA 8032.

OBITUARY**JULIAN LINTON**

JULIAN was a Humanist. He was a member of the Oxford University Group, and my husband and I last saw him in May this year, limping back to his college, waving and looking very much alone. He had taken us round the city to see some of the new buildings, remembering all the things visitors ought to see. He drove us in his "mini" with considerable skill and speed through the countryside, talking enthusiastically about his work, about his Humanist convictions and our organisations, and about the future. But there was to be no future for him; he died on Saturday August 20, aged 21.

He had already had a leg amputated because of the cancer which attacked him. His attitude to his disablement was typically straightforward, wry and courageous. With the tactlessness it is so easy to adopt when forgetting about other people's handicaps, my husband asked if young university men still climb roof-tops as they did in his day. "Yes", said Julian "although personally I don't!" The next morning he was busy with his friends handing out the Humanist leaflets to Billy Graham's congregation as it filed into the church.

Julian went to school in Wimbledon. He became an expert printer, and, while in and out of hospital, he won his place at University College where he studied chemistry. His mother died when he was a child and her professional and sensitive photographs of India were proudly displayed on the walls of his college room. He had enjoyed holidays in India himself, with his father and stepmother who were working in Delhi on behalf of the Society of Friends. It may be that in this kind of service to humanity they will be able to find comfort. We earnestly hope so.

Those of us who grew up in wartime know what it is to lose friends in their 20's and to live without expecting any future. But this, for us in the west at any rate, is peacetime. We must surely double our determination that medical research scientists shall not be hindered by lack of funds or support from finding the means to save these lives we can so ill afford to lose.

It is perhaps only through our experience of death, even our own selfish fear of it, that we can fully appreciate life. It is surely by our consciousness of human mortality that we learn to value opportunity, and time, and to deplore waste and apathy. If we live twice, three or four times as long, we cannot wish to say more than that we have lived, as he did, with kindness, honesty, intelligence, and enthusiasm. And so we who knew Julian remember gratefully and are proud to have known him.

"Salvation through Christ": A Shattered Myth.—"Traditional Christianity has what was known as the scheme of salvation through Christ. It began with an alleged rebellion of Satan against God in which angels fell. By direct acts of God, Adam and Eve were created. Their descendants were intended to restore the number of angels fallen. Satan corrupted Eve and all mankind. In order to restore his thwarted purpose, God sent his Son Jesus, who, assuming human nature, was born on earth died as sacrifice for human sin, and was resurrected. God was appeased, man redeemed, etc. This outline has been shattered. Known facts of astronomy, geology, biological evolution, anthropology, comparative study of religions, psychology, historical criticism of the Bible, have banished this scheme." (J. S. Bezzant in *Objections to Christian Belief*, p. 70-72, Pelican, 1965.)

Excerpted by G. S. SMELTERS

LETTERS

The new FREETHINKER layout: Cons and Pros
AS A READER for some 30 years I would endorse the opinion of L. Raleigh-Gilbert (July 29).
[*He doesn't like it.—Ed.*]

G. A. AIREY

UNTIL a few weeks ago I had not seen the FREETHINKER for some years and I certainly like the new layout—even if Mr Raleigh-Gilbert isn't the only one that doesn't.

J. A. S. NISBET

Vietnam

SO THE FREETHINKER approves of a load of fatuousness dished out by that ridiculous journal called *Freedom*. Like that other bunch of "know-alls" and intellectual champions of the obvious, the SPGB, they the anarchists are *neutral* and *impartial* regarding the horrible war in Vietnam and can indulge in a "holier than thou" attitude by positing the absurd speculation and, by inference, assertion that the victims of American savagery would use the same horror weapons if given the chance. So we are asked to condemn the victim as well as the aggressor! If a hooligan attacks me without just cause (and it is well to remind *Freedom* that the USA has no legal right in Vietnam, north or south) and uses a horror weapon on me then I am also to be pre-condemned on the grounds that, given the chance, I too, would use the horror weapon on my assailant. As well as being cowardly such argument is ridiculous.

The case for anarchism in this complex system of society is so simple that only very simple minds could accept it! Anarchism like Christianity, cannot fit into an industrially-advanced nation. For the benefit of our heavy-weight intellectuals in the anarchist's ranks I would point out the evolution of society: (1) Primitive man—*anarchist*; (2) First attempt at organisation—*death of anarchism* and beginning of government, which has been evolving ever since.

CHARLES DORAN

YOU CALL IT "refreshing" to read in the anarchist paper Jeff Robinson excusing the American intervention in Vietnam on the grounds that if the Viet defenders had napalm lazy dogs, delayed action bombs (to catch those who pick up the dead and wounded) the Viets would use them.

I would like to remind Jeff that it is not the Viet "Cong" who went over the seas 7,000 miles to another continent to bomb and butcher the people of America. No, it was the priest ridden American war clique who did this to Vietnam.

During the period of French rule the Catholic mission picked or kidnapped many native children and indoctrinated them in the Catholic cult, then let them loose to start the Catholic minority in the country. After the French withdrawal this small, though well organised minority seized power, and proceeded, as "the only true religion", to exercise its traditional intolerance by persecuting and suppressing all opposition. This stirred the otherwise non-political Buddhists into action. So Cardinal Spellman, with the help of the Catholic lobby and the Jesuits in the Pentagon, persuaded the then President to intervene to support the Catholic ruling clique in Vietnam. Today no country is safe from the combined evils the American power capitalism and their allies the Vatican and the Jesuits. The Catholic Church, the curse of civilisation, is at the bottom of the war, and of course American big business sees vast advantages in a subject East Asia which has so much mineral wealth. Communism is an all-purpose and convenient excuse. America is fast becoming the world bully and Wilson supports it. I would ask Jeff R. how long does he think an anarchist state would last before being taken over by the Jesuits with American bombs if necessary. Wishing the new editor success.

MARTIN McCALPIN

[*Thank you. I don't think Jeff Robinson was excusing anyone. I propose to publish a bitter attack on American atrocities in Vietnam by an American and would welcome an article from a Communist condemning some Viet Cong methods—or the shooting of refugees over the Berlin Wall.—Ed.*]

World Government

GERALD JACKSON in his article *When will the Hungry Eat?*, asks rhetorically "Is it just a wild dream of the humanist that one day the world will be united as one people?" My answer, based on years of experience of politics and thought and study of inter-

national politics in particular, is that it will continue to be a dream until people do something about it.

Indeed, if people had put as much effort into trying to get World Government as they have into campaigning for things like disarmament, nationalism, etc., we could be quite a long way on the road to the achievement of "the wild dream". There have been several moments when something like a World Government could have been set up; or at least something which could have developed into a World Government. 1918 was such a moment—so was 1945. But the statesmen of the world refused to take the chance; and the people of the world (and of Britain and America in particular) made no effort to force the statesmen to take the necessary action.

Those who seriously believe in the ideals of humanism should start at once to work for World Government; and we should stop supporting those people who, under pretence of working for human rights, are splitting the world up into more and more units and preparing the way for more bloodshed, sorrow and disaster—the Nationalists, whether British, African, Irish, Scottish or any other species.

I. S. LOW

IN HIS ARTICLE *The Problem of Anti-Church Unity* (June 24) E. G. Macfarlane writes under "Aims", "*Since the aim is world civilisation it follows that no member of the Humanist movement could also be a member of any organisation advocating the maintenance of local national sovereignty or any scheme for world peace through international arrangements between sovereign states*". I want to see a world civilisation as the result of world peace and the benefits that would follow world peace. But I see no reason why I should not advocate the maintenance of local sovereignty. I am a citizen of Wisconsin. Our state (nation) is a part of a federal union. We have given up sovereignty over a few matters to the Union. So we are disarmed and have agreed to settle all disputes with other states by law and not war. On this basis we have had peace between our states for over 100 years. Wisconsin has what may be called "local sovereignty". We call it "HOME Rule". Any subdivision of the state, county, city, town, school district or other subdivision can do anything it wants to, that is not contrary to state or federal law.

I want to see the people of the various nations transfer to the UN sovereignty over international matters so that the UN can make, interpret and enforce law among the sovereign nations on international matters. I advocate making Esperanto the first "second language" for all peoples, and on that basis making the UN into a federal union like the Union of our states.

I have met with opposition from some Fundamentalists who are sure that the second coming of Jesus is about to take place and so oppose action by men. But to have a Humanist oppose such a plan is just too much. Maybe I misunderstand the proposal of Mr Macfarlane? I hope so. I wish he could be given some space in the FREETHINKER to expand on his plan for world peace based on his Humanist ideas.

GLENN P. TURNER, J.P.

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