

# FREETHINKER

Registered at the  
G.P.O. as a Newspaper

FOUNDED 1881 by G. W. FOOTE

Friday,  
September 9, 1966

## THE HUMANIST LETTER NETWORK (INTERNATIONAL)

FOR THIS ARTICLE the Editor is giving way to the Hon. Organiser of the Humanist Letter Network (International), so as to bring its members up to date and to inform any readers of the FREETHINKER, who may still be uninformed, of its existence. The HLN(I) was started in January 1964 in order to try and help isolated or lonely Humanists, Freethinkers, Atheists and Agnostics, to make postal contact with one another. In the leaflet *The Problem of Loneliness* (published most helpfully by the NSS) I dealt with those aspects of life that stimulated the project. Altogether 266 people have joined; 36 have since resigned, married or are just 'lost in the post', leaving a total of 230 active members to date. The breakdown shown overleaf will explain some of the problems involved and confirm that such a service by and for Humanists is needed. For this purpose, "single" includes widows, widowers, the divorced and separated, as well as the never-married.

As you will see, the Network needs more young unmarried women and more unattached men between 50 and 60. Although specific requests cannot always be met, there is no doubt at all that the successes outweigh any disappointments. However, because, I am the only person to see the whole picture and because the letters are all treated as strictly confidential, it is not easy to proclaim the success which my natural lack of humility would otherwise allow. Let me just quote a very few from the enormous file of correspondence:

"I am writing to tell you how fruitful my correspondence with X in the USA has proved. I am most grateful that you were able to put us in touch..." (Miss Y, aged 17, British)

"...the Network has worked out very happily for me and I have two staunch pen-friends. I am always eager to learn of new Humanist correspondents" (Mrs A. American)

"...my tongue aches for someone to talk to and I must tell you how much pleasure you have brought me by sending Mr X's address" (A divorced northerner, British)

"...the contacts you have provided me with are a continuing joy to me and help in my isolated life..." (Mr Y, aged 70)

And then there is the proof of Secularist and Humanist diversity: "I am not an intellectual..." "I have a very high IQ..." "I am a headmistress..." "My work is house decorating..." (and almost everything else you can think of!) "If you get someone in your Network who is

probing the boundaries between Christianity and Humanism..." "I have been reading the FREETHINKER for 60 years..." "I am an Atheist, (Humanist, Agnostic, Rationalist...)" "I am not a member of any organisation but would like to hear more..."

There is no doubt at all that lively discussion takes place between the 16 countries represented on the list (not including the United Kingdom). Labels are no longer barriers, and while our organisations must necessarily stress the differences in policy and commitment, individual Freethinkers and Humanists seem to enjoy writing and receiving letters from those who do not necessarily belong to the same organisation.

The fee for joining stands at two shillings, but of course donations and stamps are most gratefully received. All profits go to Humanist projects and since the Network started it has been able to donate more than £50, divided between the Agnostics Adoption Society, the Humanist Housing Association, the Crescent Youth Home in Edinburgh, the Swaneng School in Bechuanaland, the Bihar scheme in India, the Humanist Youth Service and the NSS centenary funds. As much again (specially donated for the purpose) has gone to individual members 'in need' in particular emergencies, and yearly accounts are issued. The work involved has become rather more of a problem since taking over the editorship of this paper, but I hope that the only noticeable difference will be my own inability to enjoy writing individually to members as I used to do. I welcome news and requests, and I need to be kept in touch with what is going on, or, (I have said this before), everyone's time is wasted. Requests are often dealt with by return, and if there is any undue delay it is probably because there is just no suggestion I can make at the moment. But do not hesitate to remind me if I appear to have forgotten to take action.

The HLN(I) is completely independent and self-supporting, but is, I believe, capable still of assisting all the Humanist organisations. Whereas personally I have been 'banned' from speaking about Humanism at a public meeting for the BHA on account of my opposition to the Vatican dialogues, in fact the BHA continues to receive some enquiries from Networkers (as from my public speaking) which they might not otherwise have had. Indeed I believe that even the office staff at No. 13 has increased by one Networker! Although I no longer have time for the BHA Correspondence Course students, I also believe that one Networker has been able to assist in this. If this self-advertisement seems rather uncalled for, it may perhaps be forgiven if it is realised that if I don't speak up for the service the Network is offering to Secularists and Humanists, and to all organisations, no one else will, and it would be a pity to underestimate any mutual aid that

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does exist between us. I have been considering having duplicated a brief résumé of Humanist organisations in Britain, so that the outsider who comes first to Humanism through the Network may see the situation at one blow. It would, of course, only be done with the approval of the organisations concerned. However this is in abeyance as the BHA has, as yet, no constitution and is not easy to describe.

A number of Humanist Groups and even more individuals have co-operated in offering and giving their help for visiting members in hospital etc. This is extremely valuable, and I am grateful as I am to all those who keep me in touch with publicity I may not otherwise hear about.

There have, I gather, been other Rationalist Pen-Clubs, but, try as I may, I cannot find out how they worked or why they are now extinct. I heard that an American woman Humanist was starting her own organisation, and I offered to co-operate, but I have had no recent news. Indeed, there are more than 40 Americans on my list and I have been intrigued sometimes to put them in touch with each other. I have heard rumours of some Youth Services starting up their own Correspondence Club, and although I shall probably be the last person to get details, I shall certainly be the first to cheer if someone does join in or even takes over one aspect of the work. Quite often I would gladly hand over the lot. What does seem important, however, is that the organisers of all such projects should be in touch and work together as much as possible. Any idea of competition is surely ludicrous. Unorganised efforts cannot fail to lose strength.

I have not this year advertised in any non-Humanist medium—although letters following my BBC talk did bring in some enquiries. There are of course more enquiries than members, and even by the time this is in print there will be more members than at the time of writing. The increase is slow, but it is steady. It is, I dare to suggest, evidence of international Humanism in action (if only on a very small scale!) which ignores all those barriers of education, class, race, nationality and even age that so often harrass us. Language must inevitably be a problem, although we are just beginning to have Germans writing to German-speakers and this may develop.

The permission granted by the IHEU in Paris to have

## EATING PEOPLE IS GOOD

*Dr L. B. Halstead Tarlo (b. 1933) is an Atheist palaeontologist who teaches geology and zoology at the University of Reading. He was brought up without any religion.*

IT IS GENERALLY ACCEPTED that our ancestors indulged in cannibalism as far back as 500 thousand years ago. It might be thought that our forefathers were driven to such extremes in times of dire food shortage. However this would be mistaken. Our ancient ancestors did not eat one another for proteins, but rather to acquire the spiritual qualities and personality traits which the victim possessed during his or her lifetime. Indeed only the most revered people stood any chance of achieving a temporary resting place in the stomachs of their fellows. Only the very best people could hope to achieve this acme of acclamation. To be so acknowledged is the peak of personal achievement, to which many people have aspired in vain.

In spite of the fact that we are no longer allowed to kill and eat great men nowadays in this country, many people still have a deep psychological need to indulge in ritual cannibalism. Such persons band together in special societies for this purpose. However, the individual that the

leaflets about the Network on its publication table was helpful. They all disappeared, and I wish I had taken more.

Obviously the Network cannot always fulfill the hopes of its members. It is primarily a *correspondence* network, and it is relatively unsuccessful in making suggestions for personal introductions. It is not yet a marriage bureau, although I believe that before very long I may be able to announce one wedding.

I would like to say how fortunate I feel myself to be, for no one, from where I sit as Hon. Organiser, could be depressed about their fellow unbelievers. I am no longer surprised at the width of interests, activity, enthusiasm and kindness I find in letters every week. The "problem of loneliness", however, continues, and, for the Atheist-Humanist, it is rather a special isolation which it remains the purpose of the Humanist Letter Network to try and ease a little.

To the members of the Network, then, may I say thank you very much indeed for your continued co-operation, donations and letters. As Editor of this paper I no longer have time to write back as often as I would wish, but do keep in touch and let me know if you think I can help. Anyone who is interested in joining should send a sae to me at Mercers, Cuckfield, Sussex, England. Please do *not* call on me personally, at least not without phoning first!

	Men	Women	Total
Under the age of 30	54 (Single 51 Married 3 Teenagers 10)	26 (Single 17 Married 9 Teenagers 4)	80
Between 30 and 40	21 (Single 13 Married 8)	14 (Single 8 Married 6)	35
Between 40 and 50	20 (Single 13 Married 4 ? 3)	21 (Single 12 Married 9)	41
Between 50 and 60	18 (Single 6 Married 10 ? 2)	22 (Single 14 Married 8)	40
Between 60 and 85	22	12	34

L. B. Halstead Tarlo

members of these societies are encouraged to eat is supposed to have died a long time ago. Furthermore the membership is so large that, even if this favoured individual had been canned or frozen, there would not have been enough to go round. In view of the consequent difficulties of supply and demand, an elaborate system has been built up by the officials of these societies. They have managed to persuade their membership that specially prepared biscuits and red wine can be consumed as symbols of flesh and blood of the individual they want to eat. The largest of these societies manages to convince its membership that the biscuits and wine literally do change into the actual flesh and blood of their extinct hero.

So we can see that the need to eat one another is still satisfied in contemporary life. Admittedly a somewhat watered-down version of the original, but nevertheless the best that can be done in the present rather difficult circumstances. There seems little doubt that the people who indulge in these practices feel much the better for it. It is only to be regretted that the chap they want to eat is no longer available and they have to make do with only symbols of flesh and blood, instead of the real thing.



## A FRENCH CONSCIENTIOUS OBJECTOR

C. Bradlaugh Bonner

(C. Bradlaugh Bonner, whose lamented death we report on page 287, was President of the World Union of Freethinkers and the grandson of Charles Bradlaugh, founder of the NSS).

SIXTY YEARS AGO a young French countryman, Louis Lecoin, came to Paris to make his fortune, and was able to earn about a pound for a 76-hour week. He also came to read Zola, Jaurès' *L'Humanité* and books on social theories. Out of work one day because of a strike, he went to hear Sebastian Faure, the anarchist, and came away with his pockets filled with anarchist literature. The next day, watching the crowd, he was arrested by the police. The judge, hearing of the contents of his pockets, sentenced him to three months in prison where he saw something of French police methods and came to understand why anarchists were opposed to police. In 1910 he was called up for military service. Shortly afterwards there was a railway strike and his company was ordered to help suppress it. Louis saw his captain and his major, submitting to them that his conscience would not allow him to march against his fellow-countrymen and workmen. A court-martial condemned him to six months' imprisonment. To his astonishment his case was taken up by the newspapers, and *soldat* Lecoin received a fan mail. He came out of prison a convinced pacifist and anarchist. In 1912, at the time of the Balkan war, he was authorised by his union, the Cement workers, to conduct an anti-war campaign, and soon he was in prison again for anti-militarist propaganda, or, as *Le Matin* had it, "for instigating murder theft and pillage"! This was the beginning of eight years of prison, with two breaks each of a fortnight.

The 1914 war broke out; the army did not want Lecoin in a combat unit; he was to be an *exclus* (i.e., to do work no one else would) and was called up for this service as he came out of prison in 1916. He wrote to the Ministry for War, that he would not do such service, and helped to publish a leaflet *Imposons la Paix* (Let us make peace!). This first fortnight's break from prison was over; though his friends in the police advised him to seek refuge in Switzerland. A court-martial condemned him to five years' imprisonment with an additional eighteen months for "troubling the course of justice with subversive remarks". His experiences led him eventually to attempt a hunger strike, which after six days was successful, much to his astonishment. The C.O., a *humane* man, ordered that there was to be no further brutality, but, to prevent Lecoin from converting other prisoners to his subversive ideas, he was to be kept in solitary confinement. In solitary confinement the days pass slowly, and there were 630 of them.

At length he was free again, free without a farthing. A scathing pamphlet on the Poincaré government for depriving pacifists of the right to be treated as political prisoners led to his re-arrest, another six months in prison, and a new hunger strike until, once again, Poincaré yielded on the sixth day. Women pacifist prisoners, however, were not to benefit. To obtain the same privilege for them Louis Lecoin had to fast again until this battle too was won on the fifth day.

### Humanist anarchist

Louis Lecoin, once a jobbing gardener, then a cement-worker, became a militant humanist of the anarchist persuasion. Refugees from the Ukraine, from the Argentine,

from Italy and Spain, all received help from him. Anarchists hate the State but love committees. The Committee for a Free Spain sent over the frontier every week several lorry-loads of clothing, bedding, food and arms, and also three ambulances.

When World War II broke out Lecoin became the chief agent in distributing a leaflet *Paix Immédiate!* signed by a score of well-known personalities. The storm this created was intensified by the greater storm. Lecoin found himself accused as an agent of the Gestapo, of the Ogpu and even as an agent-provocateur of Daladier, and abandoned even by many of those who had signed the pamphlet. He was surprised to find himself once again in prison, though not as a political prisoner. From prison to prison, at last to the Sahara to be freed in September, 1941.

With such an experience, Lecoin felt impelled to devote his energies on behalf of political prisoners in which his devoted wife encouraged him. In 1948 there were between 50,000 and 90,000 political prisoners in France. In the monthly *Défense de l'Homme* Lecoin called for a complete amnesty for all, without distinction of race or political creed. In particular he fought for the Conscientious Objector. After his wife's sudden death in 1956, with the agreement and co-operation of his daughter, he realised all he possessed and *Liberté* appeared, backed by a Committee of Defence which included Albert Camus, Jean Cocteau and Jean Giono.

"We must obtain the liberation of all objectors; from our point of view there are no "just" or unjust wars; the true conscientious objector refuses to take part in any war."

This declaration brought him once again before a court of justice, to be acquitted. This was followed by a letter from Minister Guy Mollet stating that, while awaiting the decision of the government, he had given directions that all objectors who had already served five years or more in prison were to be released. Nine were set free. A later order freed another sixty, nearly all Jehovah's Witnesses.

A Bill of Liberation was prepared, largely by Camus. However the violent feelings aroused by the Algerian war made the government hesitate, though it was said that De Gaulle favoured the Bill. Three years passed and nothing was done. Lecoin decided on action, for himself alone, which might, as he had found in the past, arouse attention and so oblige the government to act.

First he wrote to General de Gaulle reminding him of the situation. Convinced that the General would act, Louis, aged seventy-four and in a poor state of health, entered on a fast to last until the Government passed the Liberation Bill.

His daughter and an old friend, who came specially from Dakar to keep him company, looked after him. His friends made a public appeal. Guy Mollet, no longer minister, received an assurance from the secretary of the Chambre that the Bill would shortly be presented.

A fortnight passed. Nothing happened. Louis drank his five pints of water daily and ate nothing.

### A man who should not die

Then *Le Canard Enchaîné*, that widely read satirical periodical, published two articles, "A Man who should not die", and "Hi, the Big Noises, will you let Louis die?" The press generally took up the cry; the "Big Noises" joined in. The Minister for War announced that the Bill

(Continued on page 288)



## NEWS AND NOTES

MRS DIANE MUNDAY urges all those who care about education and democracy to write NOW to Mr Crosland, Minister of Education and Science (with a copy to their MP) asking the government to consider the following:

that when it is proposed to build new denominational schools in multi-school areas, a statutory provision should be made to ensure that when aided schools in one-school areas are rebuilt, the Trust Deeds automatically lapse and the schools become part of the County system.

As many of us know from experience, there is often only one school serving a rural or urban area, and that a denominational church school. Such a situation, as Mrs Munday insists, is morally untenable, undemocratic and makes nonsense of the spirit of the 1944 Education Act. This point was raised by the National Secular Society deputation to the Department of Education and Science last April, and Mr Edward Redhead showed considerable understanding of the problem as it affects parents and children alike; but it needs stressing continually until this provision, at the very least, is provided.

### The Bristol Campaign Against Capital Punishment

SINCE the passing of the Abolition of the Death Penalty Act (1965) the committee of the Bristol Campaign have continued in the course of abolition, both in relation to anomalies in the Act and by extending their activities to the assistance of those condemned to death in other countries, "becoming an International Centre for world-wide abolition of the death penalty". As their leaflet says, "Improving the respect for human life will help to produce a world that never attempts to solve any problem by the death of fellow human beings."

Enquiries to Jim Little, 70 Novers Park Road, Bristol 4.

### Moscow reports

ON August 16 (the *Guardian*) that a Russian Jew, M. Rabinovich, has been sentenced to death in an economic crimes trial on a charge of stealing clothes from a series of factories. His leading accomplice was imprisoned for 12 years in a strict régime labour colony, and another assistant was sent to prison for 8 years.

### Slight exaggeration, perhaps, but . . .

"IT IS WORSE than being in a prison camp", Mr Albert Williams, aged 44, said of the Church Army hostel at Corby, Northants, where if they don't go to chapel they get no TV on Sundays. The *Guardian* (August 26) reports that "toughened steel workers and builders' labourers" who live there also object to the "be in by 11 pm rule".

### The grass on the other side of the fence . . .

A NEW BOOK of Biblical tales recently put on sale in Russia sold 100,000 copies "within a few minutes". Its atheist author, Zenon Kosibovsky does not regard the Bible as divinely inspired (reports the *Catholic Herald*) but as "a monument of world literature reflecting the life of many generations of ancient people". Perhaps as a deterrent to taking it too seriously, six leaders of the Evangelical Christian Baptists in Russia have been imprisoned for "anti-social activities", which included organising religious processions, baptising people in the river Don and running a Sunday school.

### In Cheshire . . .

THE NATIONAL YOUTH LEAGUE (reports a reader of the *Guardian*) is trying to recruit young people. Its propaganda includes "Race—a Biblical subject", which explains that the Bible and science confirm that it is a sin

to mix the races, and the sort of jingoism so favoured by the Empire Loyalists with whom this unsavoury league is "working in happy conjunction".

### And in Peking

TEENAGERS known as the "Red Guards" have been demonstrating and appear 'to have taken over permanently the churches serving Peking's Christians, whose number are stimated at fewer than 20,000" (*Guardian*, August 24). The Red Guards have also declared in posters that having flowers in the house "is not revolutionary", and several flower shops have been closed. It all makes one think how much more pleasant the world might be without belief—be it in doctrine or dictatorships.

### The Jehovah's Witnesses

HAVE been holding their regular national assembly at Twickenham rugby ground. There are (reports the *Observer*) perhaps more than 40,000 Witnesses in Britain, "mainly people of limited education, which, in any case, they are taught to disdain". Perhaps Secular-Humanists really are rather unique in their respect for the sort of wisdom that can only come from a lifetime of learning without faith . . .

### Amnesty International

EXPECTS a major clash at its fifth assembly when the French and Swedes will press for the definition "prisoner of conscience" to include those convicted of violence. Nelson Mandela forfeited Amnesty's support under the existing ruling.

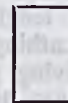
### Not really, but . . .

CHRISTIANS do not seem to see themselves in the reflection of the Flat Earth-ers, who have received a "terrible shock" at seeing a photograph of the earth, quite distinctly rounded, as taken by the Lunar Orbiter satellite, but of course only momentarily; Samuel Shenton (no 1 of the 24 members) suggests that "it is probably one of the non-luminous bodies between us and the moon" and not the earth at all.

### "Peering into the future . . ."

MR ST JOHN-STEVAS writes in the *Sunday Times* (August 28), "it is not perhaps too fanciful to see a patriarchate of Canterbury in communion with Rome, acknowledging the primacy of the Pope and retaining its own liturgy . . ." Meanwhile the RCs in Rome have a theory that their "Christ" was 5 ft 3 ins tall. I wonder how many man-hours it took to think that one-up, and where they go from there. Just supposing someone says, "No! 5 ft 4½ ins", I suppose it will be a new heresy . . . And the Dutch Bishops are upholding that the super-man was "born without man's action out of the Virgin Mary through the overshadowing of the Holy Spirit"; which somehow makes him sound more like a racehorse.

## POST CARD



Hector Hawton has suggested that we should be able to define what is meant by "HUMANISM" in 1966 on a Post Card. Readers are invited during the next few weeks to submit (in no more than 150 words) their definitions, remembering that Humanist beliefs are positive and not just non or anti-Christian, and that the definition must be unique to Humanism as we understand it. Send in your idea NOW; ask your friends and see if we can provide Mr Hawton with what he is looking for.

EDITOR.



## THE CONGRESS OF THE WORLD UNION OF FREETHINKERS : LONDON, SEPTEMBER 1966

The following message was received from S. Ramanathan, President of the Indian Rationalist Association.

IN CONVEY THE GREETINGS of the Rationalists of India to you the Rationalists of the World Union. You, in different countries, are struggling in your various ways to secure full secularism which is the *sine-qua-non* of real freedom. Rationalists in India offer their full co-operation in the achievement of that freedom.

The history of freethought in India stems from pre-historic times. The tradition is that Brihaspathi, the *guru*, the preceptor of the gods, was himself a freethinker. He was probably a contemporary of the writers of the Vedas and lived about 5,000 years ago. The following words attributed to him cannot be bettered by a modern Rationalist:

"Higher than this world there is none. There is no heaven and no hell. The world of gods is an invention of imposters. When once a man is dead and his body is burnt to ashes, how can he return again? If he who departs from the body goes to another world, how is it he comes not back again restless for the love of his kindred? The holy rituals and sacrifices are all merely means of livelihood for the priests destitute of manliness. If a beast slain in the holy sacrifice will go to heaven, why does not the sacrificer offer his own father? If the offerings to the priests produce gratification to the persons in another world, in the case of travellers it is needless to give provision for the journey. If Beings in heaven are gratified by our offerings to the priests, why not give food in a similar manner down below to those on the house top?"

Here is atheism with a vengeance, a complete denial of heaven and hell and a withering ridicule of priestcraft. The lineage of Brihaspathi was continued by Charwaka and other materialists until the time of Buddha who not only denied the existence of heaven and hell but had no belief in the soul.

There were always two lines of thought in India, one was the Vedic and consisted of the propounders of religion. They were very few and kept themselves exclusive fearing contamination of the multitude. The other consisted of the generality of the people, the vast masses who were not tethered to any ideals but were materialists pursuing worldly objectives. They were called the Lokayats, the word "lok" meaning the people. The Vedic school propounded the after-life and professed belief in heaven and hell. The Lokayats, on the contrary, held no such beliefs and lived wholly for material ends. Although a small minority, the believers in Vedas exercised political power by allying themselves with the Kings and the Rulers. The time honoured method of exploitation by priests is to ingratiate themselves with political rulers and to curry favour from them. That is how all the world over this small minority of religious exploiters dominated over the vast majority. The trick that the priests in India played to hold power in their hands is the enforcement of the caste system which divided people into divisions based on a fictitious law of heredity. Every individual born in India necessarily belongs to a caste whose duties are assigned to him at birth. These duties are known as "Dharma". The only ethical principle assigned to man is to hold fast to his "Dharma", namely, the various duties pertaining to the caste in which he is born. This is the central teaching of the Gita which is supposed to be the Bible of the Hindus.

Historically there is no justification for applying the term Hindu to anyone in India. It was a term of contempt used by the Greeks when they conquered the inhabitants of that part of India situated on the Sindhi river. They

referred to the local people over whom they achieved victory as Sindhis which term was converted into "Hindus" in later usage.

The central doctrine of the Gita which is the caste system prevails in India to this day and prevent the people from being united. Originally there were only four castes, but today there are four thousand. Each caste considers itself superior to every other, except the Brahmin, who is of course at the top of the ladder and lords it over all the others. There is no hope of democracy in Indian until this evil of the caste system is abolished. There have been so many reform movements since the days of Raja Ram Mohan Roy, but none of them succeeded in abolishing caste. The politicians dare not touch the caste system because it would make them unpopular. The great leaders including Tilak, Gandhi and even Mrs Besant praised caste in order to secure their popularity. The problem of India is one of achieving democracy by the destruction of caste. Caste wields political power and plays a great part during elections.

I started a campaign to abolish caste by advocating the passing of legislation penalising marriages within the caste. Now the rule is that every marriage must be performed within the subcaste to which the bride and the bridegroom belong. Marriages outside the caste are few and far between and are beset by so many dangers. Even when inter-caste marriages are undertaken by people who brave the consequences, the enthusiasm fades away in the next generation and the children take to the caste of one or other of their parents. My proposal to ban intra-caste marriages gained support, and I secured several thousands of signatures, but the Congress party which is in power refused to entertain my petition to Parliament for some flimsy technical reasons. I do not think of any other method of abolishing caste except by penalising intra-caste marriages.

The question of secularism is very important for India, as it is, indeed, for the rest of the world. Our leader, Gandhi, said that his politics flowed from his religion. Hence the Congress party was committed to religious politics and led to the division of India into Hindu and Muslim at the cost of millions who lost their lives and whose families were uprooted. It was the greatest tragedy enacted in human history, and India has yet not learnt the lessons of the danger involved in playing religious politics.

Pandit Nehru, our late Prime Minister, had the wisdom to incorporate secularism in the Constitution of India. It was a hard necessity for him, because he could not follow the Muslims and the Buddhists in neighbouring countries by promulgating religious states. In a sense, therefore, India enjoys a more liberal constitution than Britain, for example, which is still suffering the handicap of an established church. Although the letter of the constitution is secular, the practice of true secularism is yet far off. State functions are still accompanied by Hindu religious rituals, and our Ministers and our VIPs do not feel the shame of performing religious rites and ceremonies at public functions. Educational Institutions are still far from being secular. The struggler for secularism has yet to be waged, but the constitution has already shown the way and the battle is on for achieving full secularism. In this fight we expect you in the rest of the world to co-operate with us, and we shall all march together into the new era of freedom.



## "NO LONGER RESPECTABLE TO BE A CHRISTIAN . . . ?"

Rae Melamed

Rae Melamed, who comes from an orthodox Jewish family, was born and educated in South Africa. She has been an active Rationalist for more than 20 years. Both her children are also Freethinkers and her granddaughter (age 5), who is at a nursery school, claims to be the only one of the family to believe in God.

IN THE magazine section of the *Daily Telegraph* on July 22nd Rachel Anderson writes:

"Finally came a dismal time when Christians were again persecuted for their odd beliefs. They were not eaten or burned, but they suffered mental persecution; they were mocked by their modern friends, derided and even considered traitors to the great up-to-date humanistic age. England has been officially Christian for more than 1,500 years. Our whole culture is based on Christianity. However today it is apparently no longer respectable or even acceptable actually to be a Christian. Humanism is the thing."

A pretty piece of projection, if ever there was one! In the name of religion—which has, mark you, "Love thy neighbour as thyself" as its theme, so many ghastly holy wars have been fought, so many heretics and witches burnt at the stake, such inquisitions and tortures perpetrated (indeed all those Jews who refused to be converted in Spain were put to death, to give one example), that thinking people everywhere have been aghast at all the hatred, bloodshed and intolerance engendered by religion.

"But," says Mrs Anderson, "the last thing I want is a return to the mediæval system of compulsory belief in Christianity. This would be contrary to the whole essence of Christian doctrine, which is based on the element of choice—man has free will and can choose between right and wrong."

Now we have modern Christianity, and that, of course, is different. Man has free choice. He can choose to be good and go to heaven, or choose to be bad and go to eternal hellfire and damnation. Is the attitude of most churches today towards sex, contraception and family limitation, towards antiquated abortion laws and homosexuality, really moving with the times? Have the churches really faced squarely the problems of our divorce laws, which keep people tied together in a hellish partnership long after love and companionship have turned to hate? Does not every Church still harp on the theme of Sin—we are conceived in sin, we grow up in sin, the human body is sinful, its functions are sinful—ideas which have warped more youthful minds than anything else I can think of.

Mrs Anderson claims that Humanists laugh at Christians and persecute them. I have been a Humanist for many many years and have yet to witness any persecution from

Humanists. I have never seen a Humanist employer refuse a Christian a job, a Humanist mother refusing to allow her children to play with Christian, or for that matter Jewish or Buddhist children. I have been with other Humanists on special occasions to Church and have never seen them behaving disrespectfully. No, Mrs Anderson, I suggest that persecution has been the other way round all the time.

Her terms of reference are:

(a) A pop singer whom she quotes as saying: "I don't go to church and that crap. You meet such cranky people who do. I'm more interested in Eastern religions like Buddhism and Mohammedanism. They teach you peace of mind and all that jazz." A profoundly intellectual summing up of "Humanistic thought".

(b) A student who told her that he'd been to a lecture on Existentialism. After the lecture an announcement was given about a meeting of the Christian Union. "Poor bloke", said the student, "150 students all shouting at him to shut up. People just hurled books at him!" My, my; who has ever taken such hot-headed students seriously? Apparently Mrs Anderson does.

She also makes a very odd statement:

"Roman Catholics are just all right because one is generally born a Catholic and so can't do anything about it. Mormons are okay too, not to be, but for sociological study purposes. The Eastern religions are very trendy. But as for ordinary God-fearing, Bible-reading, Christ-imitating Christianity, it's plain old-fashioned. You're barmy, a freak, if you believe these days."

I don't quite know what this means or how this is related to Humanism, but I am always willing to learn. Humanism and Rationalism, as far as I have understood them, are philosophies born of reason and thought, and their basis is the discarding of superstitions, fears of hellfire and miracles, their essence is the belief that every individual thinks things through for himself, and arrives at a toleration of other human beings, and learns to accept them and respect them as individuals. We appreciate the differences in people and firmly believe in everyone's right to think and live in freedom. I have never yet known any Humanist proselytism or force.

Far from throwing books at Mrs Anderson or jeering at her, we Humanists would gladly invite her to attend some of our meetings to talk to us and hear our point of view and really learn something about Humanism and tolerance.

Otto Wolfgang

## THE MAN NOBODY KNOWS

WRITING IN the *Weekend Telegraph* (May 6), Tom Driberg defines *aggiornamento* as

the restatement of old beliefs, still held valid, in terms which will be comprehensible and relevant today—with, incidentally, the removal of non-essential trimmings which obscure the reality.

Without trying to introduce "reality" into a purely fantastic ideology, *Newsweek* (April 1) gives a simpler explanation when stating that Christianity is still surviving because some men in every age have been willing to believe the paradoxical mystery of the Word made flesh. Yet modern, pragmatic man, schooled in science, is uncomfortable with mystery.

Hence, some contemporary theologians like Reinhold Niebuhr regard the "Christ event" purely as a symbol and not as a verifiable event in history. Episcopal Bishop James A. Pike of California laconically rejects both the

Trinity and the Incarnation. "The Christian", van Buren says simply, "is a man who is haunted by the image of Jesus".

Nobody knows—writes *Der Spiegel* in a series of articles on *Jesus und die Kirchen*—when this Jesus was supposed to have been born, and the term "1966 AD" is the result of a monkish submission which would be erroneous even if Jesus had been a historical figure. Professor E. Käsemann (Tübingen) teaches that "Jesus did not create the Church no did he ever intend to"; and nearly all Protestant theologians—now influencing some of the RC fraternity—are agreed that the Gospels are a "profession of belief and not a historical record". By continually preaching doctrines from the pulpit which are being rejected by theological teachers, Christianity has become schizophrenic. Roman Catholicism faces more serious problems in its efforts to



cling to old-fashioned beliefs. "One of the troubles", says Rev. David Stanley, a Jesuit Scripture scholar from Canada, "is that we feel we have all the answers when we aren't even aware of the questions in the way that Protestant exegetics are." And another Jesuit theologian, Piet Fransen of Innsbruck University, agrees:

It is difficult to say in our age what the "divinity" of Jesus can mean—we just don't know.

Catholic dogma has never required the faithful to accept Mary's perpetual physical virginity, maintains Brother Isadore. "Many Catholic theologians feel that Mary was only a moral virgin". Martin Dibelius and H. von Camphausen have long ago removed this "non-essential trimming". The miracles are greatly disbelieved today and ascribed to a naïve and credulous time. And lately a hot dispute goes on between the Jesuits and the Dominicans about hell-fire, which the former describe as the fantastic outcome of medieval cruelty. They modernize this doctrine as the "spiritual torment of the soul which has lost all opportunity of salvation".

The Dominicans with their missionary activities however cling obstinately to a literal belief in the human barbecue in hell.

Karl Barth, Rudolf Bultmann and their circle have shocked the fundamentalists by declaring that nothing in the Scripture is fact but merely the invention of Christological symbolism; the fewer facts there are in a creed the deeper will be the faith, they say. And the deeper the Christ is shocked, the better it will prove for man and his belief. "I don't mind its burning because it will do away with a lot of rubbish". Even so-called sayings of Jesus are being rejected as not authentic.

It must be remembered, however, that the First Vatican Council of 1870 approved of all miracles and threatened with excommunication any Catholic who saw in them merely "legends and myths". And as late as 1961 two books by French theologians were put on the *Index*.

*Aggiornamento* therefore is a tacit retreat from the position of fundamentalism to that of Existentialism. If the life of Jesus is fiction, at least his death can be used for a "restated" religion. "The death of God is a real event to me", declared Dr William Hamilton, professor of theology at Colgate-Rochester Divinity School. "God is dead" echoes the Bishop of Woolwich, and J. J. Altizer, associate professor of religion at Atlanta's Emory University, considers God's death as a prerequisite for genuine Christian faith. His treatise *The Gospel of Christian Atheism* (sic!) is to be published by the Westminster Press; it teaches that the faith of the radical, or Godless Christian, is grounded in the incarnation and crucifixion of Jesus, but not in his resurrection. "The only exceptional thing about Jesus was his dying", maintains Professor Arthur McGill (Princeton).

His miracles have been discredited by science, his message of grace can be found in the Old Testament and his disciples before Easter proved to be no more heroic than anyone else. But in his death Jesus revealed that all real loving is a form of dying.

Far from daring to discuss their position with unbelievers, the churches ought to bring their own house in order first and find out where they stand in respect of Jesus, of whom Bultmann, applying the techniques of literary form criticism to the New Testament, reached the conclusion:

I do indeed think that we can now know almost nothing concerning the life and personality of Jesus.

And yet, they still arrogate the right to indoctrinate schoolchildren and adults alike with the Man Nobody Knows.

## FREETHINKER

Published by G. W. Foote & Co. Ltd.  
(Pioneer Press)

103 BOROUGH HIGH STREET, LONDON, S.E.1

Telephone: HOP 0029

Editor: KIT MOUAT

THE FREETHINKER can be obtained through any newsagent or will be forwarded direct from the Publishing Office at the following rates: One year £1 17s. 6d.; half year, 19s.; three months, 9s. 6d. In U.S.A. and Canada: One year, \$5.25; half-year, \$2.75; three months, \$1.40.

Orders for literature from THE FREETHINKER BOOKSHOP; FREETHINKER subscriptions, and all business correspondence should be sent to the BUSINESS MANAGER, G. W. FOOTE & CO. LTD., 103 BOROUGH HIGH STREET, LONDON, S.E.1, and not to the Editor. Cheques, etc., should be made payable to G. W. FOOTE & CO. LTD.

Editorial matter should be addressed to: THE EDITOR, THE FREETHINKER, 103 BOROUGH HIGH STREET, LONDON, S.E.1.

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.

## ANNOUNCEMENTS

### OUTDOOR

Edinburgh Branch NSS (The Mound)—Sunday afternoon and evening: MESSRS. CRONAN, MCRAE 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 9th, 8 p.m., ERNEST TATE, "Cuba". 16th, 8 p.m., Dr MALCOLM CALDWELL, "Neo-Colonialism in Asia".

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.

Havering Humanist Society (Harold Wood Social Centre, Gubbins Lane and Squirrels Heath Road), Tuesday, 13th September, 8 p.m., LYNDON-JONES, "Productivity in Education".

### REPORT ON LIBRARIES

ESHER, Surrey, will not provide either the FREE-THINKER or the *Humanist*.

HAYWARDS HEATH, Sussex, provides the *Humanist* but refuses the FREETHINKER.

(The Editor will be grateful to hear of the situation in your own area.)

## STOP PRESS

ON the morning of September 2nd, the second day of the 1966 Congress of the World Union of Freethinkers in London, its President, Charles Bradlaugh Bonner, died aged 78. Grandson of the great Charles Bradlaugh (founder of the National Secular Society), printer, schoolmaster and linguist, Charles Bradlaugh Bonner devoted his life to Freethought and (as Michael Foote put it at the evening meeting) "sustained the name and reputation of his grandfather with most proper and splendid devotion". To his widow, sons and grandchildren we extend our deepest sympathy. His work for Freethought is in all our hands and must and shall go on.



## A FRENCH CONSCIENTIOUS OBJECTOR

(Continued from page 283)

was being studied; meanwhile all objectors who had served three years or more were to be released.

At this point a surprised occurred. The police came to arrest Louis' daughter and the friends at his bedside. Why? Because they were guilty of not going to the help of one in danger of death! At the same time they took him away from his home to the Bichat Hospital, where he was treated with the greatest care and kindness. He did not waver.

Telegrams came from the Italian President and from Nenni, then Minister of Foreign Affairs, expressing their encouragement.

On the twenty-second day the doctors became nervous. His friends would not leave him for an hour. A crowd gathered outside the hospital. M. Pompidou announced his acceptance of the Bill, and ordered the release of all the 150 conscientious objectors then in prison. Louis broke his fast.

### Victory at last

Four days later parliament rose for the vacation. Nothing further had been done. In fact it was a year before the Bill, much amended, was finally passed. And then the Jehovah's Witnesses, who formed the large majority of the objectors released, wrote to the General that Lecoin could never be the mouthpiece for Jehovah's Witnesses because his opinions did not agree with Christianity.

Louis Lecoin is still alive. His friends have put his name before the Nobel Prize Committee for the Peace award for 1966. What do you think?

[From the book *Le Cours d'Une Vie*, by Louis Lecoin, Paris, 1965.]

## LETTERS

### The Medicos

BY a nice coincidence your excellent editorial on cancer, *A Matter of Life and Death*, appeared on the same day as a Press report about five Manchester Medical School students who tested their examiners by submitting identical papers. It is most appropriate that the marking, by different examiners, varied from a "failure"—45 per cent—to a "distinction"—70 per cent—because times without number different doctors have given widely-varying diagnoses of the same subject.

Since the FREETHINKER is primarily and essentially anti-clerical I should not be plaguing you with anti-medical letters, but there is no need to be surprised that Josephine Butler had the medical profession against her, including even the woman doctors, because that is the pattern. Like organised religion, orthodox medicine flourishes on ignorance. Where would doctors be if people knew how to keep well?

J. A. S. NISBET

### Human liberty in peril

I WAS MUCH INTERESTED in a suggestion in the FREETHINKER that some nuns in convents may well be unhappy yet unable to find a way of escape. I am also left wondering concerning the actual conducting of these places and how far undue influence is used in such matters as the making over of money to the Order and the like. Many years ago, there was a Convent Enquiry Society conducted by the Rev W. Lancelot Holland but it seems to have disappeared in the years preceding the first world war. One of its aims was to seek governmental inspection of convents by Home Office inspectors. It also set out to help ex-nuns. Some organised activity should also be available to assist priests and laity who wish to break away from the Roman Catholic Church in this country. Again, there should be some concerted manner in which ex-Roman Catholics may be aided in warding off attacks, frequently under-handed or back-stabbing, made officially or unofficially by their former co-religionists.

The whole manner in which the undesirable activities of the Romish system can be counteracted in this country by practical protest and action needs investigation. Old-fashioned Protestant-

ism certainly does not meet the case. But I would suggest that it is a task which could be undertaken by the NSS, possibly by the use of the sub-committee method. It is clear that such activity is needed upon a wide scale, ranging from local protest at so obvious a municipal scandal as the Cricket Green at Mitcham in Surrey being used for the conducting of the full rite of Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament in the presence of the (RC) Bishop of Southwark, over to the highest forms of parliamentary action. Wherever Rome exists unchallenged or unchecked, human liberty is at stake and in peril.

F. H. AMPHLETT MICKLEWRIGHT

### Youth in the "dock"

I WAS INTERESTED in the article *Logic of the Teenager* by Gerald Jackson (July 8). I am aged 37 so I can pass an opinion. I hope, without any prejudice for or against either the older or younger generations. I agree that what they wear is nobody's business, providing they keep themselves clean and reasonably tidy. However, the statement, "If their music offends, we don't have to listen"; *don't we?* How many times have you been relaxing on a beach or in a park, wanting peace and quiet, and been disturbed by a teenager with a blaring radio? They are not satisfied with entertaining themselves, they want to force the noise on everybody and become abusive if asked to turn down the volume. Similarly why is it that when they are making their way home late at night they cannot converse normally but must shout? So they "refuse to be influenced by religious or political propaganda"? I remember a teenager, an RC calling me a "dirty red" because I stated I was an atheist. *Are they far less tolerant of racial discrimination?* The author should come round this district some time and see slogans such as "Wogs go home", "Wilson loves Wogs" and swastikas which have been daubed by teenagers on walls as well as obscene drawings. I have actually seen teenagers doing these things. As for protesting against social injustices I have found many of them to be "bosses men" and one actually said to me a couple of weeks ago "I wish I was one of those playboys so I would not have to work for a living". If the teenagers are our saviours well we have no future. I agree previous generations have made a mess of things but I do not think the teenagers, what I have seen of them, will do any better and I do not share the author's confidence. Possibly the generation as yet unborn will be our Saviours but up till now Humanity is a miserable failure and cannot possibly progress until politics and religion have been completely abandoned. A civilisation based on ethics will destroy the evil of Capitalism and make unnecessary the ideology of Socialism. Finally, I must add that I have many good friends among the teenage population. My criticisms are generalised but I hope they are constructive and not destructive.

A. BLOOD

## REVIEW

David Tribe

*He was gone when they got there* (Mermaid) has some splendid moments and neat *doubles entendres*. Written by Bill Naughton, it delivers Britain's last free man, Badger Brown, of Mucky Meadows, from Whitehall bureaucracy and its omnivorous computer, Simon. Built by Mike Hanson and D. R. Marshall (Scenery) Ltd., and voiced by Peter Sellers, Simon steals the show. Nothing else comes up to his wild inventiveness, though Thelma Whiteley as Miss Ebury, the repressed bureaucrat with surprising hidden depths, rivals him in one scene. Effective acting by Mairi Russell enlivens stockpot cleaner Flo.

There is not much more in favour that can be said. Writing, direction and acting were generally uncertain. Random lines and programme notes (imaginative and informative as usual) suggested a serious social intent, but the whole romp was not convincing even at the level of satirical farce. It certainly had none of the scientific insight of *Brave New World* or political plausibility of *1984*. Once or twice, embarrassingly, the Whitehall staff burst into production numbers ably composed by Leonard Salzada. With more justification the yokels also sang a song or two. Perhaps the best thing would have been to turn the show into a musical along *Gypsy Baron* or *Brigadoon* lines; but it would need to be slicker, faster, better acted and/or better sung.

The most unsatisfactory scenes were of the yokels. At one point they said, "Let's turn on the Archers", but both before and after they were not as witty, well-observed or well-scripted as Edward J. Mason creation. It was essential for the play to succeed that Badger Brown (Bernard Miles) be as eccentric as the bureaucrats, as folksily endearing as Old Mother Hubbard or as comical as Barbara Frietchie. In this production he remained sympathetic bore that Whitehall was welcome to.