

FREETHINKER

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VERY TRYING TO UNDERSTAND

THE ESSENCE of snobbery lies in knowing or believing that one has enviable qualities or possessions, and despising (or just pitying) those who are without them. There is another feeling of superiority, however, when we cannot prove that our own experience is more valuable than other people's but set out to convince them that this is so. Tone-deaf artists try to persuade musicians that their lives are empty without an understanding of Francis Bacon, religionists insist that unbelievers are deprived of the experience of "Christ", while Rationalists may well suggest that people with a religious faith never really appreciate this world or use their reason to the full.

In his *The Conscious Mind*, Kenneth Walker, FRCS, tried to describe the experience of mystics whose aim seems to be to "pass beyond" the mundane projects, plans and purposes of human life to a passive, receptive state, ready to be occupied by something called "the divine". We are, as it were, virgin-receptacles, longing to be penetrated, not by those pleasantly human gods of Greece or even the bloodthirsty Father of Jesus, but by a "universal spirit". And this "spirit" is much more likely to be found in Calcutta than in Carshalton or California. It is essentially eastern, and a reaction (we might suggest) against the materialistic theology of the Christian faith. All the same, Mr Walker believes in the Christian "Christ" as a "great religious leader" and he writes as one of those who long to find a common denominator of Absolute religious Truth worshipped by all mankind.

Mystics do not believe, as Humanists believe, in being attached to this worldly life, filling it with emotional, intellectual and artistic activity. Mystics want to get rid of personality and individuality, to be drained of all desire, so as to be free to experience . . . well, what? This is what is so hard for them to describe and for some of us to understand. The fact that mystics often seem to be relatively insensitive to, say, the fine arts, sex, or just enthusiasm on an ordinary plane, makes one suspect that perhaps their so-called "mystical" experience is the best they can do as a sublimation. But here we are in danger

perhaps of adopting an inverted snobbery of the non-mystic! Certainly life without desire would be dull for most of us. Just wanting the unobtainable (so long as it is not bare necessity) whether it be that holiday on the Riviera, one of the Beatles, or a George II spoon is often more satisfying than possession or achievement.

Buddha is the model for the mystic: fat, relaxed, smiling. Not Rodkin's "Thinker" of the RPA library. But surely this is a matter of temperament and choice? We might choose other than we are or have, but we would not all choose the same. There can be no absolute model in this non-personality cult; certainly not Jesus, but not even Buddha or Bertrand Russell.

Kenneth Walker experienced his "At-oneness" with what he calls "the Universal Consciousness" in a "cathedral wood"; can it be experienced, we may ask, in the concrete jungle? Or is mysticism (like good brandy and first editions) for the few and affluent? Even if you live in a Glasgow slum there may be Mozart on someone else's transistor radio. Bertie Wooster asked at a late breakfast, "Is there an hour earlier than this?" And is there any experience that can possibly exceed listening to a Mozart concerto? And wasn't Mozart in his lively sexual, creative life infinitely more attractive than, say Jacob Boehme who confessed that he was not "a master of literature nor of the arts, such as belong to the world, but a foolish and simple-minded man" who had "never desired to learn any science" but strove for "the salvation of his soul"? It is the mystic's emphasis on *my* soul, *my* salvation, *my* experience that is apt to bore one out of sympathy. Kenneth Walker describes mysticism as a "courageous attempt . . . to explore the uncharted territory of the spirit . . ." But what does that really mean?

Secular-Humanists are not pantheists. We do not see nature as divine or as a deity. We can, of course, experience an exciting and wholly understandable "at-oneness" with the universe, merely by picking up a fossil a few million years old, or by seeing the original Nefertiti head and realising how little we have learned about art in the last 4,000 years. But there is nothing mystical about this. It is a matter of knowing a few facts and letting the imagination run on a little on pleasant rather than unpleasant lines. We do not claim to have a "super" or "higher consciousness". We are just grateful to have escaped the Christian view of history with its calendar less than 2,000 years old. Indeed, while the mystic is heaven-bent on escaping the pulls and thrusts of this world, it may be an "at-oneness" with *him* that is most difficult to feel, and this may only be felt through the Humanist stress on the plain, ordinary, biological humanity of man that survives all the seductions and rapes of the "spirit".

INSIDE

HUMANISTS AND THE VATICAN	F. H. Amphlett Micklewright
CO-EXISTENCE WITH CANCER	Phyllis K. Graham
HUMANISM, HOME AND FAMILY	Isobel Grahame
INTERNATIONAL CONGRESS	
INTERNATIONAL TRIBUTE	: WUFT CONGRESS
NOTES AND NEWS	: ANNOUNCEMENTS
LETTERS	: OBITUARY

The words glitter in the book, like artificial frost on a Christmas tree. "Higher faculties", "cosmic consciousness", "pure perception", "something great that is not myself"; all set to make one feel deprived if there did not lurk a small suspicion about it all.

Kenneth Walker is a disciple of Ouspensky and Gurdjieff, who also inspired Maurice Nichol and his followers. In my experience the Nicolites are so involved in their own terminology that they are in real danger of breaking off communication with the rest of us. If theirs is a joyous experience, their joy is well hidden. There is no doubt about their intensity, or that they believe that they have a superior self-knowledge, vision and experience; but it is hard to see how this benefits others, the world at large or even themselves.

Perhaps the mystics can produce valuable data to be put alongside dreams, hysteria and sexual problems, the effects of drugs, starvation or frustrations; but it needs to be sorted out by scientists who strictly avoid the use of all religious and poetic terminology. Of course we all have a right (within reason) to explore our own enjoyments, but mystics cannot prove that their brand is really any "deeper", "fuller" or more "worthwhile" than, say, the process of giving birth, taking carnation cuttings successfully, or designing a steam engine. It is impossible to allot

such priorities, and any claim to do so is bound to sound pompous and a little arrogant. Most people can experience achievement in at least one direction; we are all necessarily "deprived" in others.

The Secularist, however, so often accused of having an arid and sterile philosophy, cannot stress too often the importance of the arts in our lives and the necessity of developing the sense of wonder which is natural to the child and which can so easily be crushed. We do not despise plans and purposes, and we have a world-full of human achievement on the non-mystical plane to explore. We can try to understand the mystics' need to escape (as we try to understand the attraction of the monastery), but we need not envy . . .

Kenneth Walker belongs to the "Fellowship of Religious Humanists" which has its HQ in Ohio, USA, and is affiliated to both the American Humanist Association and the Unitarian Universalist Association. In 1963, 38 ministers and laymen issued a draft proposal for an organisation "to promote understanding between humanistic religious liberals with particular attention to philosophy, ethics and religion . . ." We hope that in their attempts to communicate with those who talk in religious terms, these Humanists will not neglect communication with those of us who do not.

HUMANISTS AND THE VATICAN

F. H. Amphlett Micklewright

FOR THE STUDENT of European culture, the Vatican presents a constant challenge. It is the centre of the Roman Catholic Church and, as such, the centre of a religion which is clearly opposed theologically to any form of secular humanism. At the same time, it is the centre of a worldwide church which sets out to function as a vast political organisation. There can be no doubt that this church works through its agents to bring about the conversion of the world to an acceptance of its claims. It is highly authoritarian and totalitarian with the natural result that its outlook is far removed from that of political democracy and stands in hostile contrast to any form of Marxist totalitarianism.

A good contemporary example of this hostility is reported in the *Times* for April 13, where a report is to be found of the refusal by the Marxist government of Poland of visas to various Western dignitaries of the Roman Catholic Church in order that they might take part in the thousandth anniversary of the founding of the Polish Church. The motivation of the refusal is clearly political, the fear of a nominally religious occasion being used as the excuse for anti-Marxist demonstrations. At the other extreme, the *Times* for April 12 reported protests made following the expulsion from St John's Seminary, Boston, of eight American students for the priesthood who were demanding academic and personal freedom. It is clear from happenings of this kind that the totalitarian issue is still very much alive and that neither the challenge of Marxism nor the liberalising influences of oecumenicalism have done a great deal towards softening the authoritarian attitude which the modern Papacy has inherited from its mediaeval predecessor.

Intrigues in England

At the same time, it is also clear that the Roman Catholic Church has its agents constantly at work to subvert the structure of opposing orders. Immediately after the Reformation, the Jesuits proved to be the militant

agents of the Counter-Reformation. Such names as Campion and Parsons recall the use of Jesuit agents in the struggle for the reconversion of England and their work went on throughout the seventeenth century. The reigns of both Charles II and James II provide many curious examples. It is too often forgotten that the order proved itself so great a nuisance with its history of plotting and intrigue that it was abolished in 1773 by Pope Clement XIV, an abolition which may well have led to the poisoning of the pope in question.

Since 1829, the need for subterfuge has greatly disappeared among Rome's agents in this country. The Roman Catholic clergy and laity function openly, although it is not too much to assert that they sometimes do so in devious ways in such matters as education or the world of the press and publication. Fellow-travellers have appeared, such as a handful of the advanced high church party in the Church of England. Roman Catholic pressure groups are a phenomenon of contemporary society. It may be debated how far the Roman Catholic Church has made headway among native English during the last hundred years, but its vast social and political increase of power cannot be disputed nor can the network of intrigue by which it has been supported.

Humanist response

Faced with this situation, the humanist may well ask himself where he stands during a period of Vatican advance. It must be clear to him that, with the obvious decay of the Church of England and of the nonconforming Protestant bodies, the Vatican may well become increasingly a politico-religious mecca for the right wing in politics. Indeed, the spiritual path trodden by Mr Evelyn Waugh from the days of *Decline and Fall* to those of *Brideshead Revisited* affords apt illustration of the point. From a Humanist viewpoint, the vital issues lie away from the historic Protestant doctrinal discussions. Zwinglianism in eucharistic belief is as remote from humanism as is

transubstantiation. His real controversy lies within a clash of cultures and the problems which he has to face arise out of the further problems of his reaction to the cultural assertions found in modern Catholic social application.

Not a little insight may be gained from the history of humanism itself. Treating the Chaucer of the *Canterbury Tales* as the pioneer English humanist, he stands in direct contrast to William Langland, his mediaeval contemporary. For Chaucer, the world was to be described and valued in terms of an immediate empirical experience. He described men and women as he saw and knew them. In contrast Langland denied this emergent optimism and wrote his *Piers the Ploughman* in terms of the gloomy pessimism which marked mediaeval religion. Men and women lived their lives under judgement in a world of sin. The only hope lay in the last day and in the divine mercy. At the root of this ideological division is to be observed naturalism as it stands in contrast to supernaturalism. It was this division which illuminated the literary humanism of the Renaissance or the humanistic motives in later mediaeval Italian art.

As the world of physical science opened out, the same division marked the growth of learning. Finally, in the post-Darwinian world, the division is once again into naturalism and supernaturalism with the culture of the humanist standing against that of the Catholic supernaturalist. A work such as Maritain's *Art and Scholasticism* when read side by side with Coulton's *Art and the Reformation* illustrates the extent to which modern Romanism at the academic level has rehashed the scholasticism of the Middle Ages and the extent to which it is still removed from any sort of compromise with any form of naturalism.

Dialogue

For one group of humanists, the issue arises as to whether this gulf can be bridged in any measure by the modern technique of the dialogue. It is obvious that some sort of envisaged common ground may be explored, that some sort of debate may be established and that some sort of doctrinal compromise may be brought about. The unwary humanist may even think that he has made some progress and that the day may dawn when Cardinal Heenan will speak not only in Rochester Cathedral but at Conway Hall. Could a reverent and constructive humanism do better? It recalls the days when Dr Coit hoped to set up an ethical working model for a state church to follow out, or when Comte sought to desupernaturalise the great Church of Rome itself! The real fallacy lies in the failure to appreciate the true end sought by the Church of Rome and to identify it with doctrine.

Romanism rests not upon doctrine but upon power dressed up as theology. The whole final motive of Vaticanism has been illustrated by its search for political power. Such may be traced out in the Hildebrandine controversy. It is reflected to the full in Pius V and the Counter-Reformation. Nineteenth century Vaticanism and the victory of ultramontanism was a perfectly logical development from an earlier period. Indeed, it was the power-complex which turned the convert Manning into "the noblest Roman of them all" and which his Roman Catholic biographer, C. E. Purcell, was unable to disguise. The contemporary story as it has been unfolded by such writers as Paul Blanshard or Avro Manhattan is one of the Vatican quest for political power. A very real fear which may arise when some humanists go off to conduct their dialogue with Vatican representatives is that acting under the delusion of a supreme statesmanship, they will become merely the victims of the ablest power-statesmen

in the Europe of today and that a ruined humanist movement will be the result of their doubtless well-meant activity.

Secular humanism

The secular humanist stands in contrast with the Vatican. He is aware how the Labour Party in Australia was all but wrecked by the minions of the Vatican and he has seen the same thing happen in some constituencies in this country. For him, Vatican clericalism is always the enemy. A writer such as Joseph McCabe represents the normal humanist attitude where the Roman Catholic Church be concerned. There can be no question of compromise or of dialogue. He is facing the old enemy of democratic freedom in thought and in speech and the battle is still far from won. He does not need to have an attitude of mind typical of the London of the days of Titus Oates to mistrust those who, openly or less openly, serve as agents of the Vatican in the Western world of today. They are serving an authoritarianism which, as the well known ex-Dominican, R. R. Suffield, once said, is a system of mental and spiritual serfdom. The humanist recalls that Pius IX, in an encyclical which has never been repudiated, condemned under the name of liberalism a century ago most modern liberties. Present-day Roman Catholic interference in such matters as marriage law is ever-present witness to a standpoint which he would wish to repudiate.

In his *In Defence of the Reformation*, Dr G. G. Coulton pointed out that the English Reformation was the social upheaval brought about by mediaeval corruption and decay; it was very largely a lay movement overthrowing a decadent clericalism. Bad though things were in sixteenth century England, Dr Coulton's contemporary, the distinguished Scottish historian Dr Hay Fleming, was quick to show that things were even worse in Scotland! It is interesting to recall that, though both of these learned historians were subjected to a tirade of Roman Catholic "history", in other words of priestly Billingsgate, their major contentions were never refuted.

Sober caution

For the humanist of today, the real question is whether he wishes to come to terms with modern descendants of priestly mediaevalism or whether he still sees an ecclesiastical authoritarianism as the foe. A succession of historians, W. E. H. Lecky, J. B. Bury, Andrew White, H. C. Lea, will all alike provide him with ample materials to shape his answer. He does not need to be a fanatical seeker after Jesuits or a person of seventeenth century outlook to mistrust to the full the present day activities of the Vatican or to see it as an authoritarian alternative standing forth within the rival cultures of the world. For many, the answer will be that discussion with Vatican representatives is fruitless and they may recall the spirit which met John Huss at the Council of Constance.

The Vatican spirit of change proclaimed today does not go so far as to erode the historic quest for power. But the answer will be that a victorious Church of Rome in England or Scotland would mean victory for a denial of the very secular evaluations and claims to freedom for which the humanist stands. It would be the end of the great English tradition of freethought for, in the battle between Rome and reason, it would mean that Rome had won. Older Protestant challenges tended to be based upon Biblical assertions and would cut little ice today. The issue of humanism and the Vatican is a direct challenge to humanists to remove the traditional battleground to that of the sociological and there to maintain the historic fight against the greatest enemy of liberty which the Western world has ever seen.

GO-EXISTANCE WITH CANCER

Phyllis K. Graham

Since cancer is now a tolerably acceptable subject for discussion we can mention the word without fear of sending people into hysterics or reducing them to an appalled silence. One may venture to hope that to use it in analogy will not be regarded as an error of taste or a sin against society.

"LEARN to live with it." That is a common enough exhortation, much indulged in by helpful psychiatrists. I know, having had it from them first-hand and often.

But just suppose that instead of "nerves" or some other misfortune not curable by surgery, the diagnosis should be cancer, with the hope of cure by an immediate operation. Should I then gratefully recollect the teachings of those reverend masters of mind-behaviour and resolve to "live with it"? I might, of course, if I were on the path to sainthood. I might prefer to "offer up" protracted agonies and painful death to the God who glories in the gruesome and excruciating. Since I am (I hope) a moderately rational being, having long dispensed with helpful psychotherapy and unhelpful gods, I feel pretty sure that I should take the obvious course and co-operate all I could in driving out the foe and restoring the system to normality.

International cancer

"The obvious course", however, is not so obvious when the enemy is a world-scale carcinoma and the cachetic system a vast agglomeration of humanity. Diagnosticians are rare, and those who venture to come forward are wary. Few of them advocate the knife. Tolerance and homeopathy seem to be the favourite prescription with those of the majority who do not actually shrug with their psychiatric brethren, "Learn to live with it".

Freethinkers and Humanists should be under no delusion about the state of the victim and the nature of the growth. Some may shrink from the thought of drastic treatment, but none should deny that the tumour is malignant. Alas, a surprising number of them do just that.

"There will always be people who *need* religion," says one, naming the pathological condition almost with reverence.

"Why should we *take* it from them?" demands another, repudiating surgery with the sort of emotion aroused by vivisection. "It doesn't do them any harm so long as they're sincere. And if it makes them happy..."

"But it isn't *true*," you may point out. "Do you want them to be happy on a Lie?"

"But it's true to *them*," comes the staggering retort. How can you cope with sophistry like that?

Well, I suppose one *ought* to argue on in the name of reason. But toiling to convert irrational Humanists seems rather a waste of time to me. Our life is brief and Humanists are supposed to have done the job for themselves.

Born free

There are others—and frankly I often envy them—who simply are not touched by the tragedy. "Born free"—healthy from childhood—they have no experience of religious cachexia in themselves and are rather baffled by it in others, though it excites their curiosity and frequently their pity. They are not blind to its effects on society and they can trace its impact on history, but mostly they tend to laugh with Democritus at the follies of mankind. God-worship in all its vagaries and varieties strikes them as so utterly ludicrous that they cannot help treating it as a jest, or as something so puerile as to be beneath contempt and unworthy of serious consideration. While com-

plaining to the victims they often fail to grasp the reality of the disease.

To those, like myself, whose lives have been overshadowed from the beginning by the "clouds and darkness" of the god-cult, such a state of freedom seems at times a nirvana for which we would willingly exchange the burden and pain of our awareness. But we know that this can never be. As long as we live we shall be conscious of the Power of the Lie and the havoc it wreaks in the corpus of humanity. We shall perhaps see more clearly than many others the signs and symptoms of that sinister erosion, perpetually destroying in secret the life-cells that build up the progress and carry the identity of man. As long as we live we feel bound to fight it and oppose it in every way we can, though our hearts fail us for the feebleness of our efforts and the loneliness of our struggle against intolerable odds. There could be no let-up even if the world turned against us. Our defiance ends only with our last breath!

Is there a doctor in the house?

But—must we be a small body, ill-equipped, fighting on alone? Must the cancer-cells spawn on unchecked through weakened humanity for lack of surgeons and scalpels, of understanding, courage and skill?

When I became a Roman Catholic in the early nineteen-twenties I was one of three hundred million throughout the globe. Today, despite millions of deaths in the cruellest war in history, and the drain of continuous leakage, the number has practically doubled. It represents something between one-fifth and one-sixth of the present world population. We all know the reasons for a trend that isn't likely to alter as things are at present. The main drive of the Catholic mentality is identical with that of the cancer-cell: sheer proliferation. The Roman Church, relentlessly growing, pushing, expanding, pursues in every country of the world her sick aim of self-aggrandisement: from the avid multiplication of stocks and shares to the reckless multi-spawning of human births, from feverish recruiting of "vocations" to frenzied scalp-hunting for "conversions".

It is an awesome thought that the anti-life process of cancer-activity is actually a violently dynamic manifestation of the life-force. But it is life gone mad, swollen up with rebellion against its own laws and principles. A mindless will-to-power drives it on to dominate the system, till the very excess of its urge to reproduction brings about the opposite end—the negation of life.

Etiology

Christianity, like cancer, is mysterious in origin and baffling in action. "That they may have life, and have it more abundantly" is uncannily and ironically prophetic of the course of christian history and the pathological states of christianized societies. The morbid growth which has developed under the name of Rome, and all the many related forms of christian sarcoma, are a parody indeed of that "fulness of life" so longed for and sought by the mind of man. The malignant disorder from the orient dethroned human life from its true dignity, interfered with its normal functions, reduced it to a state of more or less chronic morbidity. Some resilient spark in man's spirit—or perhaps the dogged resistance that survived the Ice Age—has so far saved his life from being snuffed out altogether. In fact his healthier cells are increasing, the warrior corpuscles getting more active in his blood.

Prognosis

But today we see a new and startling phenomenon: a sudden virulent access of strength in the progress of disease, as if it had become resistant to measures which have hitherto succeeded—just—in keeping it in check. Ecumenism poses serious possibilities. For instance, the scirrhous carcinoma of Canterbury may unite with the monstrous intumescence of Rome . . . a prelude to none knows what new ramifications in the fibrous ravel of cellular deformity.

I must admit that sounds rather grotesque! And indeed (to switch to a brighter metaphor) we could all enjoy a hearty laugh at this pantomime spectacle of the two chief gilded puppets of christendom. If only one could be convinced that the morbidity was in one's own mind, that it was conjuring up symptoms of corruption where there was nothing but sound health, sweetness and light. . . . The trouble is there are too many ugly realities to permit of indulgence in such a dream. Too much incontestable evidence of the influences at work beneath the white skin of christian hypocrisy.

Action versus faith healing

There is surely no need to put evidence of this kind before Freethinkers, who know how to recognise these influences in the trends of history and behind the horrors

of our own century, and how to interpret the mysteries of human conduct in the light of scientific truth. There could be cause, though, for a new call to action: a resistance movement to the threatened eruption of disease in new areas. And because some well-meaners in the wider reaches of our Movement are preaching the doctrine of co-existence with cancer, and urging us to "learn to live with it", we ought to sharpen up our scalpels and screw up our resolution and get down to doing the contrary.

Some in our ranks are afraid to "use the knife" for fear of harming living tissue. Others prefer to believe that diseased and healthy cells can co-exist indefinitely. There may indeed be some who cannot bring themselves down from their lofty spheres of thought to dwell on these sordid possibilities. Let us leave them to their dreams and hope they will do as little mischief as learned irrationality allows. Our way lies in another direction.

There is no sharper weapon, none deadlier, than active, uncompromising atheism. It is the Church's natural enemy, the one she hates most and the only one she fears.

We who possess it must be convinced of its power. In the strength of this knowledge, and of our fighting fellowship, we can start on the multi-operation for the health of the world.

HUMANISM, HOME AND FAMILY

Isobel Grahame

Isobel Grahame (b. 1911) is a Humanist writer who is also active in the Movement as a speaker on various aspects of Humanism. She and her husband have two adopted children who are now grown up, and one grandson.

I CHOSE THIS SUBJECT to write about because many of the interests, discussions and controversies which take place between members of our movement are at such a high intellectual and theoretical level that they are way above my head, and are irrelevant to my kind of life.

Humanism, freethinking and rationalism, if they are to be meaningful and useful to me, must be applicable to my doings and needs every day all the year round, keeping house and caring for the family. My humanism is at the sink, in the larder, the garden and the shops, on the buses, at the doctor's and in all places and situations where I still find unreason, bad design, carelessness, narrow, closed or bloody mindedness.

Humanism, freethought and reason actually begin at home, because that's where we all begin, even if we are stifled for years by the imposition of other people's beliefs and lack of opportunity and information to work out one's own philosophy.

Babies are not born free; they are totally dependent upon parents and home or whatever institutions replace them. Our young are the most dependent animals on Earth, because they have to master so many physical, mental, and emotional skills before they can feel confident and be self-supporting.

For many years now—certainly since before the last world war—doctors, psychologists, social workers and a few teachers and parents with the enterprise to read up the subject, have known without doubt that most of the human misery, neurosis, malfunction and criminal behaviour can be traced to unhappy homes and faulty child management in the formative years. However we are irrational enough to go on spending huge sums of the taxpayers' money (yours and mine) on rescue, reformatory and penal services, instead of teaching human psychology

to everyone from the very first day they go to school. Why waste money trying to cure the evils we already know how to prevent?

Recently a girl, pregnant and married at 16, said in a TV interview that she wouldn't have been either if she had known more about life and what she was in for. She scarcely knew herself, let alone the boy, and had only the vaguest romanticised notions of homemaking, child-rearing and the demands marriage makes on young parents. "At 16 we think we know everything when really we know nothing", she said sadly. Why didn't she and her boy know more?

Amateur teachers may no longer teach in State Schools—and a very good thing too. Why on earth are we so addle-headed as to rely on amateur parents to make or break the only heirs to civilization and humanity?

Surely there is something very wrong with school syllabuses when, after 10 years of compulsory education, girls and boys leave school without knowing what they are in for and what they can let others in for? It's all very fine to learn about sticky buds, thrum-eyed and pin-eyed primroses, birds, bees and the biology of human sex, but why does LIFEMANSHIP—the art of human relationships—have to be bought by each new generation at such high cost from the private enterprise shop of Messrs Trial and Error?

Why do so many unskilled adolescents go into jobs and on to the streets believing that there's a "safe period", that contraceptives are reliable, that Sex=Love and even that Money=Wealth? Five-year-olds are capable of learning "Numbers" with the aid of beans and matchsticks, so they must be intelligent enough to learn the principles of productivity by simple demonstration long before they know the word economics.

School education is for growing up and living life, so it should begin with elementary self-knowledge, which is the most important piece of Nature Study we have to under-

(Continued on page 296)

INTERNATIONAL CONGRESS

CHARLES BRADLAUGH BONNER, President of the World Union of Freethinkers, died on the morning of Friday, 2nd September. At the first public meeting that evening, the Vice-President, M. J. Cotereau of France, gave the sad news; David Tribe took over the chair, and the meeting stood in silence to remember the man who had been planning the conference so devotedly during the past year. And then it went on as he would have wished, and there is no doubt that he would have felt well rewarded if he could have heard the papers on "Freethought in the Future". It is impossible for those who were at the IHEU Conference in Paris not to make comparisons. More was said, and was more to the point, in two hours on Friday than in many days in Paris; and, dare I mention it, the platform aroused no feminist protest. One important and considerable difference lies between these two international bodies; the World Union openly acknowledges without bitterness or emotionalism the survival and good health of its enemies. It does not hesitate to point an accusing finger at organised religion and at the Church of Rome in particular. Wishful thinking is encouragingly absent, and with it the pretence that a handful of liberal Roman Catholics represent either the Vatican or the church militant as a whole on this troubled earth. Naïveté and innocence can be charming and are usually respectable, but they are no basis on which to base our Humanist activities and hopes.

PROFESSOR LUCIA DE BROUCKERE (Belgium) stressed that Freethought is not a right that we demand; it is a duty we accept. It needs constant effort. Man has a deep religious instinct: he is more apt to ask for his daily bread than for the opportunity to think for himself. Freethought is unnatural, and we must accept that freedom of thought will develop more slowly than freedom of speech or information. There are obstacles both without and within. **We have strenuously to oppose totalitarianism, and our greatest danger is laziness and complacency.** Too many people are tempted by the idea that the Church of Rome is changing; but its doctrines have not changed. The gap between us is as great as it ever was. She referred to the Adam and Eve legend. Freethinkers, she said, do not want children taught to admire Adam, who so grudgingly took from Eve the opportunity for Knowledge and Life. Indeed, Adam and Eve are symbols of humanity emerging from darkness . . .

MRS MARGARET KNIGHT spoke of the confusion foreigners must feel at the multitude of our labels, from the right-wing Ethical Humanists to the left wing of Freethought; or, as she put it, from the "soft-centred" to the "hard-centred". She regretted that so many Humanists decry militancy, and suggested that Professor Ayer, who believes that there are no longer any battles to fight, is living in an intellectual ivory tower. There is no need to be insensitive to the feelings of believers, but it must be remembered that the "comforts" of belief in the after-life involve also the terrors of Hell. We do not force Humanism on those who do not wish to hear, but we need not worry too much; believers are well practised in preserving their own illusions. Christian belief has long been a means of exploitation, and she quoted Napoleon, ". . . we must see to it that the doors of the churches are open to all and that it doesn't cost the poor man too much to have masses said on his tomb". The poor would then be content to stay poor and not envy the riches of others. It is the task of Freethinkers and Humanists, said Mrs Knight, to attack

the social evils at their source. Organisations such as ALRA, FPA and the Howard League (in which Christians and Freethinkers can and do co-operate) are best fitted to attack the manifestations of those evils. **The dissemination of ideas is our basic task and vital activity.**

PROFESSOR R. POMEAU (France) sketched an outline of the French Union of Rationalists, founded in 1930, and mentioned the Rationalist Dictionary, published 1964, which has been brought up to date.

HAROLD PINTER referred to the article and correspondence between Professor A. J. Ayer and Lord Willis in *Encounter*, and condemned the hypocrisy of this country and the pretence that religious belief is so widespread as to deserve its place of authority and power. Just because we feel so strongly about, say religious indoctrination in schools, we have to beware of over-emotionalism, but we must be forever watchful and protective of all our concerns. He was proud to associate himself with organised Freethinkers; the only sort of organisation to which he could possibly commit himself.

MICHAEL FOOT, MP, claimed to have no qualifications for speaking at such a gathering but spoke brilliantly, as one might expect. He "greatly honoured" and complimented Mrs Knight on her courage and outspokenness. Paying tribute to Charles Bradlaugh Bonner (as did all the speakers), he spoke in praise of his illustrious grandfather, Charles Bradlaugh, that great international figure whom Paris had nominated as a candidate for the National Assembly; the man who had raised money for Garibaldi, for Polish and Russian and Spanish freedom, who produced the first draft for an Irish Republic and had travelled through the USA on behalf of all these. Bradlaugh, who stood trial as a pioneer of birth control, of whom Queen Victoria said, "It is not only his known atheism, but his other horrible principles that make him a disgrace to the House of Commons"! **If we took the radical-socialist literature of the last 150 years, said Mr Foot, and removed the contributions of Freethinkers, there would be a very meagre residue. Freethinkers have much to boast about and less need to apologise than any other section of the community . . .** It was the 19th-century Freethinkers who fought and won so many victories for the freedom of the press; but the battles have not all been won. Today the papers refer to Anglican approval of birth control, but make no reference to those pioneers who were victimised by the churches. It is the pessimism about human life that has been Christianity's great strength and a reason for its survival. Christianity expressed the miseries and hardships of life which Christians then very often blame on to Freethinkers! It is we who were responsible, they try to suggest, for recent horrors, from Nazi gas-chambers to Vietnam, while in fact most rulers have been devoted supporters of their religion, and the nuclear bombs were blessed by priests. Most of the world's infamies have been committed by believers without doubts. **The more Freethought is accepted, the more people will accept toleration and doubt and learn to live in a civilised fashion.** To Professor Ayer, Michael Foot would like to say that we wish to hurt nobody, but that we believe it wrong to suppress the truth. We believe this, not out of any spirit of pride, but because we do not see by what right the truth should be suppressed by anyone at all. The tradition of Freethought down the ages has been a proud tradition; it has made a special contribution to this country and is the

most powerful influence for amelioration. Mr Foot ended by referring to a letter from the world's leading citizen, U Thant, who warned us of intolerance and any allegiance to uncertainties. If the world will listen to this it may be saved, and through Freethought people will come to listen.

PROFESSOR H. LEVY (Great Britain) stressed that the Freethought Movement is part of the Movement for the Advancement of Science, and it is in science that the possibility lies for men of all nations and beliefs to meet and understand one another. We have to adjust our thinking to the physical world in which we live. **The history of discovery is the discovery of how to put this into practice and so to transform the world. Freethought and science are interdependent.**

The meeting was then opened to the floor. It would not have been easy to add to what had already been said in such concise and intelligible terms, but it was a pity that a request for a reading list for the newcomer to Freethought found the panel surprisingly unprepared. Margaret Knight should not have hesitated to recommend her own Humanist Anthology (or, better still, someone should have done it for her), and surely Bertrand Russell has brought more people into Rationalism than almost any other writer. But if this was a lost opportunity, it was perhaps the only one in a stimulating evening. The FREETHINKER itself won welcome praise from a member of the audience who got up to speak.

The conference had had a good beginning.

Is it too much to hope that the next conference might be held at, say, the equivalent of our young Sussex University? Somewhere with an atmosphere of youth and looking ahead? Although French speakers were given translations on Friday evening, and the chairman offered similar facilities to the Germans, Rae Melamed reports that at the Sunday morning session the lack of automatic translation devices proved a considerable barrier. It is easy to offer ideas but they have to be paid for. However if we don't pay we cannot expect to succeed. Those who find life particularly hard financially should be helped by a reserve fund. The World Union of Freethinkers (like the NSS) has no need suddenly to decide to try and attract this or that "class". It has a wide satisfactory range of support already, but it must ensure its own future by making sure that young people know that it exists and are not deterred by any misleading exterior.

The conference continues. Further reports next week.

K.M.

INTERNATIONAL TRIBUTE

FORTY DELEGATES and others attending the International Congress of the World Union of Freethinkers, participated in a ceremony at Kensal Green Cemetery, London, on September 4th. They assembled at the Reformers' Memorial on which is inscribed the names of many famous radicals including Paine, Bradlaugh, Place and Harriet Martineau.

Mr David Tribe, President of the National Secular Society, spoke of the heroic struggles and sacrifices made by those who are commemorated on the memorial. His speech was translated into French and German.

Wreaths were placed on the Reformers' Memorial and the Robert Owen by Mrs E. Venton (Vice-President of the NSS) and J. Cotereau (President of the World Union of Freethinkers).

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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 16th, 8 p.m., Dr MALCOLM CALDWELL, "Neo-Colonialism in Asia"; 23rd, ALASTAIR WATSON, "A Christian Ciewpoint".

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 Thursdays of every month.

WUFT CONGRESS

AT the International Congress of the World Union of Freethinkers held in London a resolution was passed condemning American escalation in Vietnam, asking for the withdrawal of all foreign troops and the peaceful settlement of the situation. The delegates also passed a resolution drawing attention to the fact that two-thirds of the world's population are undernourished, and called on the United Nations to fulfil its responsibilities in terms of economic assistance and population control.

A message was sent to U Thant urging him to remain at his post, give all nations a lead in ending the war in Vietnam and building a peaceful world order.

The following officers were elected: President, J. Cotereau; Vice-President, J. Gremling; Acting Vice-President, M. Rauche; Treasurer, L. Courtors; Secretary, J. Caudel; Information Officer, W. Runge. Messages of sympathy were sent to Mme Pardon and H. Freistuhler who were unable to attend because of illness.

HUMANISM, HOME AND FAMILY

(Continued from page 294)

take, because we can't grow up without it. Weekly RI (sorry—I mean CI) must be replaced with HI—graduated lessons in human psychology under some ordinary name like "The Nature of You and Me". This should begin with basic hygiene and safety instruction, going on to provide children with sufficient insight into themselves and others and the way our culture works, so that they appreciate the *reasons for morality or ethical behaviour as necessary commonsense self-interest.*

Teachers, parents, employers and eventually all adults demonstrate by their own example how human ethics are *essential* for health, wealth and happiness, not merely tiresome impositions which we carry out unwillingly just to avoid the wrath of gods and policemen.

Life in a home or a school where nobody tells the truth or gives accurate information, where nobody can be trusted to do anything or to respect persons or property is HELL. So is collective life in tribe, village, town, city, country, nation and the whole human population of the Earth.

A freethinking, humanistic, rational, open society is the only real Welfare State to be in, because that is the only one which will work.

LETTERS

I THINK we in the NSS as well as other Humanist Societies, should not accept at their face value, the reports in the Daily Press of the results of a Public Opinion Poll, taken several months ago, relating to parental wishes on the subject of religious instruction in schools. It is obvious that there is room here for questions to be so worded as to suggest the answer either expected or preferred.

Should not the NSS, BHA or RPA appoint a Sub-Committee to frame a set of suitable questions; and then Commission one of the recognised commercial opinion polls, eg Gallup Poll; to carry out further tests in different parts of the country? Such polls could be repeated at regular intervals, in this way trends could be readily ascertained. What do your readers think?

W. BYNNER

IN HIS contribution (August 12) David Collis refers to "Scotland's 30 per cent Roman Catholic population". This year's "Scottish Catholic Directory" claims a total of 825,900—at the very most therefore the Roman Catholic population is about 16 per cent of the whole.

The question of 75 or 80 per cent grants is not relevant to Scotland. Roman Catholic schools, apart from a few exceptions, attract grants of 100 per cent for building and maintenance. Although such schools are "managed" by Roman Catholic authorities they remain the property of the appropriate local and county councils.

MACDONALD MORRIS

The LDOS

MAY WE thank you for bringing our Sunday Freedom League to the notice of so many people and ask you, please, to spare me a corner to thank all those who have written to me, and to assure those who have *not* heard from me, that I will reply to *all* letters, in due course. And will Messrs C. Pearson and J. and B. Caldwell please write me again—my letter has been returned to me as "Gone Away". Also, could I ask readers for any information concerning the history of the Lord's Day Observance Society, especially the business and financial side; such information seems particularly difficult to come by. I would like to borrow, or buy, any books on the subject.

I have had the most encouraging letter from Lord Willis, who has invited me to hear the presentation of his Bill in Parliament later on this year—I shall most enthusiastically accept. This, will be the culmination of all the work which has been such a pleasure to me, and has brought me so many new friends. Thanks again, my dear Editor, for all you've done, for our League and us.

JOHN and DAVID SHEPHERD
(The Sunday Freedom League)

Problem for Agnostics

IN REPLY to H. A. Paterson, I think it depends on what he means by God. If he means First Cause, then we can all have delightful discussions. But if he means an all-powerful diety then we fight belief in or obedience to him. The God we fight is the All-powerful all-loving God which is shown in this universe as a contradiction in terms. This God who created animals to eat each other, who sends hurricanes and storms to destroy both the good and the bad indiscriminately, who strikes children with polio, and who allows the birth of morons. This is the God we fight, and if anyone can think up a God (who, to be a God, must be all-powerful), who can justifiably do these things, I shall be very surprised. I should like to know exactly what H. A. Patterson means by God.

LILIAN MIDDLETON

IN answer to the letter of Bruce Cannon regarding the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland, it does not matter whether the 1,300 at the Assembly are laymen or Ministers they spend days on utterly useless discussion.

About the "Military Pageantry" it is definitely part of the Assembly proceedings.

MRS M. WATSON

Christians consider School Religion

I WAS much interested by Margaret McIlroy's article because it does raise implicit questions concerning the various attitudes shown by Christians themselves. The article describes the contents of two books. But it must not be overlooked that these books emanate from liberal Christians who have little representation or influence outside academic circles. The strength of Christianity lies in the parishes just as the strength of the C of E or Roman Catholic churches lies in diocesan organisation. One will not find much liberality here but a determination to sell the goods based upon a fixed belief that Christianity is the only true religion. Long experience of the Christian laity leads me to believe that they are of a particularly narrow and limited outlook when taken as a whole. Thus, I find little answer to contemporary problems in considering the theoretical views of academic liberal scholars. The vital questions surrounding religious education in state-aided schools exist at the practical levels.

It is interesting to hear what the liberal Christians would do about practical problems of state education created and inflamed by the past and present behaviour of the churches themselves. But they stand little chance of actualising their own theories, and, in the meanwhile, the part played by Christians over school religion is a constant battleground in the lasting warfare between Christianity and a scientific rationalistic humansm.

OBITUARY

THE sudden death of Mr C. Bradlaugh Bonner, President of the World Union of Freethinkers (announced in the FREETHINKER last week), came as a sad shock to his many friends, particularly those who had just arrived in London for the International Congress of the World Union. Mr Bonner died at his home on the morning of the first public session of the Congress at which he was due to preside. He had been preparing for the Congress for over a year, and it was decided that all the events should take place as arranged.

C. Bradlaugh Bonner was the grandson of Charles Bradlaugh who founded the National Secular Society exactly one hundred years ago. He was educated at Westminster School and Cambridge, and was a master at Mercers' School, Holborn. He had been an active Freethinker all his life, and spoke at the NSS Centenary rally in Northampton on July 17th.

Mr Bonner and his wife celebrated their golden wedding two years ago. They have two sons, seven grandchildren and three great-grandchildren.

The funeral took place at South London Crematorium on September 6th. There were representatives and floral tributes from the World Union of Freethinkers, the National Secular Society, South Place Ethical Society and G. W. Foote & Co. (publishers of the FREETHINKER). Mr Harold Blackham paid a moving tribute to Mr Bonner who had been a friend and colleague for many years.