

FREETHINKER

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

FOUNDED 1881 by G. W. FOOTE

Friday,
November 4th, 1966

THE BENEFIT OF ALL REASONABLE DOUBTS

THE IDEA THAT BELIEF and faith are "good things" has been absorbed by most of us as thoroughly as the assumption that the British must have a monarchy, with the result that children today have to be taught *not* to believe the TV advertisements which suggest that shampoos, cigarettes, and deodorants are all that is needed in order to find love and a mate. Housewives have to be warned not to believe everything that door-to-door salesmen tell them, and Anglicans (hoisted on their own firework) warn each other not to fall for the salesmanship of the Mormons or Witnesses. For generations, any scrap of rotten material could be sold as a fragment of the "Holy Shroud". Nevertheless a recent attempt to persuade teenage girls to buy some of the Beatles' hair failed. "How do we know it really *is* their hair?" asked the girls, though goodness knows what they would have done with it if it had been guaranteed. No matter how half-hearted the faith of most Christians today, the complete loss of a religious faith can still cause misery and traumatic neurosis. The idea that doubts and scepticism involve deprivation lingers on.

Perhaps the root of the problem lies in our need to rely on other human beings. We make a virtue of our "trust" and "faith", and then complain quickly enough if we are "let down". The divorce courts don't help by labelling one partner "guilty" and the other "innocent".

Could it be that early training in scepticism would prevent disillusionment (including self-disgust) in later life? Or would it breed cynics who would be unable to believe "good" about anything or anyone?

In his *Introduction: On the Value of Scepticism* Bertrand Russell tells the story of Pyrrho, the founder of Pyrrhonism (the old name for scepticism), who claimed that we never know enough to be sure that one course of action is wiser than another. When he was out walking he saw his philosophy teacher with his head stuck in a ditch, unable to get out. After contemplating him for some time ("sitting on the fence" as we might say), Pyrrho walked on, "maintaining that there was not sufficient ground for

thinking he would do any good by pulling the old man out". Secularists know this attitude. We might today call it the "agnosticism" of those who refuse to commit themselves, even when their help is urgently needed.

Most of us would probably agree with Russell and advocate what he calls "the middle way", being "prepared to admit any well established result of science, not as certainly true, but as sufficiently probable to afford a basis for rational action". On such a foundation we rest our commitment to the Secular-Humanist Movement.

Russell goes on:

"The scepticism that I advocate amounts only to this: (1) that when the experts are agreed, the opposite opinion cannot be held to be certain; (2) that when they are not agreed, no opinion can be regarded as certain by a non-expert; and (3) that when they all hold that no sufficient grounds for a positive opinion exists, the ordinary man would do well to suspend his judgment". He goes on, "These propositions may seem mild, yet, if accepted, they would absolutely revolutionise human life. The opinions for which people are willing to fight and persecute all belong to one of the three classes which this scepticism condemns."

"What is wanted," Russell insists, "is not the will to believe, but the wish to find out, which is the exact opposite."

It might be suggested that this is all very well in the realm of ideas, but what about human relationships? Should we really be so critical of our friends, family and colleagues? I suspect that our desire to be understood and trusted is just as strong as our need to rely on others, and that the sting of being too analytical is removed by our willingness to "find out" about ourselves. If we are taught to see more clearly, we can perhaps also hope to be more clearly seen. As a result: fewer dreams, less optimism, but more security and toleration. James Russel Lowell (1819-91), the American rationalist poet, wrote "A wise scepticism is the first attribute of a good critic". The vice-vigilantes of our society are rotten critics. They have never really looked in a mirror to find out about their own human nature, and so think that "criminals", "homosexuals" or the generally unorthodox are a different species.

The desire to "find out" is at the heart of Humanism, and it creates its own courage to face what is found. But again this suggests that courage is needed in a study of ourselves and of the human race. And it is, for the cynic who still suffers a hangover from the doctrine of "original sin", and for the man who believed in divine perfection or parental infallibility, was proved wrong and dare not believe again. Religious indoctrination in childhood breeds cynics, but cynicism is surely as irrational as unflinching optimism? "Cynicism is intellectual dandyism" said the atheist George Meredith (1828-1909).

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Scepticism, however, is a positive virtue of Freethinkers and Humanists which Christians fear, for, as Cardinal Newman said of it in religious enquiries "it is all-corroding,

all-dissolving". Like an efficient solvent it removes the film from the mirror, the rose-colour from our spectacles, but also the tarnish from the gold.

THE CHESTER-BELLOC

I. S. Low

I. S. Low (b. 1919) was brought up in the C of E, but became an atheist in 1958. He has been both a teacher and a solicitor.

G. K. CHESTERTON, the famous Catholic writer, is supposed to have been a beautiful character. So one must assume that his books were written by someone of exactly the same name.

In his short story *The Crime of the Communist* (about Father Brown, the detective priest) Chesterton definitely says that people have not the right to their own opinions. One character says (speaking of a communist) that it doesn't matter what a man's opinions are if his life is in the right. To which Father Brown replies: "How can a man's life be right if his view of life is wrong?" No criterion, of course, is laid down for finding out if a man's view of life is wrong—except perhaps that it's wrong if it disagrees with Mr Chesterton's (we know that the Catholic Church believes in the Authoritative Interpretation).

Racialism

Chesterton was a racialist. He believed that the culture of Asia was not only different from, but antagonistic to, that of Europe (and presumably—though this is not certain—that of America). He strains his literary ability to paint a vivid, magical and cruel picture of the life and thought of Asia (having been there, I find this rather amusing). In *The Wrong Shape* Father Brown says of an Indian dagger, "It's the wrong shape in the abstract. Don't you ever feel that about Eastern Art? The colours are intoxicatingly lovely; but the shapes are mean and bad—deliberately mean and bad". Again, in a story *The Red Moon of Meru*, an Asiatic priest is suspected of a crime. It is proved that he could not have done it—physically; whereupon he is depicted as hinting that he had done it by magic! Father Brown takes the opportunity of this to attack those who think that East and West can meet.

"All religions are the same . . . Are they, by God!" . . . "He actually took the credit of stealing . . . We whose fathers at least were Christians, who have grown up under those mediaeval arches, even if we bedizen them with all the demons in Asia—we have the very opposite ambition and the opposite shame. We should all be anxious that nobody should think we had done it. He was actually anxious that everybody should think that he had—even when he hadn't."

And Chesterton had not a much better opinion of the Africans. In another story *The God of the Gongs*, the murderer is an African. Hints are dropped in this and in other stories (e.g., *The Resurrection of Father Brown*) that Africans can never be anything but barbarous and cruel. As a result of the murder (in the story) people in Britain come to have a grim view of Africans ("The Black Man meant in England almost what he once meant in Scotland"). Chesterton clearly wished this would happen in real life. Mr Ian Smith would like this story; Dr Verwoerd, Malan and Herr Hitler would have liked it, too.

Anti-Semitism

Chesterton was also against the Jews. In *The Flying Inn* he portrays the sinister Dr Gluck, the representative of International Jewry and Jewish Finance. Gluck is the real

force behind international politics. He pulls the strings. He tells the aristocratic English statesmen what to do, and they do it (and of course it's wicked). The hero makes up a song about him:

"Oh I know a Dr Gluck
And his nose it had a hook
And his attitudes were anything but Aryan."

(This was before 1914.) In a short story in a book called *The Man Who Knew Too Much* the theme is repeated—Jewish financiers are the real power behind British imperialism; they blackmail Cabinet Ministers and force them to send British soldiers to die in places "where there's no earthly English interest". (The name of the story is *The Tower of Darkness*.) In another Father Brown story, *The Ghost of Gideon Wise*, we are shown the clash between Capital and Labour—or rather Capital and International Socialism. Jews stand at the head of each! The calculating Jacob P. Stein is at the head of the capitalists; while the brains of the communist movement is John Elias—also a Jew. When the latter is introduced "the journalist's first and last feeling was how very like each other were John Elias and Jacob P. Stein". Later Father Brown, speaking of the Communist leader Elias, says "He always reminded me of Stein—in fact I think he was some relation". Readers of *Mein Kampf* will find this familiar.

Nationalism

Chesterton's most famous novel is *The Napoleon of Notting Hill*. It is about a man who makes the London district of Notting Hill an independent nation. From an argumentative point of view (if not from a financial) it was the most unlucky novel any author ever wrote. All Mr Chesterton's witty cracks against people he disliked became applicable to himself and his friends! For instance, he tries to satirize the Webbs' idea of a super civil service by making Britain a despotism—with the King (chosen by having his name picked out of a hat) as despot. Yet it was Belloc, Chesterton's friend, who later seriously suggested this—in language exactly similar to that of the character in the novel who supports the idea and is supposed to be a satire on the modern intellectual. (And both Chesterton and Belloc supported the idea very definitely when Mussolini arose!) All through the novel Chesterton extols the ennobling effects of nationalism—"it gives one a soul in everyday life". But many people who have studied international politics think differently. They find that nationalism and national sovereignty result in national governments stirring up their people to hate other nations; telling lies about other nations; sometimes going to war against them. Ironically it was at Notting Hill itself that the effects (or some of them) of nationalism were demonstrated—when young thugs beat up Africans. There is no definite evidence that these thugs were influenced by Chesterton's novel, so far as I know; but there is a certain dramatic significance.

Peace only through Catholicism

Hilaire Belloc, Chesterton's friend, wrote history books among others. And his books on history were very interesting. You learn some startling things from them. For instance, at the beginning of his *History of England*, he

says that the idea of the Brotherhood of Man is an erroneous one. He also lays down (in other works) that there cannot be peace in Europe till it is completely Catholic. The essential condition for peace, he says, is the supremacy of Catholicism. But in his book on Cardinal Richelieu he has to explain why this Roman Catholic cardinal, who was prime minister of France, supported the Protestants of Germany in their fight against Ferdinand, Emperor of Austria, who was trying to re-establish Catholicism in Germany. If Ferdinand had succeeded, Belloc says, the Austrians would have gained possession of land from which they could invade France. The French people would never have been free from aggression, he says. But if the Emperor had won—Catholicism would

have been supreme in Europe. And this, according to Belloc, is the supreme requirement for peace. So why would the French people need to worry about aggression?

Belloc and Chesterton had a whole string of hates: Jews, Communists, Capitalists, Protestants, Mohammedans, atheists, scientists, "The Mongol", Asiatics, Russians and People Who Thought Shakespeare's plays were written by Someone Else. One feels that every night Mr Belloc and Mr Chesterton peered anxiously under the bed in case these undesirables were there. Frivolous people might wonder if this is the reason why they were so fat? Only men of such a width would have a bed wide enough for all these objectionable types to hide under.

RELIGION IN A PUBLIC SCHOOL

David Reynolds

I LEFT my prep school with high hopes of increased freedom on arrival at public school. I got it. I was only forced to attend chapel once daily instead of twice. I considered myself lucky for a short time, but one day my house master asked whether I wanted to get confirmed next term or the term after. Having given the matter very little thought I hesitated, and was reticently told that very occasionally boys were confirmed when aged seventeen, usually because they entered the college late and were immediately involved with "O" Levels. I was never asked again, because it became well known long before I was seventeen that I was proud of making up fifty per cent of those to avoid confirmation.

our economics teacher what the lesson was about, replied airily, "Oh, a spot of the resurrection . . . and a touch of the Jesus Christ". He was incidentally a "School Prefect" and a member of the "Upper Sixth" and the fact that he narrowly avoided being sent to the Headmaster is less significant than that he was a typical case. This is an excellent example of how such a system fails and thus has no justification even for those parents, and surely they are few, who send their boys to such schools primarily to have them brought up as Anglicans. Virtually everyone was confirmed by the time he was fifteen, but virtually no one attended communion regularly by the time he was fifteen and a half.

I joined the London Young Humanists when I was fifteen, and, from then on, the accent on Christianity at my school became more than just the "drag", which it appeared to at least ninety per cent of the boys. I was obliged to follow the ritual in chapel as far as turning to the East, but managed to avoid any head-bowing, or reciting any creeds or prayers.

Although it was frustrating to be forced to go through these Christian rituals when it was known I was a Humanist, it was much more frustrating to see the other boys either left in a morass of agnosticism (because the authorities were incapable of recognising or explaining anything but Christianity), or left completely devoid of any interest in religion at all, caused by an excusable revolt against the compulsion involved in projecting only a small part of it.

As well as the daily chapel service, we were compelled to attend a divinity class once a week taken by the chaplain, who by definition had a strong bias in favour of Christianity. In the lower forms we studied various gospels, though the lesson always deteriorated into chaos, since the chaplain at that time was more suited to the country parish, with an average congregation of three, to which he subsequently retired. The new chaplain was a very able young man, but also completely biased. The divinity periods became discussions on a book named "Your God is too Small", which was of little use to those who had not got one. The chaplain shut his eyes to the nefarious but silent activities of those with no desire to participate, for the benefit of those who did. Though these discussions were edifying, and it became obvious that the majority of those who bothered to participate were dissatisfied with Christianity, no attempt was made to explain any other religions or non-religions. The chaplain, though equipped with a First in Theology, knew so little of Humanism that he asked me to tell him about it.

Surely a man's religion, or lack of it, should determine the way in which he conducts his life, and for an educational establishment to adopt such a narrow and arbitrary policy is ludicrous. I must thank my parents that I have seen my own way clear, and not the fifty masters, who are it seems either bigoted Christians or hypocrites.

PUBLIC DEBATE

THE SUNDAY OBSERVANCE LAWS

SPEAKERS

LORD WILLIS

HAROLD LEGERTON

General Secretary, Lord's Day Observance Society

CHAIRMAN

LORD SORENSEN

CAXTON HALL, CAXTON STREET, LONDON, SW1

Nearest Underground: St James' Park

FRIDAY, 4th NOVEMBER, 7.30 p.m.

Organised by the National Secular Society

The article "Let's make Sundays Brighter" by Lord Willis and published in the FREETHINKER on October 14, has now been reprinted in leaflet form by the National Secular Society. Copies are available on request from 103 Borough High Street, London SE1.

In addition to the chapel service and divinity lessons, at the beginning of the first period of every day, each form read the lesson and then were given a commentary on it by the master concerned, be he philosopher or carpenter. A serious-minded friend of mine, who claimed a belief in a personal god, was caught napping and when asked by

NEWS AND NOTES

HOW do freethinkers react to news of disaster and tragedy? Just like anyone else, of course, but, being unable to blame anything supernatural, and believing prayer to be useless, we may experience a special dismay and anger. In a world where so much horror is so swiftly communicated, we may also be afraid of developing an immunity to it. Too many words can dull the awareness we need if we are to react constructively. The disaster at Aberfan was intensified by remembering the peril faced so continuously by those who work in the pits. At least their *children* should have been safe at school, we feel. It is too late now for the "why didn't . . ." and "if only . . .". We can only hope that the local councils and National Coal Board will make sure that never again does any similar tragedy occur. The link now between Vietnam and South Wales defies politics but is forged in common suffering. We read that two former SS men are on trial in Vienna for forcing more than a thousand Jewish children in Nazi occupied Poland to stand naked for several winter days until they died. Whether it be by the negligence of the authorities, or by deliberate brutality, the children are killed and those of us who have our young safe and secure are sobered for a while until we, too, forget. Gustav Mahler in his "Kindertotenlieder" surely expressed better than anyone the restrained grief of bereaved parents for all time, the world over.

The new Roman Catholic Bible

THE JERUSALEM BIBLE, produced by the Director of the Ecole Biblique in Jerusalem, Père Roland de Vaux, OP, translates "Now faith is the substance of things hoped for . . ." as "Only faith can guarantee the blessings that we hope for, or prove the existence of realities that at present remain uncertain". And Catholics now read that "the flesh has nothing to offer" instead of "the flesh profiteth nothing". Both of which perhaps put the anti-Humanist point of view rather more clearly.

Not diamonds after all . . .

PAUL JOHNSON writing in the *Catholic Herald* (Oct. 21) says that a "girl's virginity is still her best friend". It is a moot point whether or not the Christian sexual ethic has really "protected" woman from her biological vulnerability more than it has degraded, frustrated and generally confused her. While raising our glasses to Chi Chi for knowing what she didn't want, it is puzzling that so many intelligent people still recommend female virginity without, at the same time, demanding male chastity. We can only presume that women are (in their view) still divided into groups. Those who can afford a "best friend" and those whose purpose it is to satisfy the carnal appetites which male pandas can control but men can't. In fact mere virginity is as bleak comfort as a mere lack of it. What matters is that at last women are learning to recognise and explain their own individual needs, and to be a little more honest with themselves and others. But there is still a long, long way to go, and (as Mr Johnson points out) we can't expect "to find acceptance of a woman's right to sexual equality among those who still resolutely deny sacerdotal responsibilities to half the human race".

An unholy ghost

THE *Psychic News* (Oct. 22) suggests that the NSS centenary celebrations must be causing Charles Bradlaugh "concern—or some amusement" because "after his pass-

ing, Bradlaugh became the principal spirit guide of F. W. Fitzsimons, one of South Africa's leading naturalists" to whom he made himself known "through the mediumship of Fitzsimons' 19-year-old girl cousin". The anonymous reporter goes on "It is fascinating" (though understandable, we might suggest) "to see how his attitude to life changed after his passing . . ." The Bradlaugh ghost insisted that he did not wish to go down to posterity as an atheist, and, when asked if he really did die as an atheist, Bradlaugh is said to have answered from the heavenly corridors of power, that he had at last believed in God and a hereafter and "whoever speaks otherwise is not speaking the truth . . ." And so these believers with the most curious imaginations are indeed "haunted" after Bradlaugh's death by his atheistic virtues and success and must try and destroy them by sticking pins in a ghost-doll of their own making!

The Muggeridge at it again

IF MALCOLM MUGGERIDGE can find time from writing in the *Catholic Herald*, he might well be given a column in the *Psychic News*, and his attempt on Any Questions to prove the existence of a "hereafter" (or *thereafter* surely?) by claiming that there must be one because everyone who has been of any importance in this world has believed in it, would be just about the right standard of argument. The fact that he doesn't consider Goethe, Beethoven, Brahms, Berlioz, and countless other great men and women who rejected the idea of immortality of any importance is no more or less than we would expect. The only person of real importance to Mr Muggeridge, it seems, is Mr Muggeridge.

No more shopping days before the racket begins

THE POST OFFICE is producing Christmas stamps with the postmark of Bethlehem (Carmarthenshire). And it won't be any good at all pointing out that many scholars who believe in a historical Jesus insist that he was born in Galilee and *not* in Bethlehem. Perhaps, if the PO asked the *Psychic News*, they could get a photograph of the birthday child himself ("after passing" of course) in front of the real Bethlehem post office. I wouldn't be a bit surprised.

From JAMES ROYLE SCOTT, Claverley, Nr. Wolverhampton. DEFINITION OF HUMANISM ON A POSTCARD

HUMANISM is the belief that the greatest happiness for the greatest number should be the aim of all human existence; that there is no form of existence for Man, other than life on this planet, that the human mind can comprehend; that Man is a natural product of his environment and that he and the Universe are evolving in accordance with scientific and discoverable laws; that therefore all human actions should be based ultimately on reason; that the unreasoning instincts created during an earlier period of Man's existence are not far beneath the thin surface layer of civilisation, and that those instincts are to be brought to understanding and directed into constructive, or, where wholly inimical to humanist conceptions of the dignity of Man, harmless channels; that prejudice, dogmatism, superstition, cruelty to other men or any living thing capable of suffering are inconsistent with the humanist outlook; that all men belong to the same human community without distinction of race, colour or sex; that in Education, Science, the pursuit of the Arts and in serving one's fellow men lies the best hope of preventing the destructive powers possessed by the Human Race from bringing to a violent and cataclysmic end civilisation as we know it.

[You are invited to send your own definition in not more than 150 words to the Editor.]

WHAT'S IN A NAME FOR HUMANISM?

Edward Hughes-Jones

"WHAT'S IN A NAME? That which we call a rose by any other name would smell as sweet", said Juliet. Maybe, but it is an over-simplification. There is much in a name, as the world has sometimes found to its cost; a great deal has hung even on a diphthong, as anyone studying early Christian history will discover. Attempts to change long-established names soon meet with opposition from traditionalists, even if there appear creditable grounds for changes. To alter the names of well-known abstract ideas is even more difficult. Where a considerable variation has arisen from a traditional body of concepts there is often much to be said on both sides; for (a) retaining something of the old name inasmuch as it may be judged to contain some representative "good", and (b) discarding the old name completely because it is judged misrepresentative and damaging.

Is Humanism a religion?

It is sometimes queried whether Humanism is the best designation for our attitude to life and whether it is a "religion". Most educated people would, I think, probably agree about the importance of Semantics (study of meanings) which has increased as mankind multiplies the volume of communications. Humanists have good reason for emphasising the importance of clarity, which is at the basis of Semantics, because the world has been bedevilled by the obscurity and incomprehensibility of so many religions. It is certainly right, therefore, to try to answer the queries, although a consensus of Humanist views on them is probably as yet unattainable. (New subscribers should expect such differences of opinion in a rationalist democratic Association, but it is important that our individual judgments should be informed and tolerant, and that we realize what can be said on the other side.)

Some say "Yes"

Some distinguished Humanists have said that we can by precept and example make the term "Religion" understood in a far better way than has been done by priests; that we should *retain the term* but free it, as far as Humanism can, from its ancient debased encrustations of supernaturalism, sacerdotalism and hypocrisy. We should retain, they say, the idea of a striving for a better way of living and a higher standard of morality and values which still appears to form *part* of its meaning to many people. Humanism, they rightly stress, is more than rational ratiocination; it calls for the fullest *application* of reason and of individual and *social* morality. Thus a purged-of-dross interpretation of "Religion" would not connote creeds, rituals, formulae or systems of theology; Humanism as a "religion" would include the "striving for a better way of living . . ." and signify a concerned, committed and *rational* way of seeking the good life for the individual and the whole human family.

Sir Julian Huxley (*Religion without Revelation*), Adam Gowans Whyte (*The Religion of the Open Mind*) and many others extol very persuasively this "purged-of-dross" point of view, however expedient or inexpedient it may be in the short run concerning recruitment to Humanism. They think that the older, irrational, outmoded, superstitious interpretations and practices of Religion should not, because of their iniquities, be allowed to deter Humanism from interpreting the term correctly. (I would add that there appears to be no synonym containing the good part of the meaning and excluding the debased.) The advocates of this view I shall call the Fors.

Others say "No"

Critics of the foregoing view, the Noes, say that insufficient weight is given to the debasement, disrepute and obduracy of Religions over centuries, muddled theories and, at times, scandalous practices. Humanism, cited as a "Religion", would be tainted ("who can touch pitch and not be defiled") and would be handicapped because Religion will increasingly come to be seen, in a scientific and secular age, as an obstacle to progress, mentally and ethically, in human shaping of affairs. The Noes want to be rid of the term except as a grave historical warning of a savage survival; they think "Religion" is damned beyond redemption by its past.

Is this so? Many words adjust their meaning over the years; take as a prime example within Christianity the word "God". It has varied in meaning from the vengeful old-man-with-a-beard-deity of Adam and Noah to the sacrifice-demanding God of Abraham, the argumentative Lord of Job, the kinder God of Micah, the Father God of Jesus, and now writhing Christians, trying to square their religion with the march of Science, strive to interpret it as an abstract principle! Men with developing intelligence have fashioned from time to time a rather kinder God made of course in their own improving image. These concepts have changed over thousands of years from savage idolatry to the recent highly cultivated metaphysic, e.g., the late Professor A. N. Whitehead of Harvard in his book *Science and the Modern World*, defines God as "The principle of concretion, of rationality which prevents the world from being chaotic and unreasonable". Lewis Mumford, another distinguished American, defines God as "perhaps discernible when a faint glimmer of design emerges in the Universe". These and similar cultivated men, notwithstanding their nebulous abstractions of "God" have called themselves adherents of Christianity. (Perhaps considering it one of the better illusions to be fostered for the masses?) If they are deemed justified in so doing, it would be inconsistent of those who agree with them to challenge those who deem Humanism a religion. But are they right?

New wine in dirty bottles

I think not. Can it be in keeping with intellectual integrity to vary as they do the normal meaning of the word "God" without at least the fullest, frankest, avowal of all the *drastic* change implies for orthodoxy? It certainly does not promote clarity and logical thought. G. B. Shaw illustrated how men fail to get full benefits from an evolved higher conception which he likened to purer water of life. I would wish to apply the simile to Humanism. Shaw urged that the crystal water from the new fountain should not be poured into the old vessels until emptied of the old dirty water and thoroughly purified. But, he said, we baffle the blessing from the new fountain by just sloshing the clean water into the contents of the dirty old bucket! I realise this illustration is not wholly just to the Fors because they do wish to throw out the dirty water and purify the vessel (cherishing the clean Humanist baby) but, alas, they are sadly outnumbered by the priests determined to keep the rubbish in the dirty old bucket; it would be lamentable if any taint rubbed off on Humanists in the struggle! In support of Fors are an increasing number of American Unitarian-Universalists with open avowal of Rationalism and Agnosticism in their Church Assemblies, which in some

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WHAT'S IN A NAME FOR HUMANISM?

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places they are winning for their avowed Humanism. Perhaps most British Humanists would be surprised to read some Universalist literature and rejoice to note how far they have evolved in advocacy and practice of Humanism, e.g., in the Negro Civil Rights campaign. It is truly heartening.

My Quaker and Unitarian associations over 40 years ago enable me to understand with great sympathy the Fors who wish to retain the best part of "Religion". The bulk of people seem so often to be better than their idolatrous priests and incomprehensible outworn creeds. But the Noes argument seems to me preponderatingly strong in this increasingly scientific age; "Religion" is irredeemably besmirched with its history of wars, support and blessings of wars on every side, and with the maintenance of authoritarianism, ignorance, befuddlement, punishment. So I

boggle at the idea of the *Religion* of Humanism. I have found no better name than Humanism for my views. Is it not enough? We write and speak of Stoicism, and it conveys a philosophy and way of life of finer quality than that of many religions. The stark name sufficed. It was enough. It is enough. I hope that Humanists will try to demonstrate by their own lives that Humanism is enough. It can stand alone. If Man can stave off the looming disaster of nuclear war, and turn to co-operation instead of conflict, it is not wild to hope that in the fullness of time "Humanism" can come to conote not only rationality, clarity, veracity, intellectual and moral integrity with "self-transcendency to escape the prison of the ego" (J. Huxley), but also sustained efforts with a kindly sense of humour towards practical courage, compassion, justice and human service. So-called Realists may shout "Sentimentalism" but it is well to remember that: "Many people of course use 'sentimentalism' as a term of abuse for other people's decent feelings and 'realism' as a disguise for their own brutality" (Professor G. H. Hardy).

EARLY WARNING FROM A SECULAR STATE

Dave Shipper

THE UNITED STATES Post Office Department recently announced a decision to issue a 1966 Christmas postage stamp which would incorporate a religious scene in its design. In response to this announcement the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU), the foremost organisation in the USA fighting for civil liberties, has protested strongly, stating that their opposition is based on a belief that this governmental support of religion violates the First Amendment guarantee of separation of church and state.

The ACLU executive director, John de J. Pemberton, Jr, wrote a letter of sharp criticism to the US Postmaster-General, Lawrence O'Brien, stating that the plan to reproduce Hans Memling's "Madonna and Child with Angels" on a Christmas stamp was in effect unconstitutional, as the government

"has no mandate or authority to indoctrinate minorities in the religion of the majority, or to lend its instrumentalities and vast prestige to the celebration of the religious holidays of the majority."

It should be noted that the ACLU complaint followed a protest by the American Jewish Congress (AJC), which was flatly rejected by the Post Office, who defended their decision by stating that the purchase of Christmas stamps was not mandatory and that the Memling reproduction was "a portion of a work of art".

The ACLU noted that this explanation offered no supporting argument, and they attacked the Post Office statement as "a cavalier way of dismissing a serious constitutional question", asserting that "the fact that citizens are free to purchase other stamps does not offset the effect of the government's participation in a religious activity by issuing this stamp". Additionally the ACLU alleged that "the artistic nature of the Memling design does not alter the fact that the design clearly appears to have been selected just because it represents a world-recognised religious subject, and it will amount to government sponsorship of, or participation in, the celebration of a religious holiday."

Besides opposing "Post Office approval of religious orthodoxy"—which defies the First Amendment prohibition on any form of governmental assistance to religion—the ACLU argue that "decency and fairness should . . . inhibit publication of this stamp". The United States is "a nation of more than 250 organised religious denominations and of an infinitely greater variety of belief and disbelief when counted in individual terms". Why then,

should the Post Office seek to impose the belief of the majority on this multitude of minorities? "Our government, including the Post Office Department," said the Union, "is the government of all of us, not merely the Christian majority." Furthermore, the ACLU clarified, "even if the Post Office Department issued stamps commemorating the religious holidays of any or several of the minority groups in an effort to be fair, the ACLU would still consider it a constitutional violation that the United States government had endorsed *any* religion or religious group".

The civil liberties organisation warned against the apparent official Post Office shift in policy "from an endorsement of the mild religiosity of recent years' designs to an uninhibited adoption of Christian themes in stamp designs for the Christmas season in 1966 . . . and perhaps for the future".

Change in policy

The Union quoted from a 1962 Post Office statement of policy which was "not to issue stamps to commemorate religious events or subjects", and contrasted this with the present position of the Department, which appears to be "that neither constitutional law nor respect for minority views and sensibilities impose any limit on the religiosity of the themes to which our government will lend its prestige and imprimatur, so long as some work that has received some artistic recognition somewhere provides the basis for the stamp's design."

This argument exemplifies the constant struggle between the protectors of the constitutional separation of church and state, and those who would welcome the erosion of such safeguards.

It is peculiar that the country which has never yet portrayed Thomas Paine—a national *and* international hero to many Americans—on its postage stamps should be prepared to display advertisements for religion.

NATIONAL SECULAR SOCIETY

Founded 1866 by Charles Bradlaugh

CENTENARY BROCHURE

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Place), Sunday, November 6th, 5.30 p.m.: Professor RICHARD
HISCOCKS, "The Work of the United Nations for the Prevention
of Discrimination".**Havering Humanist Society (Harold Wood Social Centre, Gublins
Lane and Squirrels Heath Road), Tuesday, November 8th,
8 p.m.: Panel of local speakers, "The Humanist Approach".**Leicester Secular Society (Secular Hall, 75 Humberstone Gate,
Leicester), Sunday, November 6th, Rev BILL MATTHEWS, IVOR
GLENTON, Miss J. ROUTLEDGE, R. S. MCGOWAN, "The Future
of Man".**Manchester Branch NSS (Wheatsheaf Hotel, High Street), Sunday,
November 6th, 7.30 p.m.: RICHARD CLEMENTS, "The Churches
and Modern Doubt".**The Progressive League Weekend Conference at High Leigh,
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6th. "Creativity in the Man-Woman Relationship". Full details
from Mrs. Joyce Coles, 120 Corringway, London, W5.**South Place Ethical Society (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square,
London, WC1, Sunday, November 6th, 11 a.m.: Professor
HYMAN LEVY, "Humanism-Rationalism-Materialism"; Tuesday,
November 8th, 6.30 p.m.: JOYCELYN BARROW, "Racial Integ-
ration".**South Place Sunday Concerts (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square,
London, WC1, Sunday, November 6th, 6.30 p.m.: DEREK
HAMMOND-STROUD, JOSEPHINE LEE, Schubert "Winterreise".
Admission 3s.**West Ham and District Branch NSS (Wanstead and Woodford
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Christianity, both by Joseph McCabe. Details to Ian Hall,
38 Dudley Road, Grantham, Lincs.***REPORT: THE FREEDOM OF VISION TEACH-IN**

Christopher Brunel

SOME THIRTY YEARS ago my father submitted the Jean Cocteau film, *The Seashell and the Clergyman*, to the film censors, only to have it rejected with the following classic comment: "This film is apparently meaningless, but if it has any meaning it is doubtless objectionable". Since then the British Board of Film Censors has been forced to take a much more liberal attitude—and it generally acts in a logical manner. But other censors still provide material for jokes; this year reproductions of Aubrey Beardsley pictures were seized from a shop, while that respectable institution, the Victoria and Albert Museum, was selling the same pictures in its catalogue of that great artist's exhibition.

Later the pictures were returned, and no doubt the incident was no joke to the shopkeeper, whose stock was temporarily sequestered. The twin strands of absurdity and infringement of civil liberties came clearly into focus at the Teach-In on Censorship that Freedom of Vision organised at London's Hampstead Town Hall early in October. Writers, lawyers, artists, nudists, teachers, publishers, film-makers and members of the public pooled their experiences and their views. There were a number of common factors among all who spoke, but it certainly was not a repetitive mutual-admiration event.

The main difference of opinion was between those, like Edward Bond (author of the play, *Saved*) and nudist Jack Gray, who backed the view that all censorship is wrong, and others who said that censorship must be retained yet must be liberalised. Quite a lot of the Teach-In was devoted to the effect of the mass media of television and film on young people, and it seemed to me that what were regarded as the bad effects of some programmes and films on youngsters was the principal justification for retaining some form of censorship.

Although the Teach-In lasted six hours, there was no time for drawing together the diverse views expressed—perhaps the organisers left that to the people who attended to do for themselves. But it is important that all who are concerned about censorship should work together, and my hope is that there will be other Teach-Ins on the topic and that bodies like Freedom of Vision will be the channels for future activities.

FREETHINKER FIGHTING FUND

THE FREETHINKER is the only weekly Secularist-Humanist paper in the country. It is still only 6d. How much do YOU care how many people it reaches? To advertise we need money, and our expenses are ever-increasing. Whose copy are you reading now? Have you got a subscription? Couldn't you contribute something to the Fighting Fund, say 6d or 6s or £6 or £60? How much do you really care about Freethought and helping other people to hear about it? Do, please, help if you can.

The FREETHINKER, 103 Borough High St., London, SE1

LETTERS

Free Will

MAY I criticise Mr Lamont's comments on free will? I think that Mr Gray is much nearer to the truth.

(1) It is true that Christians have believed in determinism, but this belief led to a Christianity that was even odder and more self-contradictory than the forms we face today. I firmly believe that the doctrines of the Fall, heaven and hell, redemption, salvation, etc, depend upon the idea of free will. The Christian idea of sin, for example, is meaningless if free will does not exist. Mr Gray is quite right to regard free will as crucial to modern Christianity.

(2) It is possible to believe in "chance factors" within a determinist frame, providing that the idea of a "chance factor" is carefully defined. What I understand by a chance factor, as referred to by Mr Gray, is a circumstance or event which could not have been predicted in practice. Certain events are unpredictable simply because nature is complex. To make successful predictions, changes have to be analysed in mathematical terms—in, for example, differential calculus. For simple circumstances this is easy, but when many causal chains interact, the maths become impossible. But this never means that causes do not apply in all cases. In fact science works on the assumption that they do—in the sense that scientists look for "explanations".

(3) Mr Gray's rejection of Catholicism is no argument for free will. Mr Lamont is committing the very familiar error of confusing "choice" with "free will". *The question is not whether people choose (which they obviously do) but whether the choice is predictable in principle.* I suggest that it is, and that psychologists could not even begin work if they did not make this assumption. It is useless to look for natural laws in a truly random field. Mr Lamont should remember that the modern computer can choose (as anyone knows who understands programmed jump instructions). No-one says the computer has free will simply because we know a bit more about it than we do about the human brain. A computer is programmed, so is the brain—by natural selection.

Mr Gray is quite right to reject free will. Careful analysis shows it to be meaningless: all events are caused or not; human choice is an event; human choice is caused or not; if caused then determinism is true; if uncaused then moral and intellectual considerations (and everything else) are quite irrelevant to choice, since, if such things have an influence, it must be causal.

The difficulty in tying down free will is why it tends to be associated with supernaturalism which is just as vague, ill-defined and empty. A true rationalist cannot believe in free will.

Manchester.

G. L. SIMONS

Vietnam

G. L. SIMONS takes me to task for saying that I find the two sides in the Vietnam war equally objectionable. I am sorry that the short excerpts from my *Freedom* article in the FREETHINKER gave him that impression. What I said was that although the Americans, due to their foul military techniques, are by far the greatest war criminals in Vietnam, their communist opponents are *potentially* just as bad in that, if they had the same sophisticated arms as the Americans (and to use them was to their military advantage) they would not hesitate on moral grounds to do so. Recent events in Tibet and Hungary have shown that communists to gain or keep the upper hand will use any vileness they think necessary.

Apart from this, I agree with everything else Mr Simons says, but there are some things he leaves out. As he says, the US has no legal right to be in South Vietnam at all, but does it follow as he seems to imply that it is therefore OK for the communists to impose their "solution" by force? Or does Mr Simons believe that the communists, if they win (which seems pretty unlikely), intend to hold free elections *à la* Geneva agreement?

There is no evidence that the majority of South Vietnamese want either Ho Chi Minh or the odious Ky, but yearn only for peace. The Buddhists, in particular are largely opposed to both sides. Martha Gellhorn in her recent series of *Guardian* articles made this point clear.

Mr Simons is also right in saying that the US has simply ignored the Geneva agreement because it doesn't suit its interests. But all governments ignore agreements when it suits them. Odd how the communists (and I don't mean Mr Simons) raise a great furore about an agreement most of the signatories of which were capitalist states just because the agreement seems at first sight to give legality to their Vietnam enterprise. On other occasions communists have repudiated agreements precisely because the signatories or most of them were capitalist states.

Mr Simons' solution to the Vietnam conflict is for the Americans to withdraw. I believe that *all* the warring parties should withdraw. This is highly optimistic but no more so than Mr Simons' suggestion that the US alone should withdraw. (How can they when their prestige is at stake?)

To my mind the worst thing about the Vietnam war is the way that atrocities have suddenly become OK. In this connection I believe that many British communists actually love the Vietnam war because it enables them to indulge in their favourite emotion—hatred of America. The mention of the massacres in Nigeria or Iraq (where napalm is freely used) or even Indonesia where tens of thousands of communists were recently murdered by the army causes scarcely a ripple of interest among the same people. It goes without saying that they are not interested in Tibet.

I think that it would be a good thing if the FREETHINKER, instead of concentrating its energies on attacking the spent force that is the church, were to attack instead the cant and dogma that surrounds such subjects as politics and nationalism. Anarchists have been doing this for a hundred years.

JEFF ROBINSON

Comments (various)

I WAS particularly interested in Tom Price's article, "One Way to Atheism", because I am one of the very few people who served in the British Forces during Hitler's war with identity discs proclaiming a complete absence of religious belief or affiliation, a course of action that was made as difficult as possible to follow. My first set had ATH on them but when our army unit was issued with new discs before sailing for Sicily in the summer of 1943 I changed to NIL because of atheism's political connotations. I can't stand party politics and never have voted.

Like Miss Hawtin, I (and many others) had the disadvantage of a university education. She mentions Ingersoll. Wasn't it he who said that a university education polishes pebbles and dulls diamonds?

Your editorial about Joan of Arc is one of the best things I have read for a long time. In ancient Rome the early Christians were considered atheists! A favourite topic of my own is the difference between Shakespeare's play "Macbeth" and the known facts about the career of Mac Beth Mac Finlay, one of the best Kings Scotland ever had. He was not a usurper but had at least an equal right to the throne through a double claim by himself and his wife, Gruoch—called "Lady Macbeth" by Shakespeare. Duncan was not a feeble old man murdered in bed but a vigorous young man killed in battle.

J. A. S. NISBET

The need for new values

ALL THOSE seriously concerned about man's past and present actions should be well aware that only a falsely nurtured mankind could be responsible for his bloody history and prevailing fraud and crime records. That this same pseudo-training is yet being maintained is all too obvious. It is reported that only one-tenth of one per cent of US penal inmates to be without traditional training. Certainly a training and philosophy that dogmatically encourages self-deception into a self-hypnotised self-perjury has been basic with man's entire self-defeating thinking and conduct—just the opposite of intellectual honesty!

History will gruesomely indicate that the exploitations of man (pious or otherwise) that can only exist and advance through the use of deception, dishonesty, overt greed and force, are eventually man's chaotic self-defcats! (Man's inhumanity to man!)

The world is certainly in critical need of matured, ethically disciplined populations, but will the aggregate of professional leadership of all kinds actually qualify as possessing the intellectual honesty and ethical qualifications as matured leaders of men?

The pleas of honest men, from Diogenes, Confucius and Ingersoll, to the present, continue only as ostracized and extremely minor efforts. Maybe when deceit is no longer profitable; when men have learned that unselfish, undeceptive, trustworthy and genuine goodness is earned and proven through actual knowledge, intelligence, kindness and intellectual honesty, a more matured, free, balanced and peaceful existence may be a possibility!

Hatton, Ark., USA.

JOHN H. JONES

OBITUARY

VICTOR COCKERELL, youngest son of Fanny Cockerell, editor of *Plan*, died suddenly on October 18th. Aged 21. Funeral, Golders Green Crematorium, Monday, October 24th.