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LOOKING HARD AT CHRISTIAN CLAIMS

HOW JUSTIFIED are Christians (and their fellow travellers) in claiming to have brought, say, medicine to mankind? Dec Wells is not the first (and will certainly not be the last) to believe that this is not too wild a claim to make. But what are the facts?

Go back 5,000 years for a start. According to a 19th-century medical history, the first physician was probably Sekhet'enanach, who lived about 3000 BC. It is briefly recorded that "he healed the king's nostrils", the "king" being one of the Pharaoh's. Other historians claim that Imhotep ("he who cometh in peace") was the first professional medical man although he was known in his lifetime chiefly as an architect. After his death he was worshipped as a demi-god and eventually as a god of medicine. Then there was the physician Lulu in Ur of the Chaldees, practising in about 2700 BC.

From archaeological discoveries we know that in the third millennium BC pharmacology had made considerable progress. Sumerians made much use of salt, saltpetre, milk, snake-skin and so on. They dealt in both external salves and liquids to be taken internally (made palatable with beer). S. N. Kramer writes that although it is known that the Sumerians did rely on exorcisms and charms to some extent, it is interesting to note that the physician who wrote the clay medical document in the third millennium BC "did not resort to magic spells and incantations. Not one god or demon is mentioned anywhere throughout . . . It is completely free from mystical and irrational elements" (pp. 103, 104).

There is a *Chinese Book of Medicine* dating from 2650 BC in which is found the first mention of the circulation of the blood. The ancient Hindus excelled at surgery (even plastic surgery) and they may well have influenced the Ancient Greeks to whom we turn for the beginning of medical science. It was the Greeks who developed the scientific spirit of enquiry which was to be so thoroughly crippled by the demands of the Christian faith.

Aesculapius (the Greek "Imhotep") may have been a real character. He was credited (like Jesus) with miracles

of healing. Unlike Jesus, he fathered a couple of memorable daughters, Hygiea and Panacea, one of whom was said to be the direct ancestor of Hippocrates (b. 460 BC) the "Father of Medicine".

In the Bible, however, there is little evidence of any medical practitioners. God had come to be regarded as the Great Healer, and could stand no competition. He promised good health in return for obedience (Exodus xv, 26) and all manner of horrors for disobeying his laws. Douglas Guthrie writes, "Any human knowledge of healing was regarded with disfavour, lest it should detract from a power which ought to belong to God alone . . ." and this sums up the crux of the matter. Nevertheless it is suggested that the Jews were pioneers in public health, and they developed measures for the prevention of epidemics.

Of Christianity Guthrie writes:

"It cannot be denied that the early Christian Church retarded the progress of medical science . . . Prayer and fasting were above all other remedies. Medicine must give place to the Church. The Christian view of disease, too, was a retrograde step. Even St Basil of Caesarea, who in AD 372 established one of the first known hospitals, denied that all disease was of natural origin. Many diseases, he alleged, were sent as punishments for sin, and such chastening demanded only prayer and repentance. The sensible views of Hippocrates were denied . . ." (pp. 84, 85).

Guthrie doesn't write like a Freethinker (in his reference to Christ) and so it need not be suggested that I am quoting him because he is biased in our favour. Indeed he goes on to claim that "when all the evidence is weighed, it must be admitted that Christianity has generally favoured the advance of medicine". The trouble is, the rest of the book doesn't seem to support this claim, and, of course, he makes it quite clear that medicine did not start when Christianity developed out of the pagan religions. He writes later that "any investigation into the natural causes of sickness was out of the question". For the Christians, suffering was a discipline to be patiently endured. The primary concern of the monasteries was spiritual *not* physical healing. Diseases were the work of devils, "to be cast out", in the name of Jesus. Believers in him could "take up serpents; and if they drink any deadly thing, it shall not hurt them". (Those people who worry about the influence of TV over the young seem to take it for granted that they will disregard such passages in their Bibles, and let's hope they do . . .)

Medical archives cannot have been helped by the sort of vandalism which Christians had to resort to in order to destroy all possible evidence to prove that their wild claims were false. In AD 391 Christian fanatics set fire to the Alexandrian library and hundreds of thousands of books were destroyed.

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Writing of the Medical School of Salerno (11th and 12th centuries) Guthrie refers to the previous "five centuries of comparative stagnation in the widely scattered monasteries of Christendom" and goes on to admit that in the Middle Ages the "history of medicine had sunk to a very low level indeed. The prevailing conception of disease was archaic . . ."

Among the medical research "scientists" there were of course many heretics. Roger Bacon (1214-94), the scientific friar (who is said to have derived his ideas from Arab sources) ended his life in confinement and obscurity. The Black Death (which killed half the population of London and a quarter of the civilised world) was said to have been caused by the Jews poisoning the wells. The Jews, who had murdered the Christian God-man, were capable of anything, and they were burned alive for it. Michael Servetus (who had published his own theory of pulmonary circulation) met his death the same way, on a slow fire in Geneva in 1553.

It is not surprising that the Renaissance brought new life to the field of medicine. Bacon, Descartes and Galileo were pioneers of further scientific discovery. By the 16th century, non-Catholics were (by Papal decree) excluded from the Italian universities, and Leiden in Holland became the centre of medical learning as well as of anti-Catholic resistance. Hermann Boerhave (1668-1738), the great 18th century clinical teacher, was a follower of the rationalist Spinoza.

Far too few Humanists seem to realise that the Red Cross was founded as the result of the publication in 1862 by a rationalist Swiss banker, Jean Henry Dunant (1828-1910), of his *Un Souvenir de Solferino* which so vividly described the horrors of war.

The nursing profession has its own great rationalist names in those centuries when faith "paid" even more

than it does today. D'Antoine Dépage introduced lay nursing into Belgium (and was, incidentally, a colleague of Edith Cavell) and of course Florence Nightingale was no orthodox Christian. Medicos who were not avowed rationalists were often Unitarians, and, as such, were certainly not recognised as Christians by Christians. One of the great anatomists was the rationalist Robert Knox (1791-1862). Unfortunately he became involved in the scandal by which the notorious Burke and Hare provided bodies for dissection purposes, and, although largely innocent, his career was ruined. Jeremy Bentham (1748-1842), the atheist "Father of Preventive Medicine", bequeathed his body to be dissected for medical research; a habit which is today likely to appeal to Humanists who begrudge good land given over to cemeteries and wish to serve mankind as long as possible. Dissection had of course been totally prohibited by the early Christians and later by the Moslems.

In Crete, 3,500 years ago, there were efficient drainage systems. McCabe writes, "No European city (outside Spain and Sicily) had any sanitary system until long after the end of the Middle Ages". It was the social reformers and humanitarians (not the monks and friars, priests and bishops) who drew attention to the appalling conditions in state institutions and suffered by the poor generally, and who inspired the slow work in public health which resulted in the first Public Health Act in Britain in 1875.

The claim that the medical care of man for man began with Jesus is clearly nonsense. Do we actually have to bend the most obvious facts in order to be nice to the Christians?

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"E" WOULD FREE US FROM OPPRESSIVE PRONOUNS

Clarence K. Streit

This article is reprinted with permission from Freedom and Union, September 1962. When the Bishop of Woolwich wrote his Honest to God, he relegated the Christian Father God to the state of an abstract "ultimate reality", but continued to refer to this new-style deity as "he". Would Dr Robinson have retained the same reverence if he had instead used the pronoun "she" or, as Clarence Streit suggests, "e"?

WE KEEP ON INVENTING nouns—but not pronouns. Since when has any pronoun been added to the English language—or to any other?

Three new pronouns are badly needed now in English. They are needed to stand, sexlessly yet humanely, for such nouns as *person, citizen, human being*. We have *he, his* and *him* for males; *she, hers* and *her* for females; and *it, its* and *it* for the inanimate. But we have no special pronoun to refer to a living being who may be of either sex, as may be a *person, child, writer, politician*—to mention no more. We now use for this purpose the masculine pronouns.

The use of *he* as the pronoun for such a noun as *person* or *citizen* is a relic of the primitive period when too much language—and spelling, and grammar—were invented. It smells of the old Adam, the theory that woman was made from his rib, the oppression of woman. It does not reflect

the present accepted view of the equal dignity of the two sexes.

No man would be willing to refer to the *citizen's rights* as *her rights* when clearly they included his own. Why then should we expect women any longer to say "*the citizen must assert his rights*", when they are thinking of themselves, too?

All words have had to be invented by someone sometime—and so why shouldn't we invent the pronouns needed for such bi-sexual nouns as *citizen, capitalist, communist, author, editor* and—inevitably in the end—*astronaut*? To start the creative process, I venture to suggest that *E* should be the nominative pronoun for all such nouns.

E appears in both *he* and *she*, it is their main sound, their common vowel—and it has the virtue of being as short a word as possible. We use a single vowel for the first person, *I*, and though there are three letters in the second person, *you*, it is really a single vowel sound. Why not *E* then for the double person nominative. And by much the same process of creating, why not *er* for the double person possessive, and *im* for the double person accusative?

As for the citizen, it is time *E* asserted his—whoa!—er competence to invent pronouns, or what will become of *im* in this age of equal rights?

THE SUNDAY OBSERVANCE LAWS :**LORD WILLIS v HAROLD LEGERTON DEBATE, NOVEMBER 4, 1966**

THE CAXTON HALL was packed to hear Lord Willis debate his proposed bill for Brighter Sundays with Harold Legerton (General Secretary of the Lord's Day Observance Society). Lord Sorensen (who was to have chaired the meeting) was at the "last minute", unable to come, and his apologies were conveyed by Mr William McIlroy who took his place with considerable skill and charm, maintaining a strict fairness throughout. Lord Willis expressed his thanks to the National Secular Society for the opportunity to deal with this urgent public matter. The basis of his argument, he said, was the support of the freedom of the individual to follow his own opinions, and to lead his own life. **There was no intention or proposal in his Bill to restrict any Christian from doing anything he liked on the Sabbath; his purpose was to offer others an equal freedom to do what they wish.**

The present Sunday Observance Laws go back 300 years to a time when it was considered necessary to enforce churchgoing by reducing the alternatives, and when playing and such entertainment was considered sinful—especially on the Sabbath. Lord Crathorne's 1965 Committee recognised that the general feeling today is that church attendance cannot be compelled by legislation. The Law, then, is in disrepute; it encourages the common informer, Mrs Grundies, Peeping Toms, Rubber Necks and general hypocrisy. The greatest anomaly is, of course, Sunday television, on which the public can see the plays it is forbidden to see in the theatre.

The emphasis of the Bill (for which a second reading is to be asked in the House of Lords on November 21) is on leisure, and it does not deal with shops or factories. It will not apply to Scotland or Northern Ireland, and there is a provision that gambling will receive no encouragement.

Lord Willis then dealt with the main objections to the proposed Entertainments Bill:

(a) *That the character of Sunday will be changed.* It has, he pointed out, been changing for years, and our Laws are man-made—not God's. In the 17th century Sunday was a cheerful day (after church) until, under the Puritans, work on a Sunday was equated with the sin of adultery; playing bowls with murder. The penalties were death or just doom. Even today the LDOS insist that the seaman's strike in May was divine punishment for a cricket match played at Ilford on a Sunday! Sabbath breakers are still threatened by the LDOS with an eternal roasting in hell-fire!

(b) *That people will be forced to work.* But less than 1 per cent (between 190,000 and 200,000) would be involved if all sportsmen turned up for work.

(c) *That the Bible must be accepted literally word for God's word.* But the Bible, laid down as discipline for primitive nomads, has no such relevance today. **It can be used to prove absolutely anything and so consequently proves nothing.**

The whole object of the LDOS is to force their own opinions on others. They are the "sardine men" trying to force humanity into tins. They insist that what they call God's Moral Law is binding, not just on Christians but even on those who don't believe in a Christ. Theirs is a fundamental denial of elementary freedom. The first of many societies for the suppression of other people's

pleasure was formed at the end of the 17th century. It set out to denigrate pleasure, and forbade even walking in the fields on a Sunday. At one time there had been opposition to Sunday rail traffic, and it was said even now by the LDOS that if trains were forbidden to run on a Sunday, God would wipe out the British Railways deficit! The Sunday opening of the Crystal Palace and the British Museum had also been opposed. Even leap-frogging was taboo!

"Every Sabbath should be passed

As if we knew it were our last . . ."

is the cheerful slogan of these kill-joys. Even demonstrations by amateur bee-keepers and charity concerts by children have been stopped. The LDOS took legal advice once about trying to stop Sunday television, but were advised against taking further action.

Lord Willis ended with a plea for tolerance and kindness, for a respect for human dignity and democracy; "Judge not that ye be not judged" he quoted from the LDOS favourite reading; **Harold Legerton** clearly believes in the sort of Father-God who spends eternity saying "Go and see what my children are doing and tell them to stop . . ." He based his case on the fact that Sunday is a national day of rest and part and parcel of our British heritage; it has long been recognised as such. This is enough for him. What is, is (if Harold Legerton likes it) the will of God, and must not be tampered with. We all need one day "off" in seven (all right, but why must we all have the same day?). It was "dangerous to add our own opinions to God's". This is what the Pharisees had done . . .

Harold Legerton described the enemy: "greed" (of those with vested interests, not that he meant Lord Willis, of course); "antipathy to the Christian faith" (and never, may I say, has that faith seemed more absurd); "carelessness" and the danger of losing the day of rest because of the greed and exploitation of the people.

This bill would probably be the forerunner of other bills; and even if there are some anomalies in the present law (and even if Christians have no right to impose their laws on non-Christians), the Laws under discussion were the laws of God and these are binding on non-Christians as well as on Christians. (Splendid logic this!)

Question time was handled with an admirable firmness by the chairman, who appealed for courtesy and stood no nonsense the moment it appeared to be vanishing. There was more sermonising about the "souls of men" and the "no more historically testified fact than the resurrection", and the fact that God wrote those tablets—not Moses. These are great nationalists, these Bible-bashers. A suggestion that Jesus was as brown-skinned as a Jew in Israel brought a cry of anguish, "Never!" Under his bowler hat their God is whiter than Whitehouse; his English unimpeachable. What "fun" this little band of misery-mongers must have, kicking other people's sand-castles, letting the cold, wet ocean of bigotry trickle in . . . They are the destroyers, and, of course many people get as much "entertainment" from destruction as others do from watching cricket or playing football on a Sunday. (It's all right. They will never read this, as it is being written on the Sabbath. Imagine!) And of course the threats were not forgotten. Anyone who tampers with God's laws will "reap the consequences".

(Continued on page 366)

NEWS AND NOTES

SECULARISTS and Humanists cannot complain of any lack of publicity in the daily press recently. One of the kindest columns was "The Shoe String Optimists" (*Birmingham Post*, Oct. 31) which not only gave due credit to the NSS, but also a fair likeness of its "intellectually militant" and "essentially gentle" General Secretary, Bill McIlroy. David Tribe (President) was quoted as saying "... the Freethinker looks to the day when private views on first and last causes will not impair general acceptance that morality, law and government are social in origin and man's duty as a world citizen is his highest obligation".

The *Belfast Telegraph* and the *Sheffield Star* also published features about the NSS, and thanks are due to Alan Gregory. In the *Guardian* (Nov. 1) Lena Jeger devoted her column to the "Freedom to Disbelieve", and the case against the Church Schools Bill which aims to increase from 75 to 80 per cent the amount of public contributions towards the cost of alterations and repairs of existing church schools and towards the net cost of building new ones.

"Every ratepayer, every taxpayer, has a right to ask why the Government is using its heathen, atheist, agnostic, Buddhist, Jewish, Muslim, non-conformist, Confucian, materialist pennies for the credal indoctrination of the country's children."

On Saturday, November 4, the *Guardian* published a really splendid letter from FREETHINKER contributor Phyllis Graham, "Letter from on High to John Grigg", complete with illustration of a haloed, bearded God peering round a door on which is hung a label "Disturb Ye not". If the *Guardian* will give permission, the FREETHINKER will re-publish in these pages. There have also been letters in the *Guardian* about Hospital Chaplains. Dr Peter Draper drew attention to the fact that the employment of hospital chaplains within the NHS has cost us all about a million pounds over the last 10 years. These chaplains may earn about £1,000 pa (often occupying good accommodation in the hospital) while a doctor may only earn about £500 with no accommodation. And if the Churches have anything to do with it, the facilities for chaplains will be increased. This surely is ground for the strongest secularist protest.

On Thursday, November 3 David Tribe appeared on Southern TV in a brief discussion about the Sunday Observance Laws, which were also mentioned on "World at One" on the Home Service.

The cost of anti-Humanism

LANCASTER Humanists have been protesting that the land set aside for the "indoctrination of out-of-date superstition" at the university should be used for university buildings. "The Churches are countering this by a bold £150,000 plan for a religious centre . . ." (*Observer*, Nov. 3). There will be two chapels; one for RCs and one for the rest. The *Catholic Herald* quotes £60,000 as the RC share (the *Observer* says £80,000 for RCs and £25,000 for the Methodists). Religious chaplaincies are also to be established at Durham, Liverpool and Birmingham. No doubt further demands will be made on non-Christians to help Christians pay their bills for Cathedral repairs, denominational schools and so on. And that is something we need to worry about.

"For atheists some other profession"

THE *Belfast Newsletter* (Oct. 20) published a letter from a teacher-parent, "I should not like any child of mine to

be under the instruction of an atheist". Atheists "should choose some other profession". The Anglican ministry, perhaps?

The faith that cannot be explained or defended

READERS of the *Brighton Evening Argus* (Nov. 3) have been trying to square theism with the Aberfan tragedy, which, one pleads, was not an "Act of God". Another writes

"Those who use disasters as an excuse not to believe in God should look to themselves to see what they are doing with their God-given free will. Jesus had this to say about natural disasters: 'Except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish'."

Which is an even better reason for not taking him very seriously. We must hope that the parents of Aberfan are all Christians; the mass funeral service would surely have proved unbearable for anyone else.

Much better Red than dead, but . . .

RUMANIA has now decreed that divorce will only be granted in exceptional cases. Court fees have been increased and the Court must fix a "period of between six months and a year for consideration by the parties before proceedings are opened" (*Guardian*, Oct. 12). The explanation for the banning of abortion in Rumania seems to be a move to combat a falling birthrate. The task of women once again is to breed for national reasons, whether they want to or not.

Good news for anti-naturists?

AMERICAN scientists have discovered an obscure body enzyme called *gluthathione reductase* of which white people have a fraction more than black. Take quite a lot away from the redheads and they might join the ranks of the sun worshippers after all. Racialists might be given a spot of medical treatment by which they would change colour overnight and so find themselves amongst their own victims.

The old, old story . . .

IN TEL AVIV a "self-styled sorcerer" aged 61 persuaded a teenage girl to sleep with him by threatening to cast an evil spell over her to make her a spinster for life if she would not. He told her that she would give birth to a "Messiah". Pleading not guilty to sorcery, he later admitted that "It was all the work of Satan and evil inclinations" and he regretted his deeds. Sounds as if he might have been reading the Bible.

All passion not spent

ANGLO-JEWRY is disturbed about the Oberammergau play due here in the Spring. It feels that the three Jewish Impresarios (Brian Epstein, Vic Lewis and Phillip Solomon) are letting the side down in profiting from an anti-semitic play. It's bad enough when Christians devote their lives to the preservation of the myth. What we need is a new "Passion Play" on how the Christians (and Jews, of course) have murdered Freethought and intend to go on so doing whenever they get the chance.

It makes obvious sense

A SURVEY among 2,500 men and women has shown that people who go to co-educational schools are likely to make happier marriages than those who are educated well barricaded away from the opposite sex. What is really staggering is that this still needs saying.

The academic song writer

TOM LEHRER THE GREAT is in the UK, wearing in his lapel a button inscribed "Kill a Commie for Christ" (ironically, of course)

GOD AND PHILOSOPHY AGAIN

G. L. Simons

PROFESSOR FLEW'S *God and Philosophy* (Hutchinson, 12s 6d) is another volume in the "Philosophy at Work" series edited by Patrick Corbett. The purpose of the series is "to demonstrate, through the treatment of problems drawn from contemporary life, the practical relevance of philosophy". This highly worthwhile aim is, to my mind, assisted in no degree by the present volume.

Professor Flew has humanist sympathies, and *God and Philosophy* exhibits the familiar criticism of the religious position. It is partly because this criticism is so familiar that the work made little impact on me. I am all for stressing the bleakness of contemporary Christian apologetics, but when satisfactory works already exist I see little point in duplication.

After the statement of the aims of this particular volume, the book comprises four main sections. The first of these analyses in rather superficial terms the meaning of religious language, in particular the meaning of "God". As we have learnt to expect from English empiricists, the account is lucid and fair-minded; it also has that characteristic diffidence that must be so unsatisfactory to many secularists. Without being able to produce a satisfactory definition of God, Professor Flew examines, in the next two sections, natural theology and revelation.

In the natural theology section he considers the Design Argument, the First Cause Argument and the Ontological Argument; there is also a dash of morality. The standard arguments are surveyed and subjected to the standard objections. It seems to me that the position has already been surveyed quite satisfactorily in such books as MacIntyre's *Difficulties in Christian Belief* and Ninian Smart's *Philosophers and Religious Truth*, and that Professor Flew's new volume adds nothing new. I still believe that Hume's *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion* are the best introduction to religious philosophy that the sceptic can hope for.

In the section dealing with revelation, Professor Flew considers such topics as religious experience, miracles, authority and faith. Most of the points made will already be familiar to secularists: how can competing revelations in different, mutually incompatible religions all guarantee truth? If they cannot, how do we chose the "true" revelation? Is any historical testimony of miracles sufficiently reliable to justify belief? In what circumstances should "authority" be allowed to influence our beliefs? And what is "faith" supposed to denote?

In the final section considerations are examined which "might be offered not as grounds or evidences of truth but as reasons for trying to persuade ourselves". In other words, why do people believe in religion when it's all baloney?

Many of Professor Flew's objections can be traced to Hume, and the debt is clearly acknowledged. It is also obvious that the book is intended as an introduction to religious philosophy and to philosophy generally. But there are many such books, and the present one has no particular virtue. It is lucid, but somewhat rambling—and this cannot really be afforded in a book of about 200 pages that attempts to cover all the traditional strands of religious philosophy.

And despite the series in which the book appears there is little attempt to make it relevant to everyday matters; occasional references to the modern difficulties in the

Roman Church hardly achieve this end. The book lacks crispness, and I never particularly like the decimal system of numbering paragraphs; I feel that readability suffers.

Another point of criticism that seems to me important is that *God and Philosophy* seems rather dated. Occasional references appear to such modern religious thinkers as Robinson and Jenkins, but there is no real attempt to get to grips with the modified Christianity that such men espouse. The crisis of modern Christianity is obvious, and Christians are attempting to overcome it by a number of subterfuges. The most common of these is to restate the religious case by using traditional religious language to describe secular circumstances. In brief, "God", for example, becomes "that which we hold most dear" and "prayer" becomes "entering into communion with men".

If thinking Christians are successful in these efforts—and the recent spate of books along these lines suggests that they are trying very hard—then they will steal from the humanist the secular view of man in society, hang religious terminology on it, and sustain the religious impact on our society. Here, language is the tyrant: the important question is not "What do you mean by God?", but "Do you believe in God?". The public pollsters ask the second question, not the first, and when there is a high rating, such things as religious instruction in schools are assured a future.

Religious people must be exposed when they seek to make religion fashionable by defining religious language in secular terms. This was never the purpose of religious language, and that the effect has to be made shows the barrenness of modern Christianity.

Simple people (and Jesuits) still profess to believe in the traditional proofs for God's existence, but many Christians are trying to carry the battle on to a new field. Humanists have virtually won the old battles; they should be quick to recognise the new one as it develops, and to act accordingly. It is to this question, as well as the old ones, that Professor Flew and other humanists should address themselves.

From RAE MELAMED, London, NW3

DEFINITION OF HUMANISM ON A POSTCARD

DISINFECTED against the irrationality of magic and supernatural revelation, Humanists are people who are able to think aseptically and clearly about the problems confronting humanity. Since we do not know or care about a life hereafter, we are concerned with life on this earth here and now.

Life is a challenge to every Humanist. He fights man's inhumanity to man in every sphere; he fights the forces of reaction wherever he finds them; he tries to make the world a saner, happier place for all to live in, in the knowledge that "no man is an island unto himself", and that we are all bound together in our common desire for freedom of speech and thought; for peace; for equal opportunity for all, and for the happiness and dignity of the individual, whoever he may be.

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CONTEMPORARIES

Denis Cobell

READERS of the FREETHINKER may be amused to hear that the *Christian Herald* has celebrated its centenary in the same year as the National Secular Society. In contrast to the list of learned individuals who contributed congratulations to the NSS centenary brochure, I found the names of Sir Cyril Black, Dr Billy Graham and The Queen prominent amongst the congratulatory signatures to the *Christian Herald*. This paper has survived, it seems, by burying its head ostrich-like in the sand, as a Victorian monument, failing to comment on any major issue that has affected this country during the past century.

Its centenary issue the *Christian Herald* said, "Dreams fantastic in the 1860s . . . are the realised wonders of today". It then outlined the great technological improvements of the last one hundred years. Yet this paper has no significant comments to make about the great progressive movements in the emancipation of woman and permissive attitudes to sexual behaviour, nor even the demythologising of Christian faith.

I have read the *Christian Herald* over a number of years, partly to keep my finger on the pulse of the evangelical-protestantism in which I was reared. On occasion I have been so enraged by its reactionary ignorance of the political or social scene that I have written to the editor; but no correspondence which contradicts the paper's line is ever permitted to reach the readers' eyes. Many of the maxims operating in Moral Re-Armament circles also apply. One point that secularists might just find favourable is its strong anti-Catholic tone.

Billy Graham has received a lot of support from the *Christian Herald*. It has published weekly his "My Answer" (a sort of religious Evelyn Home!), a syndicated column also circulating widely in the US. This page has been running regularly since Graham's first visit to London in 1954—when a serial story about fictitious conversions, "Hallowed Harringay" was also published. One letter from an "enquirer" at Billy Graham's latest jamboree was quite revealing; it confirmed the suspicions of many believers, that Graham's message did little to affect those outside the churches, although of course, the writer did not intend to create this impression; he had merely wished to indicate that his backsliding days were over.

Sheppard's Pie in the sky

The Rev David Sheppard, God's batsman, contributes a regular column of homely chat, in similar vein to the religious corner of the big women's weeklies. How long the *Christian Herald* will continue to exist I do not know (there are signs that its circulation is lagging); it appeals to many elderly people and is therefore written in a style more appreciated in days when there was less universal general education. The appetite for photographs of children and animals amongst the lonely is evidently great. The *Christian Herald* serves some purpose to these unfortunates by supervising a "lonely readers' fellowship". A cause that Humanists should not allow what formerly described itself as "Britain's Brightest Christian Weekly" to beat them in.

I think the *Christian Herald* is innocuous, but, while there is still a need for so many to be enlightened, this blinkered, Bible-punching product of Grub Street, which makes no active intellectual approach to any of the world's greatest problems, seems one enormous waste of energy.

To maintain publication for one hundred years must represent some tenacity, but unlike Freethinkers, there are few positive victories which *Christian Herald* readers can claim over the past century. Indeed its ineffectuality in making any response to the affairs of men's lives may have indirectly added to the secularist advance: the churches have emptied, the clergy have lost much authority, and even the Lord's Day Observance Society (fervently supported by the *Christian Herald*) has lost much ground. The *Christian Herald* is a conservative paper, strongly behind the Monarchy, and formerly the British Empire, in its missionary endeavours: therefore, any decline in its influence is a ground for Freethinkers to feel gratified.

THE SUNDAY OBSERVANCE LAWS: LORD WILLIS v HAROLD LEGERTON

(Continued from page 363)

Lord Willis told us about the threats he had received through the post from the sort of Christians who think the gouging out of eyes with hot irons too good for him. Many of us have our own files of such letters. They don't make pleasant reading, though they must be attributed to sick as well as to bitter and unhappy minds.

Harold Legerton was the first to sum up. He insisted that his case had nothing to do with church attendance; it was purely in answer to a bill which aimed at negating the Law of God. He was afraid of a godless Sunday and the powers of darkness that godlessness can bring, and it is these powers which are supporting Lord Willis now. Again he tried to imply that the Bill will somehow restrict Christians from carrying out their own "observances", which is nonsense. The wages of sin is death, he said; not of course that he approved of the sort of threats that Lord Willis had received by post. In fact Harold Legerton has no need to curse; he merely acts as God's agent and passes on the divine curses of his Lord. It's really a wonder the society is not much bigger, for it does give a splendid opportunity for the power-hungry to justify themselves. He hoped the Bill would land up where it belonged—on the dust-heap.

Lord Willis summed up by drawing attention to the fact that the debate was about the laws of man, which must be reformed. He cried "hear, hear!" to Mr Legerton's desire to do what he wanted to on Sundays; he was merely trying to win the same freedom for himself and for others like him. And if Mr Legerton really claimed to speak for Christians as a whole, he was being extremely arrogant. In fact the LDOS is a very tiny minority. Many Roman Catholics, Anglicans and others are supporting the Bill—as well as the National Secular Society, to whom he was very grateful. The LDOS opposition to reform is not their only target; they are equally in favour of "bringing back the cat" and ready to blame coloured immigrants for the crime rate. The time for change has come. If they can only accept freedom for others—their own freedom will be enriched.

The LDOS and NSS had agreed that the profits from a collection should go to the Richard Dimbleby Cancer Relief Fund. It was a good meeting, and those who went to it, uncertain in their minds but ready to learn, must have gone home a lot wiser. KM.

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THE FREETHINKER, 103 BOROUGH HIGH STREET, LONDON, S.E.1.**ANNOUNCEMENTS**Items for insertion in this column must reach THE FREETHINKER
office at least ten days before the date of publication.National Secular Society. Details of membership and inquiries
regarding bequests and secular funeral services may be obtained
from the General Secretary, 103 Borough High Street, London,
S.E.1. Telephone: HOP 2717. Cheques, etc., should be made
payable to the NSS.Humanist Letter Network (International): send s.a.e. to Kit
Mouat, Mercers, Cuckfield, Sussex.**OUTDOOR**Edinburgh Branch NSS (The Mound)—Sunday afternoon and
evening: Messrs CRONAN, MCRAE and MURRAY.Manchester Branch NSS, Platts Fields, Car Park, Victoria Street,
Sunday evenings, 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**Bristol Humanist Group (Kelmescott, 4 Portland Street, Clifton),
Sunday, November 20th, 7.15 p.m.: Informal Meeting.Leicester Secular Society (Secular Hall, 75 Humberstone Gate),
Sunday, November 20th, 6.30 p.m.: DAVID COLLIS, "The
Marketing of Secularism".South Place Ethical Society (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square,
London, WC1), Sunday, November 20th, 11 a.m.: RICHARD
CLEMMENTS, "Youth—Energy and Ethics"; Tuesday, November
22nd, 6.30 p.m.: Dr DAVID PITT and Dr MUTHANNA, "A
Synthesis on Racism".South Place Sunday Concerts (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square,
London, WC1), Sunday, November 20th, 6.30 p.m.: English
String Quartet, Haydn, Dvorak, Ravel. Admission 3/-.West Ham and District Branch NSS (Wanstead and Woodford
Community Centre, Wanstead Green, E11). Meetings at 8 p.m.
on the fourth Thursday of every month.**MRS BRADLAUGH BONNER**MRS Gabrielle Marie Louise Bonner, who died at the age
of 79 on November 3rd, was born in Aubonne, Switzer-
land, the second daughter of Emma and Octave Uldry
who became a professor at Lausanne University. She wasa brilliant musician and was preparing for a career as a
concert pianist when she met her future husband. They
were married in 1914.The late Mrs Bonner seldom appeared in public and
devoted most of her time to her home and family. Al-
though she had lived in England for over fifty years, Mrs
Bonner retained her continental ways to the end. With
her late husband she visited Switzerland regularly except
during the war years. These trips gave her enormous
pleasure, and it was to her native land that she went to
recover from the shock of her husband's sudden death.
Soon after returning to London she was stricken by angina
and bronchitis.The funeral was at South London Crematorium on
November 9th. Mr McIllroy, general secretary of the
National Secular Society, conducted the committal
ceremony.**BOOK REVIEW**

David Tribe

THE AUTHOR of *The Shocking History of Advertising*, E. S.
Turner, offers another picaresque social diversion in *Roads to
Ruin*, subtitled "The Shocking History of Social Reform" (Penguin,
6s). The combination of bantering tone and stark documentation
produces a cross, sometimes uneasy but usually powerful, between
exposé and entertainment.The reforms chronicled concern spring guns and mantraps,
chimney sweeps, Saturday half-holiday, hanging, drawing and
quartering, marrying one's deceased wife's sister, the Married
Women's Property Bill, the Plimsoll line, exclusion of children
from public houses, closing down "promenades" in music halls
and daylight saving. A mixed bag, certainly, though held together
in that the same reactionaries often figure in more than one rear-
guard action. Occasionally the same reformer too, though one
campaign usually engaged one man's lifetime. The writer, clearly
a freethinker, luxuriates in the incredible rationalisations ad-
vanced by the opponents of reform. Stockbroker Sir Frederick
Banbury in 1909 opposed daylight saving because of inconveni-
ence occasioned to the owners of sundials, while the liquor trade
opposed legislation putting age limits on the ability to drink or
purchase liquor in pubs on the grounds that it would encourage
children to lie and stop them from pursuing filial duties. Some-
times, however, reformers were as eccentric as obstructionists,
notably the pictistic Band of Hope.Charles Bradlaugh and the *Freethinker* make brief appearances.
Unfortunately Bradlaugh is seen opposing Sir John Lubbock's
Early Closing Bill of 1888, in that it struck a blow at the principle
of voluntary agreement and "at the self-reliance of the individual"
shop assistant. The *Freethinker* enters the deceased-wife's-sister
controversy with the trenchant observation: "On the whole the
bishops of the Church of England are as obstinate a set of avari-
cious hypocrites as the world has ever produced". The author
himself shows how Sir Samuel Romilly's campaign in the early
nineteenth century to reduce the list of 200 capital offences was
opposed by the Lord Chancellor, the Archbishop of Canterbury,
the Bishop of London and five other bishops. Speaking of the
interest of the Religious Tract Society in chimney sweeps, he ob-
serves: "The members of this body believed, as did the mass of
churchmen, that it was less important to succour the outcasts of
this world than to prepare their souls for the next; a viewpoint
which commended itself to the economists".Occasionally the book falters on continuity, fails quite to finish
the story and forgets dates and references. But this is a minor
fault in a work so rich in scholarship, social feeling and irony.**FREETHINKER FIGHTING FUND**THE FREETHINKER is the only weekly Secularist-
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other people to hear about it? Do, please, help if you can.

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LETTERS

Vietnam

MY reply to Mr Robinson (November 4th) is as follows (limited space prohibits full documentation):—

(1) The N.L.F. would probably use any available military techniques against the Americans. Would excessive behaviour against the Nazis by the Belsen Jews have been reprehensible?

(2) If the Americans withdrew there would probably be nationwide elections quite soon. Ho Chi Minh has always expressed support for them; they were opposed by Bao Dai, Diem and the Americans. (See Point 2, paragraphs 1 and 2 in the programme of the N.L.F.)

(3) It is misleading to talk of the N.L.F. as communist. The leader, Nguyen Hui Tho, is not a communist. The Vietminh was twenty per cent communist; the N.L.F. is probably about the same, its main impulse deriving from nationalism. (See the *Guardian* editorial, 24.10.66.)

(4) Evidence *does* indicate that the South Vietnamese would prefer Ho to Marshal Ky. But this is secondary. Vietnam has been one country for 900 years; the Geneva accords never intended a permanent partition. Should South England have independence if most southerners do not vote for Wilson?

(5) Mr Robinson suggests that all warring parties should withdraw. It seems odd that Vietnamese should be expected to leave Vietnam.

(6) It may be unlikely that the Americans will withdraw. But I prefer advocating just steps to ones likely to occur. And we must never forget the growing American opposition to American policy.

(7) Until 1948, when China went communist, most Western countries, including the US, regarded Tibet as part of China. In Hungary the Soviet Union claims that there was Western intervention in the form of mercenaries and arms; and that the whole uprising was organised and controlled by radio stations in West Germany. I cannot know if this is true; can Mr Robinson know that it is false? Why has there been no detectable unrest in Hungary since 1956? The "police state explanation" will not do: there are police states in Spain, Portugal, South Africa and the Latin American republics, and unrest is detectable in them all.

I would applaud Mr Low's support for World Government. A number of factors militate against it: nationalism (Mr Low's point), capitalism, racialism and religion. All these are present in some degree in right-wing programmes; they are all absent in Marxism.
Manchester.

G. L. SIMONS

Women Alone

I FOUND the FREETHINKER in a train carriage, evidently left for someone to read. Permit me to give "Anon" the other side of the coin. Women are lonely and are aching to meet men for support and sex. What do you find in a good many cases, as one of my friends experienced. He met a lonely woman; she was all loving and could not do enough. But! After marriage; she behaved as the boss of the house, and when anyone remonstrated with her to see if she could be reasonable, what happened. She behaved like a cow in a china shop. My friend stated that the more you gave way the more she showed her bossiness. As soon as women—especially lonely women—learn that if a man works to provide for her, he at least expects reciprocal tolerance, and obedience.

Women should learn that two captains in a ship might sink it; two cooks in a kitchen would spoil the dinner and two bosses in a house never works well. It has always been and always will be: the husband must be the boss.

Horsham, Sussex.

JAMES HILDRETH

Encouragement

I FEEL I want to send a bouquet to that gallant little paper the FREETHINKER. I always look forward to receiving it and read right through with great interest. Take this week's issue. Here in eight pages are excellent articles discussing a variety of problems vital to all of us—our attitude to illegitimacy, a picture of the gruesome Brethren, the loneliness of women in large cities, an experience in Brixton, articles on atheism and hell. It is like a breath of fresh air in the cloudy, smoggy world of the majority of daily newspapers of our National Press with their ballyhoo and nauseating hypocrisy.

More strength to Freethinker's arm! Long may it go on fighting for a rational, sane outlook on every aspect of our society.

RAE MELAMED

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