

# FREETHINKER

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

FOUNDED 1881 by G. W. FOOTE

Friday,  
November 25, 1966

## STRIP-TEASE

ONE OF THE MORE DIFFICULT facts of life (from prostitution to refugees) that mothers have to try and explain is the Strip-Tease form of entertainment. In no terms save those of an adult and mixed-up society can it make sense. But today there is another kind of "stripping" which is no easier to interpret, and that is the intellectual stripping of modernist Christians who are discarding their theological veils one by one. The "Fall of Man", "Original Sin", "The Virgin Birth", "Hell", the "Creed" and "God-the-Father" lie crumpled at the performers' feet, while they clutch desperately at the remaining flimsies of "Ultimate Reality" and "Unique Christian Love". Now and again it seems that the acts will be developed so that these, too, will be tossed aside—if only to attract a rather more sophisticated audience; but when this does happen, it is "hushed up" as much as possible. By and large the acute fear of complete exposure is as great as ever it was.

Malcolm Muggeridge is the Gipsy Rose Lee of these strippers, fluttering his eyelids—now towards the Roman Catholics and now at the Anglicans, pretending to drop a veil and then clutching it all the closer to him, crooning all the while, "Don't look at me, it's disgusting! it's all part of the corruption of our society!" and drawing larger and larger crowds. His fans include Mary Whitehouse, but only since he started having his veils made of red flannel... Some might suggest, unkindly perhaps, that he is getting just a little beyond it, and must surely be able to afford a comfortable retirement from his rather pitiful intellectual antics. There are plenty to carry on with his work. Several highly paid stars actually perform in church, although they do the show in reverse, arriving part-exposed at the door and then picking up the veils one by one as they go down the aisle, ready to join in the "Creed" with their delighted audience. Others have their own companies such as the "Christian Humanists" and the "Christian Agnostics" and a lively little group called the "Cambridge Theologians"; all show considerable versatility and intricacy in their performances.

So far few complaints have been made about "Stripping on the Telly". It says something for the tolerance of our age that these performances are allowed to come right into our own firesides. In such a way the Man in the Street (even his wife) can be made to feel part of the sleazy underworld of the mind; they can watch others doing what they secretly long to do themselves, but without being tempted to go too far.

Of course some Irish, Spaniards, Latin Americans and Italians do write and complain to the press from time to time. This was only to be expected. For them, *all* the veils are sacred, and dropping even a few of them is to risk a most unwelcome sort of revelation. Others look upon it all as terribly old fashioned. They, in their own private clubs, reached their peak of "Stripping" hundreds of years ago, and now concentrate on a very modified performance. They cannot really see what all the fuss is about, and are perhaps rightly a little peeved that these modern performers should be so highly paid. Secularists are perhaps the worst spoil-sports, but even those who complain that they can never turn on the telly these days without being faced by Malcolm Rose Lee, admit that they have an efficient switch by which they can equally swiftly turn him off. What they complain most about are the schools. The Education Act has laid down that once a day (and also at another period during the week) the children shall dress up in the full set of veils. They are not, of course, expected to go through the strip routine, but some teachers (yes, teachers!) are demonstrating strip-tease in front of the class! First goes the "Fall of Man" and then "Hell Fire", and there is a special ritual movement (quite obscene) by which the God-veil is ripped and torn although never finally discarded. Few teachers have dared to expose themselves completely; those who have dared to tell the children not to touch the veils and turn up as they would at home, find that they are barred from promotion. It is all very unsavoury.

Secularists have no wish for any censorship or laws to forbid theological strip-tease. They recognise that for some it is all part of growing up; like reading *Penthouse* or *Woman's Own*. They are merely impatient for the time when Stripping Veils take their place in museums alongside the doublets and bustles of previous ages, and the Strip-Tease will be as out of date as cock-fighting or the Lancers.

In the meantime, how do you explain to children who have never come across veils before why Bishops and theologians and newspaper columnists and business men first put them on and then win so much applause for stripping them off again in public? It's not at all easy for us mothers, you must admit.

### INSIDE

JACK LONDON (1876-1916)	<i>E. Hughes-Jones</i>
SHOULD HUMANISM BE POLITICAL?	<i>G. L. Simons</i>
BEING GOOD WITHOUT GOD	<i>John Grigg</i>
LETTER FROM ON HIGH TO JOHN GRIGG	
MR COLLINS SHOW US HOW	
THE AGNOSTIC'S SUBNORMAL POSITION	<i>Gonzalo Quiogue</i>
BOOK REVIEW	<i>Gillian Hawtin</i>
NEWS AND NOTES	ANNOUNCEMENTS
LETTERS	OBITUARY

## JACK LONDON (1876-1916)

E. Hughes-Jones

FIFTY YEARS AGO on November 22nd when only 40, Jack London, the famous Californian author, died by his own hand and an overdose of drugs. Why? Perhaps because he was physically ill and worn out by his prodigious work and experiences, perhaps greatly depressed by complex financial affairs. His great incomes were much depleted by misfortune and by his generous over-spending on spongers and borrowers who forgot! Nevertheless he was a major prophet of the people, for he uttered their inarticulate sentiments. However he is regarded, in American slang he "bucked big". He deeply stirred the intellectual waters of my generation born 20 years or so after him, and the disturbing ripples extended into the stagnant pools of religious and economic orthodoxy. The fifty years since his death have not, for me, diminished the magic of his name.

But I must confess myself biased. I am biased by my love of the best in his shining character, of his books, and perhaps by a possible distant consanguinity. After four horrible years wasted at the first world war, I was reading avidly, and collecting some of his 50 books when my old father (seventy-odd) once alluded to distant cousinship to Jack London's forebears. It was heartening to hear this (however tenth-rate-pale, dim and distant this possible association happened to be as a reflection of glory) because it might redress the balance of very surely tarnished other kinship and heritage from a scattering of scallywags and scoundrels!

Biographers reveal that Jack's mother, Flora, was of Welsh stock and her grandfather a circuit preacher known as "Priest" Jones. But Jack London had very much more the qualities of his putative father, "Professor" Chaney, with whom Flora was certainly living at the time of conception, though parting before Jack was born. (Paternity was never definitely established, but there is weighty evidence in Chaney's direction). Chaney was clever, though misguided, as an astrologer. Flora was of a hysterical, neurotic temperament, and by no means an admirable person. But even so, I am glad and grateful for Jack London having existed in the wide human family.

### The University of Books

Though studying hard in those far off days for examinations, I contrived to find time for J.L. books. As a descriptive writer he is unsurpassed (try "The League of the Old Men" in the collection of tales entitled *The Children of the Frost*). His descriptions of men and women, dawns and sunsets, white silences and south seas, slums and palaces, brute and hero, remain vivid in the memory. But grander than all he opened my mind to the sweep of space and time and the story of man against this tremendous background where "fleeting systems lapse like foam". He revealed the present urgent need in the evolution of our species for *human dignity, integrity, development of intellect and powers of cogent reasoning* to spurn the myths and superstitions that have held mankind in thrall.

Later on, during some years of Extra-Mural and WEA lecturing, I passed on to my students, I hope, some of the inspiration I had myself received from him. For many recruits to Adult Education, especially to the previously untutored, I found him probably the best INTRODUCER to literature, for they responded to his lead, given in such books as *Before Adam, The Sea Wolf, The Human Drift,*

to read more widely into questions he had raised. It would be hard to over-praise this quality of his; it is the early steps in the University of Books that are the vital ones, and I would say that no gowned Professor in the world, however erudite, has done more than he has done to lift the educational sights of the people towards general reading and the freeing of their minds from the shackles of superstitious fears (eg, the simple tale "Samuel" included in the book entitled *The Strength of the Strong*).

*His Dog, Klondike*, and some other stories are I think widely known. *Martin Eden* (semi-autobiographical), *Essays of Revolt* and *The Valley of the Moon* merit high commendation. I wish his sociological essays were better known. New students have found his searching analyses of society, religion, morals and industry a revelation, and often an inspiration towards reform. Any educable person, in my opinion, would be a bigger and better person after a thorough reading of Jack London's books.

### His own story and tributes to him

Older Humanists will probably know much of his career; the early poverty, the newsboy, van boy, factory worker, oyster pirate, fish patrolman, sailor, labourer, tramp, then to Klondike and subsequently on to great writing triumphs. He was married at 24, had two daughters and was divorced at 28. He married a second time at 30, and one baby daughter died within a few hours. Then two years' voyage in a small boat, and always, wherever he was, writing, continually writing. He also did a good deal of lecturing, invariably pleading the cause of the down-trodden and exploited. But among his high qualities were weaknesses. It is easy now with the hindsight of several biographies, literary commentaries, radio serials and so forth to underline them; on the 50th anniversary of his death the orthodox critics will probably damn him with faint praise. But I, and, I submit, many like me, owe him much gratitude and cannot give a pernickety appraisal.

I like to think of his genius and his generosity: "he never knew a joy too good to share". His books have been translated into many languages throughout the world, and workers in fields and factories in many lands will extol with me his compassion and the wonder of his sparkling stories (Lenin when dying is said to have asked for one of them to be read). I echo the late Hamilton Fyfe's appraisal of Jack London's books: —

"He opened windows upon the splendour and the savagery, the pomp and the pitifulness that he had found in many corners of the earth. He saw that in every scene, in every human activity there was an element which lifted it into the region of the beautiful, and he made all his readers see it, whether they were learned or ignorant, cultivated or only just able to read. Full justice has never been done to him. There was no silver in his purse, only gold."

A Swedish schoolgirl wrote that she liked him most of all authors and men on earth and received news of his death at school: "I heard no more that lesson". A letter from Durham reads: "Three common pitmen will keep his memory green. . . . The sweetness of his life and work can never die".

Is there any epitome, or essence, of his philosophy? Perhaps it is best to answer with the following excerpt from *The Iron Heel*: —

"Though I suffer all deaths that a man can die  
To the uttermost end of time,  
I have deep drained this, my cup of bliss

In every age and clime . . .  
I drink to Life, I drink to Death  
And smack my lips with Song  
For when I die another 'I shall pass the cup along . . .  
I am Man, Man, Man, from the tingling flesh  
To the dust of earthly goal . . .

When I drain life's glass  
Of all its rainbow gleams,  
The hapless plight of eternal night  
Shall be none too long for my dreams . . ."

## SHOULD HUMANISM BE POLITICAL?

G. L. Simons

SOMEONE once said that there are as many theologies as there are theologians. Humanism is a bit like that. To some, humanism should exclude all specifically religious categories; to others, humanism itself can provide the framework for a modern and revitalised religion. Another field where there is disagreement amongst humanists is that of politics—and I do not mean in regard to specific issues (although that also is true). What concerns me here is the overall question of the relationship of humanism to politics: should humanism be political?

In history, humanism has been everything; it has been specifically related to politics and it has not; it has been right- and left-wing. The unifying thread is concern for man and his capacities. But this concern also varies. Is humanity to be enriched by talented, competitive individualism?—or by a collective, co-operative approach? Or should neither of these questions occupy the humanist, *as a humanist*, in the modern world.

One of the characteristics of modern thought is *convergence*. The leading thinkers in intellectual spheres appear progressive and opposed to dogma. A consequence of this is that different philosophical systems no longer exhibit rigid limits, beyond which disciples should not stray. This is clearly evident in the works of Huxley (as Humanist), Dr John Robinson (as Christian) and Cornforth (as Marxist). Thus it is clear that divisions between systems, as well as within them, are no longer inhibiting the common acceptance of certain basic attitudes. Philosophy in most systems is becoming *society-oriented*, rather than heaven-oriented (as traditional Christianity) or history-oriented (as in traditional Marxism). But it is clear that social relations, when viewed broadly, are the stuff of politics. Can a society-oriented philosophy, which humanism is, avoid adopting a political posture? Is it desirable that it should?

Any reasonably comprehensive social philosophy has two main aspects: one concerns the intellectual framework (what is thought to be true, valid, etc), the other concerns the sphere of value (what is thought to be good, right, etc). In a political philosophy both aspects can be detected, and the relevance of these to humanism can be defined.

In the sphere of value most humanists agree. They broadly desire the same sort of society: a society where personal liberty is countered more by personal responsibility than by an autocratic state, a society in which citizens can grow, psychologically and "spiritually", and a society where experience is rich and personal relationships durable. Humanists are united in wishing to eradicate sickness and superstition, poverty and suffering, injustice and bigotry.

Much of this could be achieved by education and money. But it is evident that these are, in part, political matters; education has a broader aspect, relating as it does to broadcasting, the press and the Church; money, as taxes,

His second wife (Charmian) recorded at the end of her too adulatory biography that "Jack London prayed to no God but HUMANITY". Referring to those who may visit the site where his ashes are buried, she concludes with a thought that the rugged boulder monument on Jack's "Little Hill" could evoke from a pilgrim nothing better than (in Jack's own words and style of tribute): —

"By the Turtles of Tasman, he was a MAN".

rates, subsidies, duties, etc. is also loaded with political overtones. Why, in view of these considerations, are humanists not prepared to involve themselves, *both individually and collectively as humanists*, in political affairs? They agree about the sort of society they wish to see and the factors that are relevant to its achievement. Why is there not a humanist party line?—without, of course, the dogma and sectarianism that such a phrase inevitably conjures up.

One answer is clearly that there may well be widespread disagreement about the means to achieve particular ends, that different humanists may assess practical politics in different terms. But it is obviously true that this possibility is not considered decisive in many issues about which humanists have particular preoccupations; consider, for instance, what may be called the humanist party line on compulsory religious instruction, homosexual and abortion law reform, etc. But why should there be a precise humanist policy on such things but not, to anything like the same extent, on say, the Prices and Incomes Policy, steel nationalisation, Vietnam, etc?

As I see it, the chief reason can be found in the historical roots of free-thought. Where, today, there is a clear humanist commitment, it is usually backed by a tradition of rationalist thought and agitation extending over many decades. In the main this tradition has been anti-religious, and it is right that modern humanism should contain a strong element of this. But humanism also purports to be much more. It is intended to be a comprehensive philosophy for man in society; it is intended to be, in some sense, a system in which he can orientate himself and seek fulfilment. This being so, it is unreasonable for the humanist, *as a humanist*, to ignore the great political issues of the day.

This does not mean that leading humanists should lay down a policy which is then backed by other humanists. But it does mean that widespread discussion should be encouraged throughout the humanist movement on political affairs. In the cases where a consensus of opinion is reached, this could be incorporated into the overall humanist frame. In this way the humanist impact in important affairs would increase, and its social relevance would be demonstrated. What humanist, for example, would maintain that the present situations in Rhodesia and Vietnam are satisfactory? More particularly, is there a humanist alive who would unreservedly support the policies of Mr Smith and President Johnson?

Humanist terms of reference are intellectually sound and morally right. All that we need now is to draw a few logical conclusions and humanism will achieve the comprehensiveness that it needs before it can be truly termed an adequate social philosophy.

The first step is to promote wide discussion on political (as well as other) affairs. The rest will follow.

## NEWS AND NOTES

ON November 11th the *Catholic Herald* announced "HUMANISTS FAIL TO STOP SCHOOL AID INCREASE". The "Church Schools Bill" has received a unanimous second reading in the Commons, supported alike by Catholics, Anglicans, Freechurchmen and the Jewish community. Dr David Kerr (Wandsworth Central) Mr Peter Jackson (High Peak, Derbyshire) and Mrs Lena Jeger (Holborn and St Pancras South) spoke in favour of an amendment opposing the Bill

"which perpetuates a system of education which does not provide maximum choice of school as laid down in the Education Act of 1944, nor the fullest educational opportunities for all children . . ."

Altogether 18 MPs put their names to this amendment, which was withdrawn.

This is indeed a defeat, not just for the Humanists but for all those who really care about child-centred education. Considerable efforts have been made, especially by the National Secular Society; it will be disastrous to sit back now. The apathy and short-sightedness of those "agnostic" parents who do no more than grumble have contributed to the churches' victory. If such parents would only get together and give us their support (if only over this issue), they would not need to worry so much about their children being victimised as outsiders or treated first and foremost as potential pew fodder.

### The root of the problem

IN *Christian Order* (November) Fr Crane admits that many young people see religion today as something that would deprive them of life, whereas "The challenge of the church is to show the opposite: that life is impossible, not worth living without it". This is the fallacy that inspires support for the legal indoctrination of our children. The young people are of course quite right; Christianity is life-denying, but the more they agree with us about this, the more the frightened "Fathers" and clergy, MPs and the uninformed Christian public will insist that it is up to the state to indoctrinate them with fairy stories so as to make life "worth living".

### Anchor or millstone?

"CONSENT" is a word that frightens the Catholics; they need "authority", and the ideas of abortion, homosexuality, and now divorce by consent, strike at the very roots of their security.

"Catholic doctrine on marriage is not an easy one" (*Catholic Herald*, Nov. 11). "Yet if it is hammered home and shown to be the only way to preserve the sanctity of matrimony—and society—then perhaps the secular members of our society will pay heed and see in it the anchor many of them desperately seek."

Even if the "anchor" be a spouse you haven't seen for years and who hates the sight of you but refuses to commit adultery? The present shambles has been preserved so as to uphold the idea that marriages are Made in Heaven, even if they are so badly made that they can only be given an outward semblance of good manufacture by laws which are as inhuman as they are absurd. Anglican Bishops also oppose "divorce by consent", although in countries where this has been the procedure for years "some argue that divorce by consent has actually reduced the divorce rate" (*Observer*, Nov. 13). Mr Leo Abse is redrafting his bill to bring it into line with the major suggestion made by the Law Commission (published Nov. 9). After two years of living apart either party would be able to

obtain a divorce with the consent of the other. After 5 or 7 years, either party would be able to get a decree even if the other objected. This makes humanitarian—if not Christian—sense. The first public demonstrations in favour of Italian divorce were held in Rome on November 11th.

### The Non-Church again

A WEEKEND conference is planned for the New Year for the Jesus-worshippers who are neither quite in nor quite out of the church. It will, I am sure, be an enormous success. Dr Robinson, of course, will be there performing the major miracle of eating and keeping his cake.

### Sacred cows

"A Hindu who does not venerate a cow has inwardly ceased to be a Hindu" (*Masurashram Patrika*), and who cares how many people die from starvation or get killed so long as the cows are preserved to die in their own sacred and miserable way? So far eight people have been killed, 45 injured and more than 750 arrested in this popular religious cause. The march on the Indian parliament was organised by Jan Sangh, a member of an extreme Hindu political party which aims to set up a fascist-type dictatorship.

### The Italian flood disaster

EVEN the Catholic Mayor of Florence "reached the end of his tether" (*Guardian*, Nov. 11) when he saw a company of soldiers sweeping out the last traces of mud from the Franciscan Basilica of Santa Croce . . .

"I will not put foot in this church again if they think first of sweeping the floor rather than of the poor people in the side streets whose homes are still buried" the Mayor said".

### And in Rhodesia

"MANY Catholics are staunch adherents of the Rhodesian Front. They include the Minister of Local Government, Mr Mark Partridge, who is the only Catholic in the Cabinet, and a radio commentator, Mr Harvey Ward, whose job consists largely of writing and reading news analyses which, for their propagandist content would be hard to equal anywhere in the world". The *Catholic Herald* (Nov. 11) goes on to say that although some Bishops criticised UDI last year, Catholics have decided that discretion is the better part of valour. Smith's is a "totalitarian régime, to be sure—but so is Franco's Spain, and so was Mussolini's Italy".

### And in Germany

CATHOLIC organisations and the Catholic press "have played a major rôle in undermining Chancellor Ludwig Erhard's leadership in Bonn" (*Catholic Herald*, Nov. 11).

### Hard to swallow

NOW that Prince Charles has "come of age" his pocket money has gone up from £200 to £600 a week; with full board and lodging of course. Some 600,000 men meanwhile are earning less than £12 a week.

### The price of celibacy?

MINNEAPOLIS has a large percentage of Roman Catholics, and the *Minneapolis Tribune* in August 1966, published a lengthy article about a local sanatorium being built to rehabilitate some of the 4,000 priests whose lives have been wrecked by alcoholism. Austin Ripley, director of a similar institution for 10 years, has estimated that one out of every 15 RC priests in America is an alcoholic. The *Liberal* (Oct. 1966) points out that this article cannot be shrugged off as anti-Catholic propaganda. It would be

(Continued on page 375)

## BEING GOOD WITHOUT GOD

John Grigg

*This article is reprinted in its entirety (and with permission) from the Guardian (Oct. 27).*

THIS IS THE centenary year of the National Secular Society, which champions good causes ranging from "the promotion of peace between nations" to "the extension of the moral law to animals"—all on the hypothesis that God is unnecessary, because "morality is social in origin".

With most of the society's aims I am in strong agreement, but I cannot begin to share its basic assumption, which seems to have all the dogmatism of a religious creed without the psychological value which even the worst religious creed possesses. The society claims that "this life is the only one of which we have any knowledge", which is true enough in the scientific sense. But surely it is also true that an overwhelming majority of human beings believe there is an unseen Power which both created the world and shapes its destiny, and that the progress of mankind (as well as a great deal of its misery) is attributable to that belief.

The Communist philosophy refuses to recognise God (rather as the United States refuses to recognise Communist China), yet historical determinism is meaningless without the sanction of higher authority. If history, instead of being just one damned thing after another, is to be thought of as a coherent pattern of events leading from somewhere to somewhere, we are entitled to ask who ordained that it should be so, and why our selfish interests should be sacrificed to a millennium which we shall never see. The Russians, at any rate, have never ceased to be a deeply religious people, and I would expect them to reinstate God officially at some not too distant date.

Meanwhile communism is a religion in all but name, providing the authority and the sense of ultimate certainty for which most of the human race craves. Its weakness, of course, is that it offers the individual no hope of immortality, and that it drastically restricts his freedom while he is alive. It is the bastard child of Judaic mysticism and German collectivism.

### No contract

The idea that morality derives from a social contract, deliberately entered into by human beings for their own worldly convenience, is—to put it mildly—a huge oversimplification. The rational part of Man has certainly influenced the reform of law and behaviour on utilitarian lines, but Man is only partly rational, and the prime source of all morality is instinctive and religious. Nor can it be argued that utilitarian morality is necessarily more enlightened than instinctive morality. Kindness, compassion, and a feeling of responsibility to our Maker may be thoroughly irrational impulses, but a code dictated by them is likely to be more humane than one dictated by social utility alone.

The exaltation of Reason is understandable when a society seems to be in the grip of obscurantist forces, and when religion seems to be the enemy of truth and justice. But we must not overlook the contribution of religious faith to the forward march of mankind, nor must we forget that some of the most terrible crimes against humanity have been committed in the name of Reason. Reason, like religion, can be perverted and made to serve base and cruel ends, but neither should on that account be dis-

owned; they are the twin lights which shine upon the path we tread.

The religion which has guided, and which continues to guide our society, is the Christian religion. To deny this is to be blind to historical fact—hardly a good advertisement for rationalism. At the heart of Christianity lies the assertion that God and our neighbour are lovable and ought to be loved—an assertion which, however hard to justify rationally, inspires most of our ethical thought and practice. Moreover, the assertion is indivisible, for while it is natural that we should love some of our fellow human beings, it is far from natural that we should love them all. The cult of humanity cannot stand on its own, but depends ultimately upon belief in a benevolent Creator.

### Double attack

Anyone who says, as I am saying, that our society is fundamentally Christian, has to face attack from opposite directions—from the secularist who denies the Christian inspiration of our moral code (except those parts of it of which he disapproves), and from the orthodox believer for whom Christianity means the acceptance of detailed creeds and the performance of routine acts of worship.

A middle course between secularism and religious bigotry may not be easy to find, but it is worth looking for. The Church we need is ancient but not atavistic, reverent but not superstitious, authoritative but not autocratic, tolerant but not lax. At its best, the Church of England falls not too far short of those ideal standards. The escape from traditional religion has many dangers, and it is only fair to remind the National Secular Society that the great Annie Besant, who did so much to establish it 100 years ago, later became the priestess of a religion whose emotional and ritualistic extravagances put those of even primitive Christianity in the shade.

## THE AGNOSTIC'S SUBNORMAL POSITION

Gonzalo Quiogue

IT IS A FACT that either there is a God or there is no God (Jewish-Christian God). We cannot dispute this situation, because something is either existing or not existing. Empirically, semi-existence is sheer nonsense. From the viewpoint of the agnostic, therefore, the so-called "God" is in a condition of "semi-existence", a ludicrous idea to contemplate. This is one shade of agnosticism.

A more common variety of agnosticism is in this academic view:

"I reject the Jewish-Christian God. But it is possible that some kind of God is existing in the unknown. This is the reason why I am an agnostic."

This second agnostic does not realise that the unknown is as infinite as nature. Therefore, his judgment on the God question shall be suspended for ever and ever! He thinks he is hugging a logical position, when in fact he is only coddling another superstition! While he is living in the known world, he is allowing his superstition about the unknown, in the guise of an academic possibility, to influence his earthly life here and now. He threw away his primitive Christian superstition and is fondling now a "high-class" academic superstition about the unknown! With such a mumbo-jumbo attitude, how can we expect him to cleanse the world of its silly ideas of origins? How can he enlighten the masses, when he himself needs enlightenment?

## LETTER FROM ON HIGH TO JOHN GRIGG

*We are also grateful for permission to reprint the following which appeared under "Letters to the Editor" in the Guardian of November 4th.*

MY Beloved Son John,—I wish to express my sincere thanks for your gallant defence of my honour in the *Guardian*, October 27.

While fully appreciating your goodwill, I must, however, point out that your effort was marred by certain errors and a curious ignorance of the facts of life, liable to excite the derision of Mockers and hardly conducive to my personal Glory.

To begin with, your opening paragraph played straight into the hands of the nasty Secular Society. Don't you see that talk about my being "unnecessary" gives a shocking impression? Good heavens, I might just as well be a tin of cocoa or a packet of Scram. "Unnecessary", indeed. Those Secularists at least show more respect for my feelings. They don't evaluate me like a piece of antique furniture or calculate my usefulness as a prop to society. They accord me the peace of nonexistence.

Next you fall into the snare of equating scientific fact with statistical faith. My poor boob, Unbelievers who say, "This life is the only one of which we have any knowledge" (and they're dead right, too: I keep my Iron Curtain well clamped down on the next) are hardly likely to reverse their views when told that "an overwhelming majority of human beings believe there is an Unseen Power", etc., etc. Unbelievers are prone to reflect that the world is full of fools.

I do think you're somewhat unwise to harp on "historical determinism" and this "sanction of higher authority" business. Human history is not, by and large, an enchanting entertainment. Candidly, it's a bloody shambles (I'm not swearing) and I much prefer to be left out of it. It does me no particular credit.

I don't really like that bit about communism being "a religion in all but name". It shines too lurid a headlight on the nature of organised worship. "Authority"—"a sense of ultimate certainty for which most of the human race craves"—"hope of immortality for the individual"... these are catchwords to be seized and tossed around by the Mockers. I can't help wondering (a mere figure of speech) just why you play so cheerfully into their hands.

My poor lamb, I can see you're very worried about your society being "fundamentally Christian". With my All-seeing Eye I miss nothing, so I think I can give you a tip as to how things are really going. Think of it this way: not so much that your society is living on the remnants of its Christian heritage, as that it is thriving already on the wealth of Secularist achievement, before which ecclesiastical power has had to give way, point by point in a desperate battle, and suffer to be put in practice those ideals it has always preached about but so rarely respected.

You may think this odd, coming from God. You wouldn't if you realised how my reputation has been damaged by those who profess to know everything about me.

But enough. Let us deal briefly with your final paragraph. First: dismiss all idea of a "middle course". Your description of "the Church we need" is feudal, conservative, out of date and quite impracticable. It's also enough

to make a cat laugh, so even the Secularists will see the funny side of it.

Lastly, you showed a mean spirit in that sly jab at Annie Besant. There's no need for me to enlarge on it. But remember, my son, that sort of anti-ecumenical hooliganism does no good to the Christian cause. I say no more, because I don't want to discourage you. Besides, I have just had a brilliant Idea. How about founding a new Religion, with the sole, sublime yet urgent purpose of Being Good To God? Does the rôle of Messiah appeal to you? I'd like you to give it serious consideration.—Yours in goodliness,

As dictated to: PHYLLIS K. GRAHAM

## MR COLLINS SHOWS US HOW

AT the BHA Northern Humanist Conference at Swanwick in April, old age pensioner Mr William Collins of Stockport NSS Branch (and one of our vice-Presidents) set up a stall with NSS pamphlets and copies of the *FREETHINKER* and did a brisk trade throughout the two days. At the NSS Centenary Rally at Northampton in July Mr Collins stood at the door of the main hall busily selling *FREETHINKERS* to people as they left the meeting. Where should we be without Mr Collins and others like him in the movement? What *can* the rest of us do to help? I believe I have found one answer.

In the past weeks I have obtained three new subscribers (ie, people who PAY for their *FREETHINKERS*) with very little effort on my part. If other readers were willing to do the same, the circulation would be quadrupled. All I did was to mention the paper to a few people whom I knew to be sympathetic to freethought. They had all heard of the *FREETHINKER*, had read occasional copies, and most had enjoyed its reading. They just had not bothered to place a regular order. To these few people I passed on my own copies, but made an opportunity to ask the recipients a week or so later what they had thought of it. If they had liked it (all but one did) I asked them if they would like to have a copy at only sixpence a week. If they agreed, I saw to it that they placed an order. One of them ordered a year's subscription (37s 6d) from 103 Borough High Street, one placed an order through a newsagent at 6d a week, and the third sent a postal order for 9s 6d to Borough High Street for 13 weeks' supply. Thus, three new subscribers at very little trouble.

If we all approached a few of our friends in this way, the readership would multiply and the finances be strengthened. And if we were to start thinking about this NOW and approach our first friend this coming week, we, the supporters of the *FREETHINKER*, could give the editor a large increase in circulation by Christmas.

A BIRMINGHAM BRANCH MEMBER

*[Thank you very much, Mr Collins. Excellent ideas. Ed.]*

NATIONAL SECULAR SOCIETY

Founded 1866 by Charles Bradlaugh

**CENTENARY BROCHURE**

Get your free copy from

103 BOROUGHS HIGH STREET,  
LONDON, SE1

# FREETHINKER

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

103 BOROUGH HIGH STREET, LONDON, S.E.1  
Telephone: HOP 0029  
Editor: KIT MOUAT

## THE FREETHINKER ORDER FORM

To: The FREETHINKER, 103 Borough High St., London, SE1  
I enclose cheque/PO (made payable to G. W. Foote & Co. Ltd.) for:  
£1 17s 6d (12 months); 19s (6 months); 9s 6d (3 months).  
(USA and Canada \$5.25 (12 months); \$2.75 (6 months); \$1.40 (3 months)).

Please send me the FREETHINKER starting.....

NAME.....

ADDRESS.....

(BLOCK LETTERS PLEASE: plain paper may be used as order form if you wish.)

The FREETHINKER can also be obtained through any news-agent.  
Orders for literature from THE FREETHINKER BOOKSHOP; FREETHINKER subscriptions, and all business correspondence should be sent to the BUSINESS MANAGER, G. W. FOOTE & CO. LTD., 103 BOROUGH HIGH STREET, LONDON, S.E.1, and not to the Editor.  
Cheques, etc., should be made payable to G. W. FOOTE & CO. LTD.  
Editorial matter should be addressed to: THE EDITOR, THE FREETHINKER, 103 BOROUGH HIGH STREET, LONDON, S.E.1.

## 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

Brunel University, Acton, London, Thursday, December 1st, 1.30 p.m.: DAVID TRIBE, "Humanism—Science or Religion".  
Leicester Secular Society (Secular Hall, 75 Humberstone Gate), Sunday, November 27th, 6.30 p.m.: GILLIAN HAWTIN, "G. J. Holyoake (1817-1906) Secularist Pioneer".  
South Place Ethical Society (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London, WC1), Sunday, November 27th, 11 a.m.: Dr JOHN LEWIS, "Positivism and Modern Life"; Tuesday, November 29th, 6.30 p.m.: JOSHUA FOX, "The Frontiers of Mental Health".  
South Place Sunday Concerts (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London, WC1), Sunday, November 27th, 6.30 p.m.: Alberni String Quartet. Haydn, Bliss, Beethoven. Admission 3/-.  
Worthing Humanist Group (Morelands Hotel, The Pier), Sunday, November 27th, 5.30 p.m.: DANIEL SNOWMAN, "Religion in the USA".  
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.  
Wimbledon Young Men's Christian Association (200 Broadway, London, S.W.19), Thursday, December 1st, 8 p.m.: Professor HYMAN LEVY, "Atheism".

## NEWS AND NOTES

(Continued from page 372)

encouraging to think that the priests take to drink out of despair for Vietnam; but not, I am afraid, very realistic.

## All very odd

"TO OUR FRIENDS" seems to be a hand-out from the Jesuits. On the cover there is a priest in a very fetching maternity-type gown holding what looks like an egg over a shiny oversized drinking vessel. About to make an omelette, I thought. Someone tells me it is a "wafer". A Nottinghamshire priest, Fr Joseph Jones, admired Mrs Clare Walton's wedding gown so much last year that she gave it to him. The *Catholic Herald* shows him wearing it as a "chasuble"—if you know what that is. Basically it looks like a wedding dress peeping out from under a maternity-type smock heavily embroidered and decorated. Give me Carnaby Street any day!

## Up or down but surely not out of the window?

A TALL office block is being built next to St George's Parish Church at Stevenage, and so the town's development corporation has presented the church with a stained glass window as "compensation for loss of view" (*The Sun*, Nov. 9).

## The Late Show

COME back Ned Sherrin! All is forgiven . . .

From A. FRANCIS, Kent.

### DEFINITION OF HUMANISM ON A POSTCARD

*Humanism believes:* it learns with sorrow yet understanding of the bad things of which man is capable. Murder, robbery with violence, rape, child cruelty and adult love of war are problems to be solved by living thinking—not by "be good and there is a reward".

*Humanism trusts:* there is much love and kindly action by thinking people. There are people who do not hate a person because of his skin. There are people with riches who know they have wronged the poor and hungry, and who do not bid the beggar into the Holy House to forget the wrongs.

*Humanism waits:* and hopes that difficulties of ages past can be solved by knowledge and that the world will not be blown to ashes by the blessed bomb.

*Humanism invites:* others to think and not to set machines of State to kill the life that Humanism believes in.

[Your own definition in not more than 150 words is invited. Please send it to the Editor.]

### 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

## OBITUARY

BARBARA MYATT, committee member of Worthing Humanist Group and an RPA member for many years, died on November 4th, aged 62. Her admirable personality and quiet helpfulness were greatly valued: our loss is a grievous one, keenly felt by all.

Delicate from birth, she had all through life more than her share of physical suffering. But hers was one of those happy minds unshadowed by supernatural fears and falsehoods. From childhood she could laugh at their foolishness, and so was never subject to their power.

I should like to testify here to the great debt which I, personally, owe her. Our friendship was enriched by her clear intelligence and her rational attitude to life and living, and these helped me to take the last steps on my long journey, through the mists of post-religious agnosticism to the final peace of atheism.

At her sisters' request our Group is sending, in lieu of flowers, a donation in memory of Barbara to the Humanist Housing Association.  
PHYLLIS GRAHAM

## BOOK REVIEW

Gillian Hawtin

**Human rights today** (Ampersand Books, 1962, 3s 6d) by Maurice Cranston, well known broadcaster and Oxford-educated lecturer at the London School of Economics, is not, in spite of being a short book, an easy one. Its purpose, Cranston gives in a few words in its last pages:

"It is intended to elucidate the problem, and to set forth some of the salient facts about the struggle for Human Rights, since the end of the Second War. It is at once a work of analysis and of pleading."

The earlier chapters are virtually an essay in political theory. The theory of universal human rights which, through Locke, found expression in the British constitution in 1689, and, later, in the American and French revolutions is in turn based on the concept of National Law. This, Cranston traces from its Greek origins, through its assimilation into Mediaeval Christendom, to its re-emergence, in secular terms, with Locke, Grotius and Pufendorf. But its ideas have modern currency. In 1945, when it was obviously desirable to visit retribution on Nazi leaders, the concept was invoked to justify, at least in part, the proceedings at Nuremberg.

### The problem of enforcement

These theories, the basis of our traditional freedoms, have never gone unchallenged, from Hegel, from Bentham, and other logical positivists, and there is besides, the very considerable problem of enforcement. The International Court of Justice at the Hague is open only to states. In the Middle Ages the Church was arbiter and Court of Appeal. In the modern world we look to the United Nations.

The Commission of Human Rights which it appointed, held its inaugural meeting, with Mrs Eleanor Roosevelt as Chairman, in May, 1946. India, Australia and the United Kingdom wanted the draft Bill of Rights to be made enforceable. The USSR wanted it regarded only as a "manifesto", i.e., in effect a statement of ideals without the need to do anything about it. The compromise hit upon was hardly a masterpiece. There would be two documents, a manifesto for the time being, and later on, "something more legally binding"! Never do today what you can put off till tomorrow. The Universal Declaration of 1948 which followed further complicated matters by creating a whole class of new rights—"economic and social", as opposed to "political or civil". Material welfare is, obviously, something the Communists genuinely care for, and now the word "rights" was appropriated for the principles they believed in, while the traditional rights by which we set such store are still disregarded by them. The UN Commission acquiesced in this, and, comments Cranston, "is still paying the penalty" for it. It got through the first stage in eighteen months; by 1962 the second stage was not on the horizon. As the social and economic rights are largely impossible, in poor and underdeveloped countries, whatever the will to implement them, they are getting pushed "out of the clear realm of the morally compelling into the twilight world of Utopian aspiration". In short, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights is vitiated because it attempts to be a statement of both rights and ideals at the same time. Besides, there has, in practice, been considerable resistance against enforcement. Finally, in 1961, the Seminar held in Mexico reached the conclusion that it was up to each country to make human rights effective! (UN Press release, 500/2971.)

But the Council of Europe is also concerned with similar problems. In 1950, fifteen nations, including the United Kingdom, signed a European covenant for the protection of Human Rights and Fundamental freedoms, and from the beginning pledged themselves to take steps for the collective enforcement of certain of the rights stated in the Universal Declaration proclaimed by the United Nations in 1948. To this end it set up the European Commission for Human Rights and the European Court of Human Rights, which can receive petitions from states, provided they are signatories, and from individuals in them. Unfortunately, here to, there is far from unanimity. The UK refuses to recognise the Court, and the individual right of petition. So do Greece, Italy and Turkey. France, although the Council meets at Strasbourg, on French soil, withholds all recognition.

With such a discouraging picture, little wonder that individuals have had recourse to private bodies and independent agencies. Cranston treats of International PEN, the International Press Institute, and Amnesty International, but there are others. In proportion, their success has possibly been greater than the state organisations. On the whole, however, the picture of the attempt,

in post-war years, to seek the betterment of the human condition, is decidedly melancholy.

## LETTERS

### Vietnam

IT IS NOT my intention to cover the ground by G. L. Simons in his reply to Jeff Robinson on Vietnam. G. L. Simons argued a trenchant case based on *facts* whereas Robinson condemned communists in Vietnam *not* on what they are doing or have done, but on what they would do if given the chance! That is dishonest argument and in effect is a slick attempt to excuse America for its long-sustained brutality in a place where—according to Geneva Agreement in 1954—they have no right to be. However, I refer now to the end of Jeff Robinson's "a war on both your houses especially the Red one! letter wherein he wishes FREETHINKER to cease its attack on 'the spent force, the Church and attack instead the cant, and dogma that surrounds politics and nationalism'. How typical of anarchists! Apart from the stupidity of their attitude to the state—all states!—their mental attitude is priestly rather than philosophical. Another such is a letter signed J. A. S. Nisbet who is so intelligent that he doesn't realise he is living in *political* society and boasts, mark ye! that he never votes! Only intellectual morons imagine they can contract out of society. Jehovah's Witness and other un-balanced sects also refuse to vote. Such parasitism can be indulged only by those who live in dream-land!

CHARLES DORAN

### Vietnam

I WAS disgusted at some of the remarks in Jeff Robinson's letter. It was disgraceful that he should say he "believed many British Communists loved the Vietnam war". This was shameful mud-throwing. Surely a Humanist, more than anyone, should keep such abuse out of their letters.

LILIAN MIDDLETON

### In Defence of Cynicism

THE TERM cynicism has been so maligned in modern usage that I consider it is due for reappraisal and a word should be said on its behalf.

Among Freethinkers the term "sceptic" is not a term of reproach, so why should the term "cynic"? A sceptic is one who doubts the truth of human beliefs, while a cynic is one who doubts the goodness of human values. An extreme position of scepticism or cynicism may result in a sort of nihilism, but a degree of either as a general course may merely mean that one tests all things before accepting any of them.

The Ancient Cynics (*kunikos*, dog) were the "watchdogs of God on earth", like the Dominicans (*Dominicani—Domini canes*) after them, and were concerned more with the way people lived than what they believed. They rejected most social customs, preferring to live a simple life, like dogs, valuing Virtue above all things. And while they considered Virtue to be essentially an independence of spirit, they were concerned with the quality of the moral life, compared with which all other things were of little account. Their emphasis on the conquering of one's desires and wants made their way of life similar to that of Buddhist monks, while they differed from their successors, the Stoics, in having a cruder doctrine, and members mainly among the Greek proletariat. That the term cynic should now mean a selfish opportunism, a callous indifference to the fate of others, and a complete rejection of all noble aspirations is not the fault of the original cynics' intentions, but possibly of the paucity of their doctrine. Modern Beatniks are perhaps a better example of true cynicism than the conventional business executive, spiv, or con man after the fast buck.

The lesson of the cynics for us could well be that even if Humanists construct a Utopia the "kingdom of heaven is still within us" if we desire true happiness and social harmony, while due to Homo Sapiens' disproportionately-large cerebral cortex we are as likely to end up with an Orwellian "1984" as a Wellsian World unless we continuously hark back to our original Nature, subjecting all our values to the same stringent testing as did the Ancient Cynics.

If scepticism is the salt of the earth, then cynicism is the pepper. Australia.

D. L. HUMPHRIES

### Secularist answers needed

WHEN religious questions arise in the BBC programme "Any Answers" on Thursday night, Christians are always profuse in their letters. I think it is a great pity that Freethinkers do not take this opportunity of giving their views. Or perhaps they do, but Freddie Grisewood does not read them aloud?

(Mrs) M. WATSON