

# FREETHINKER

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

FOUNDED 1881 by G. W. FOOTE

Friday,  
December 2, 1966

## HAPPY AND GLORIOUS?

THERE IS ONE argument against the present conditions of our monarchy which might be expected to concern Freethinkers, but which I have never seen mentioned. It is that the senior members of the royal family are not free to change (or lose) their religious beliefs without, at the same time, losing their job. Let's not go so far as to claim that their livelihoods are also threatened but in no family in Britain is it more taken for granted that Christian indoctrination must and will succeed than in that of the sovereign.

Mind you, there have been escapees from the restrictions. Princess Alice (1843-78), daughter of Queen Victoria, considered by her father to be "the beauty of the family" was noted in the *Dictionary of National Biography* as "one of the most accomplished young ladies in England". As Grand Duchess of Hesse-Darmstadt she was honoured both for her benevolence and for her patronage of the arts. She was a friend of David Friedrich Strauss (1808-74) whose *Life of Jesus* was translated by George Eliot, and the Grand Duchess herself actually translated an article by the German zoologist Professor Haeckel (1834-1919) for the first issue of the *Agnostics'* (now *Rationalist*) *Annual*. Queen Victoria's eldest daughter, Mary Louise Victoria (1840-1901), Empress of Germany, was also a serious student of philosophy and literature, and, at the same time, devoted to the social sciences and philanthropy. Although nominally remaining an Anglican, she, too, was a friend of Strauss, Schopenhauer, Huxley and Renan, and, according to her friend Prince von Bülow, she was an "out-and-out rationalist of the temper of Herbert Spencer and John Stuart Mill".

But that was all a long time ago. One cannot imagine any young people with a greater incentive to grow up as *anti-Rationalists* than our princelings, confined to an Anglican darkness like battery hens, deprived of the daylight of alternative convictions and green fields of argument. Would they dare even to be (as were their great-great-aunts) "liberal in politics"? The only future they can

imagine or are prepared for depends on their *not* wanting to escape from a conservative conformism.

One is forced to accuse the British people (who claim to love their royal family) of shamefully denying to them a basic human right; expecting them not only to *do* what the public enjoys watching them do, but also to *believe* without question what they are brought up to believe. For surely no Christian could expect the Supreme Governor of his Church to *act* as if she believes, if in fact she does not? Surely no Christian country could condone its religion becoming for its Head of State a mere formality? Or could they? Or don't Christians think about it at all? If by any chance they do consider religion and belief to be of so flimsy a nature, why in the name of Bertrand Russell should those who reject faith and hypocrisy alike be penalised in any way whatsoever?

Prince Charles is well past the age when young people usually begin to ask the necessary questions about religion. One cannot help wondering what would have happened if, say, the idea of saying the creed had suddenly stuck in his throat. The persuasion to "co-operate for the sake of the school", and to go on saying it regardless would surely have been even stronger than for other boys in a similar but most natural situation.

What if, after all his experience of pomp and majesty, the prince decided that the Church of Rome does it all much better, and that logically he should move on from Ramsey to Pope Paul? Now that *would* bring public sympathy to bear. Protestant parents all over the country would be able to imagine how they would feel if *their* offspring turned papist. The press and the palace would be deluged with letters. Roman Catholics themselves would have special prayers and masses for the divine instrument by which Jesus would at last "convert England". Bishops would take everyone aside, and the government would meet all night for weeks to decide how to make it quite clear that although Anglicanism is OK (no matter how "high") Roman Catholicism is out (no matter how "low").

Even a half-way faltering, a leaning towards the Society of Friends, say, would cause a major upheaval. Could the future Monarch be a pacifist; or, rather, could a sincere Quaker pacifist be a monarch? And what about all those most un-Quaker like titles, and the almost inverted snobbery by which Quakers suggest that any dustman is better than any duke? It wouldn't do at all.

So we are back at the pressure put on the royal family not to investigate the religious faith of which they must so often make a public display. It is hard enough for us Secularists to win the necessary freedom for our own

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children to learn to think for themselves, but at least we don't have Archbishops on the doorstep.

British monarchs have to promise, at their coronations, to

"maintain and preserve inviolably the settlement of the Church of England and the doctrine, worship, discipline and government thereof, as by the law established in England" and "to preserve unto the Bishops and Clergy of the Church of England and to the Churches there committed to their charge all such rights and privileges as by law shall appertain to them or any of them".

And Prince Charles was committed at birth to this duty. It is taken for granted that he find Church, doctrine, worship, discipline, Bishops and Clergy, their rights and privileges worth maintaining and preserving. If he should

decide otherwise, he is out of a job. (Whether or not that job is worth preserving is a different question.)

What will happen in the future? It is the inflexible rod of steel that is most likely to snap under pressure. It is by flexibility that the monarchs of Scandinavia and the Netherlands have been able to move with the times, thereby preserving their own dignity and freedom as well as offering a more realistic image of democracy for their people as a whole.

One of the *Immediate Practical Objects* of the National Secular Society is "the disestablishment and disendowment of the State Church" of England. The FREETHINKER supports the Society in this, as in all its other "objects", which are so clearly defined for all to study.

## WHEN WILL THEY EVER LEARN?

YES, the prayers have gone up to God on behalf of the slag mountain's victims. Hands, eyes and voices have been raised towards his golden throne, in awed supplication for the souls of the children who, to the number of more than a hundred, in addition to several of their teachers, were stifled by the avalanche of slime that engulfed their school at the Welsh village of Aberfan, on October 21st. Prayers, not only in the local churches and chapels, but all over Britain, for the eternal welfare of those poor babes, have been directed towards the blue empyrean beyond which dwells the God who sees all, hears all, knows all. And those prayers did not have to travel far. The Divine One heard them as soon as they were uttered, such is his power. Why, he knew, on the fatal morning, that the smothering slush was about to fall upon the school.

No Christian, one may safely assert, would deny the almightiness of God. He is omniscient, omnipotent, omnipresent. His worshippers glory in his limitless power, and do not commit themselves to any expression of censure on his omission to manifest it, either for the prevention of human disasters, or in affirmation of his might. The dreadful occurrence at Aberfan has caused no crack in that complacent façade, whatever worms of doubt gnaw behind it. And surely this latest and most appalling example of divine ineptitude will have made many believers wonder about their ideas of the Friend of Little Children.

Unlike the "heathen" tribe that turned their idol's faces to the temple walls, in disgust at their impotence, Christians are fearful of signifying a relative disquietude. Aberfan's tragedy provided exceptions, when some of the bereaved denounced the Lord for their loss. How extreme must their grief have been to turn to anger with Him whom they had worshipped as all goodness and compassion! Their vicar's rejoinder was that the terrible event was not an Act of God. How right he was. To charge the Deity with causing the school's engulfment was foolish. There was no evidence in support of the allegation of a divine act of that nature, any more than there has been for any divine act at any time. The term, Act of God, meaning a calamitous incident unattributable to human or natural agency, is misleading in giving a supernatural aspect to the accidental, and the impassioned sorrowers jumped at its literal sense.

The Vicar was right, although his statement was not induced by logical thought. He was committed to excusing God of any kind of blame, and happened to be right in that no positive deed could be imputed to him. The Vicar

was wrong, however, in his supplementary assertion that "It was an act of man". The slagslide was certainly the consequence of the tip's constant use, and neglect to safeguard the school and village against its likelihood, but was no more an act of man than of God. The destruction of the school and greater part of its inmates occurred through the inaction of God. Had man possessed ability to arrest the lethal mass, its victims would be alive today. God who, in the view of believers, could have stopped the slide, easily and instantly, did nothing about it. He saw, with his all-perceiving eye, the first movement of the slag; he knew that it would do what it did, if he didn't intervene to halt it. He allowed it to go on its dreadful way, and entomb mites who had hardly finished their prayers to him, in its filthy embrace.

### The ugly, inescapable facts

Christians have to believe that. Their faith in his omniscient and omnipotent reality compels them to accept that the Almighty One intentionally omitted to exercise his saving power on behalf of the Aberfan innocents. He willed the disaster, because he willed himself not to prevent it. That is the ugly fact that believers cannot get away from. Indeed, they may not wish to. History reeks with such abstentions, and Christians have long advanced, as exonerating pretexts, that God works only through natural laws; that he does not save man from calamities incurred through sin and folly.

As there is necessarily no means of detecting divine workings in those of nature, the former of these pleas is unentertainable. Even were it not, is rigid adherence to those laws obligatory on God? Would not a real Heavenly Father brush them aside and demonstrate his supernatural might, in order to avert human catastrophes—and surely such as that of Aberfan? Is it reasonably conceivable that a loving Creator would impose so utter a taboo upon his evidential acts as would render him unable to gratify his merciful motivations for the beings he had put upon earth and whose homage he demands and receives?

As for the assumption that God does not save man from disasters resulting from follies and transgressions—why should he not? Man does not plot his own destruction and suffering. Life upon earth is hard, and mortal fallibility such that, as God foreknew, it is inherent in humankind, and ineradicable from the vast majority of its members. To visit upon man the calamities he was predestined to incur would stamp God as not only devoid of compassion but senselessly savage.

F. H. Snow



And what of those disasters which cannot be imputed to mortal failings?—the earthquakes, blizzards, pestilences and other natural disorders that decimate humanity and bring pain and hardship in their wake? Cities and towns reduced to ruins, worshipping congregations destroyed, pilgrim bands overwhelmed by raging elements, the innocent and pious, alike with the iniquitous, denied almighty intervention between them and horrors for which they were not faintly responsible, as history tells. What is religion's answer to these things? It has none, save that God's mind is inscrutable, that he is infinite wisdom, and that whatever he does or abstains from must be good, however otherwise it appears to finite mortals. To which there

is but one reply; that, the divine prerogative being invariably in the negative, there is nothing on which to hang belief that there is a Mind above our spinning ball—a celestial entity concerned, or capable of being concerned, with human events, not least that which has virtually denuded the mining community of Aberfan of its young

But in grieving Wales, and our whole Island, the prayers will go on, and praises of an inert and evidenceless God continue. The shock of the tragedy will little stimulate the critical faculties of the great preponderance of people, to whom the voice of reason is inaudible. It must be the dedicated aim of Freethinkers, Humanists, Secularists, to ensure that that voice is audible to future humanity.

## A FREETHOUGHT VIEW OF FREE LOVE

Michael Gray

IN the Christian society in which we live free love is not considered a respectable doctrine, since Christian "morality" regards any sexual relationship outside marriage as sinful and thus immoral. This narrow-minded and inflexible attitude, which even in our enlightened age considers unmarried couples to be "living in sin", is one which Freethinkers and Humanists should abhor, recognising that morals are not fixed rules to be dictated by a social or religious organisation, but the concern of each individual's conscience. That any particular society should regard a doctrine as not respectable does not mean that doctrine must be wrong, as Freethinkers will readily appreciate.

Since the human being is merely an animal, it is subject to animal instincts, including the "life instinct" whose aim is the preservation of the individual and of the species. This latter is responsible for the "mating urge", which Stone Age man satisfied by simply carrying off the woman of his choice by brute force. This crude "marriage" became more sophisticated as civilisation progressed, different societies evolving their own forms of marriage which were naturally accompanied by some celebration. Early Man being dominated by superstition, it was inevitable that these celebrations became absorbed into religious ceremonies, and the associated ritual part of a religious tradition. Christianity, when it came on the scene, adapted these "pagan" rites to suit its own ends (as it did so often), "elevating" matrimony to the status of a sacrament and thereafter preaching the sinfulness of any union that did not have their god's blessing. Today Christianity in general still preaches this heinous doctrine, inexcusably though understandably, since (apart from christenings when they're too young to object, and funerals when they're past caring) marriage is the only occasion when most people ever go to church!

The aversion to the doctrine of free love in this country is for the most part caused by the religious prejudices fostered by the Christian churches. Since Freethinkers recognise no authority in these relics from the ignorant past, there can be no objection to dispensing with religious ceremonies. Most people, however, still feel the need for a ceremony of some kind, and so we have the State assuming authority in matters of marriage and divorce. Although, in contrast to the churches, this authority is more well-intentioned and altruistic in that it aims at the protection of society and its members, it is still an unnecessary intrusion into the freedom of responsible adults. No authority has the right to dictate when a couple should be allowed to live together and when not, nor to condemn

them to go on living together when they no longer wish it. Unfortunately even those who are not Christians themselves apply the Christian standards with which we are so constantly indoctrinated in matters of love and marriage, and regard any sexual relationship outside marriage as immoral, or at least as not quite respectable. What it is necessary to realise is that a marriage ceremony of any description is merely an *artificial* institution. To consider that we have not the right to satisfy our *natural* sexual instincts without first going through some primitive ritual is as illogical and irrational as the belief that we do not have the right to satisfy our natural instinct of hunger without first indulging in the equally primitive ritual of giving thanks to some mythical Provider for the food we have earned with the sweat of our own brow!

### No need for guilt or embarrassment

Thus the practising of free love is neither sinful, since sin exists only in the confused minds of the promoters of the ignorance of religion, nor is it immoral. We must never allow our morals to be dictated to us, by Church, State or public opinion; since Atheists are concerned primarily with the practice of humanity towards Man, it may be safe to assume that anything which causes no injury either to the person or property of our fellow Man (or, for that matter, of our fellow animals) cannot of itself be immoral. From this it follows that the practice of free love is not immoral. The word "marriage" itself simply means the union of husband and wife; free love is therefore simply marriage by consent. Such a union should be held together by mutual respect and consideration as well as sexual attraction. But, above all, it should be a union cemented *solely by mutual consent*, not enforced by law or superstition. There would be no stigma attached to the children of such a union if it were regarded with the respect it merits, and the cruel and stupid distinction between legitimate and illegitimate, together with all the injustices that it implies, would no longer exist. Free love, therefore, is not a doctrine about which to be outraged, guilty, or even embarrassed, but one to be proud of as a manifestation of true freedom in any truly free society.

#### NATIONAL SECULAR SOCIETY

Founded 1866 by Charles Bradlaugh

#### CENTENARY BROCHURE

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## NEWS AND NOTES

THE National Secular Society issued its own press release on the subject of Divorce by Consent, which, it claims, already exists in the form of "undefended actions with arranged 'adultery', whether there are children or not, with all the seediness and humbug . . . that results". It asks "is there any real difference between 'divorce by consent' and 'breakdown of marriage'?" In the *Daily Mirror* (Nov. 18) Marjorie Proops reported the Society's suggestion that when both partners in a marriage decide to apply for divorce by consent,

"a social worker should visit the couple to see if everything possible has been done to prevent the final break-up of the marriage. Then, if the social worker is satisfied that they really have reached the point of no return, a certificate to this effect should be handed to the court and the case could proceed automatically, easily and cheaply".

Marjorie Proops commented, this proposition "sounds a practical one to me", but she wonders (as does the FREETHINKER) where enough social workers with the necessary understanding and training for such a job will be found.

### A battle that must be won

IN *The Guardian* (Nov. 18) Lena Jeger described the pressure that is being put on MPs to oppose the abortion bill—even if they voted for it at the second reading. This lobbying is so highly organised that many people who are writing in obviously do not understand the existing situation any more than they understand the proposals for reform. Some actually send in a printed postcard of protest. As Lena Jeger writes "A Government cannot govern by the counting of correspondence. The unwritten letters must also be considered". But other MPs may not be so wise and willing to ignore the electoral threats of the Christians. FREETHINKER readers who understand the urgent need for the reform which will save the lives and health of countless women and abolish a law which is as unenforceable as it is cruel, are urged to remind their MPs of the facts. On November 16th the Rev David Levison made a statement on behalf of the Church of Scotland's Committee on Moral Welfare to the effect that the Scots Church sees "no reason to justify termination on the ground of the mother being under 16". If his own schoolgirl daughter were pregnant as the result of a criminal rape, I suppose he would praise God for every minute of her terror in the name of Jesus. And what about the baby? In the name of *humanity*, how dare these clerics presume to thrust their brutal and barbarous doctrines on the public at large, and at the same time demand (and be given) respect as the mouthpiece of some merciful deity?

### "Most important people . . ."

ANN: "Do you know who the most important person in the village is, Mummy?"

Agnostic Mother: "No dear. Who?"

Ann: "It's the vicar. Whenever he comes we all have to stand up. And the other most important person is Mr Brown, the curate. We all have to stand up for him too . . ."

(The Anglican Church School which Ann attends is the only primary school in the area. Atheists, agnostics, Catholics and Jews have virtually no choice but to send their children there. The Ministry of Education is, it seems, totally unconcerned).

### That poll again

THE *Leicester Mercury* (Nov. 7) reported the Rev V. H. Atkinson, vicar of Claybrooke, as saying at a recent Diocesan Conference that a "determined pressure group" is trying to persuade the public that the majority opinion is against religious instruction in schools, but that in spite of attempts on the part of the National Secular Society to secularise education and to abolish RI, "a recent opinion poll revealed that 90 per cent of the population wanted their children to receive RI . . ." (No one ever points out that the poll offered no alternative to the present situation, and even a Humanist would answer "Yes" to "Do you want your children taught about religion?" The questions are "how?", "in what context?" and "how can ethics best be taught?". The Rev V. H. Atkinson explained that religious indoctrination is necessary because

"We believe that a universe without God is a universe without meaning. If there is no meaning there is no purpose in life", and if religious education is abolished, "morality and behaviour would go by the board . . ." "We must see that colleges have the same amount of money spent on books and equipment of a religious nature as on other subjects", etc etc etc.

The Rev Richard Trust, however, said he would like to see more evidence that church schools produce more Christian children than the state schools. Meanwhile the FREETHINKER would like evidence that the Ministry of Education really *is* concerned about education and not just about kow-towing to the clergy.

### "Hot-bed of Humanism" (*Catholic Herald*, Nov. 18)

THE London School of Economics voted recently with 86 in favour and 59 against that "This house believes in God". Fifty-nine, however, refused to vote on principle. Fr Maurice Nassan, SJ, spoke for "God", and H. J. Blackham, Chairman of the BHA, against.

### Oxford Humanists

OXFORD Humanists have permission from their proctors for a scheme for giving birth control advice to undergraduates. About six doctors have agreed to give such advice; their names would be passed by word of mouth (*Guardian*, Nov. 16).

### At home and away

THE Wednesday Play on BBC TV "Cathy Come Home" drew attention to **the appalling conditions suffered by the homeless in this country**. Families who are evicted and only become "problem families" as the result of their experience in trying to find somewhere to live and of being the victims of governments' neglect, the callousness of landlords who insist on "no children", and the incredible system by which families are split up in refugee-camp type hostels where "no husbands" are allowed. The play ended with the children being taken "into care" to cost the country far more than a house would have done in the first place. We must have more houses.

"A Bill to stop one of **Britain's most booming export businesses—the trade in live animals specially bred for vivisection experiments** was cheered in parliament on November 15th (*The Sun*). Between 40,000 and 60,000 animals are sent to countries where there are no humane regulations to protect animals, claimed Mr Rafton Punder (Con., South Belfast)."

While television and our press continue to advertise cigarettes as the way to love and success, **72 people are dying everyday of lung cancer**; four times as many as are killed in road accidents.

(Continued on page 382)



## THE CONVERSION OF HEATHEN INDIA

David Collis

"IT IS NOT, of course, for foreigners to urge Indians to abandon their deepest religious convictions," read a *Daily Telegraph* leader of November 9th, 1966.

Just how funny can you get? In the 111 intervening years since the *Daily Telegraph* emerged from the matrix of the press on June 29th, 1855, into a perpetually expectant world, the English have spent millions doing what our bluest daily newspaper now tells us should not be done, urging Indians to abandon their deepest religious convictions.

Oh 1855! Blessed year when our most conservatively vociferous child first uttered its strident cry. Before its second birthday the deepest religious convictions of the Indians furnished the cause of their revolt against Mother England—greased cartridges. Cartridges, greased with the fat of the sacred cow or otherwise, were then fired hellshot into the bosom of this rebel daughter by Mama's minions striding hotfooted from England's shores to bring carnage to the home of Hindu gods. The Christian God proved mightier, but, before the battle was finally won, the English duly paid homage to their divine protector on October 7th, 1858. The Royal Proclamation ran:—

"We, taking into our most serious consideration the grievous mutiny and disturbances which have broken out in India, and putting our trust in Almighty God that He will graciously bless our efforts for the restoration of lawful authority in that country, have resolved, and do, by and with the advice of our Privy Council, hereby command that a Public Day of Solemn Fast, Humiliation, and Prayer be observed throughout those parts of our United Kingdom called England and Ireland, on Wednesday, the seventh day of October next, that so both we and our people, may humble ourselves before Almighty God, in order to obtain pardon of our sins, and in the most devout and solemn manner send up our prayers and supplications to the Divine Majesty, for imploring His blessing and assistance on our arms for the restoration of tranquility: and we do strictly charge and command that the said day be reverently and devoutly observed by all our loving subjects in England and Ireland."

### Christians recommend indoctrination

In 1793 an India Bill had been introduced into Parliament to renew the powers of the East India Company. William Wilberforce, that great Christian, was successful in introducing into the bill a clause for the encouragement of schools and missions. This clause provoked protest and was withdrawn. The East India Company was against the proselytizing endeavours of the Christian evangelists. On September 1st, 1858, the government of the East India Company was finally and completely terminated. The Committee of the Church Missionary Society doubtless saw new grounds for hope. The CMS was one of the largest missionary societies of the time. In 1880 its annual income was over £200,000, and thirty years later had doubled. The Committee decided to send a Memorial direct to the Queen. The following are pertinent paragraphs:—

"Your Memorialists humbly venture to bring under your Majesty's consideration some things in the system of government hitherto pursued in your Majesty's territories in the East Indies, which, as they conceive, have been at variance with the duty of Christian rulers.

"The Government of India has professed to occupy a position of neutrality between the Christian and false religions. Such profession, as your Memorialists believe, dishonours the truth of God, practically discourages the progress of Christianity, and is inimical to the social welfare of the natives . . .

"Your Memorialists would therefore humbly beseech your Majesty to have it declared to the public authorities in the East Indies:—

"1. That the existing policy will be no longer professed or maintained; but that, as it is the belief of your Majesty and of this Christian nation that the adoption of the Christian religion, upon an intelligent conviction of its truth, will be an incalculable benefit to the natives of India, the countenance and aid of Government will be given to any legitimate measures for bringing that religion under their notice and investigation.

"2. That since the Government, in addition to maintaining its own educational establishments, provides grants-in-aid to all other schools which provide a prescribed amount of secular knowledge, according to the principles laid down in its Educational Despatch of July 19th, 1854, the Bible will be introduced into the system of education in all the Government schools and colleges, as the only standard of moral rectitude, and the source of those Christian principles upon which your Majesty's Government is to be conducted.

"3. That any connection which may still subsist between the Indian Government and the revenues or ceremonies of the Mohammedan, Hindu, or other false religions, shall at once cease and determine . . .

"Finally, your Majesty's Memorialists humbly submit to your Majesty that there can be no fitter time for inaugurating these changes than when the armies of England have gained a signal triumph, through the blessing of Almighty God, and British authority in India appears again in its strength and confidence."

The Committee hoped for too much. To have implemented its wishes as stated would clearly have provoked a rebellion such as would have made the mutiny appear like a mild disagreement at a birthday party. Victoria went as far as she dared in referring to her beloved religion when, on November 1st, 1858, she was proclaimed as Empress of India in the principal towns of that country.

"We hold ourselves bound to the natives of our Indian territories by the same obligations of duty which bind us to all our other subjects; and those obligations, by the blessing of Almighty God, we shall faithfully and conscientiously fulfil.

"Firmly relying ourselves on the truth of Christianity, and acknowledging with gratitude the solace of religion, we disclaim alike the right and the desire to impose our convictions on any of our subjects . . ."

### Royal backing for missionaries

However, the back door was left wide open and the zealous missionaries teamed in to urge the Indians to abandon their deepest religious convictions and adopt another set in their stead.

Royalist sentiments were well exposed eighteen years later when the Prince of Wales, later King Edward VII, made a State visit to India. Before he left England the Church Missionary Society presented an address to the Prince. Sir W. Knollys wrote thus to Lord Chichester in his name:—

"His Royal Highness requests your Lordship to be the medium of assuring the Society that Her Majesty's sentiments, as declared in her Proclamation on assuming the direct Government of India, are equally participated in by



himself, and he trusts that no encouragement will ever be wanting on his part to favour the efforts of the missionaries of the Church who have left their homes to teach the natives of India 'the Truths of Christianity and the Solace of Religion'.

"If so rapid a success has not attended the labour and zeal of the labourers in so wide a vineyard as their disinterested efforts would seem to have merited, His Royal Highness ventures to appeal to the good that has been already done as an earnest of what will follow.

"Taking the statistics of your address, His Royal Highness feels that 75,000 of our fellow-creatures, raised from the most abject condition, and redeemed from the most debasing errors, are facts for our congratulation, and may be placed to the credit of those hard-working missionaries whose efforts have thus far been attended with success."

## REPORT FROM THE HOUSE OF LORDS

IF I HAD A HAT I would take it off to Lord (Ted) Willis for being one of the few VIP Humanists openly to commit himself to that label. This he did in the House of Lords on Monday, November 21st, when presenting his **Sunday Entertainments Bill** which got its second reading without a division. *This is a great victory.* The substance of his speech was as reported from the Caxton Hall Debate, only it was interspersed with the strangely mooing "hear, hear's" of the temporal lords instead of the "tut, tut's" of the Lord's Day Observance Society. Lord Willis quoted a letter which the LDOS had sent to its members urging them to write to their MPs but without letting on that they had been prompted to write!

**Lord Derwent** was disturbed about Sunday professional sport, and suggested an amendment. **Lord Stonham** announced that the government is looking into the whole subject of Sunday trading (which the Bill does not touch upon) and mentioned the problem of racing without the tote (which would still be forbidden on Sundays). **The Bishop of Chichester** pleaded for the rights of minorities (Memo: I must write to him again about those of us in his diocese who object to paying rates to mend his cathedral roof!) and gave solemn warnings about "change" and "slippery slopes". **Lady Brooke of Ystradfellte** spoke on behalf of the extra police who would be needed if professional Sunday sport were allowed, but she described Welsh life, where, because football out of doors is forbidden, people stay indoors and play cards. **Lord Soper** had nothing to say for the LDOS theology. Sabbatarianism is not, he said, a Christian commitment; it does not belong to the Christian faith. He pleaded for the preservation of "rhythm" as if hankering after some sort of numerology or zodiac (or perhaps just the privilege of being female?). But he gave his support to the Bill and denied the dangers of the "slippery slope". **Lord Airedale** said that Sunday motorbike scrambles would be horribly noisy. **Lord Leatherland**, as a Christian, congratulated Lord Willis and supported him. He was in favour of women being able to get away from the home to enjoy Sundays, but he was against Strip-Tease clubs being open until early hours on a Sunday morning. **Lord St Oswald** (who introduced the 1965 debate on the Crathorne Report) also gave his support, but **Lord Maelor**, as a devout Welshman, did not. As chapels close, so the betting shops open. "I leave noble Lords to take their choice", he said. **Lord Moynihan** spoke as an international producer and promoter. Many provincial theatres, he said, are going out of business or are

The good work was continued with ardour by the Church Missionary Society and the Roll of Honour increased. By 1881 Protestant missions in India were carried on by no less than 35 societies, and by the turn of the century the annual income of the missionary societies exceeded a million pounds.

Now in 1966, when the Indian Government is trying to come to grips with the religious attitudes to cows which threaten the welfare, even survival of millions, that quotidian bulwark of the Christian Church, the *Daily Telegraph*, blandly tells us "It is not, of course, for foreigners to urge Indians to abandon their deepest religious convictions". Tell me, kind sir, tell me true. Have the daily activities of the Churches' missions in India passed unnoticed, unreprimed, for 111 years until November 9th, 1966?

dependent on subsidies and there is no rest for companies who would prefer not to have to travel on Sundays. The people who gain from the present situation are the big television interests. He acknowledged the brawls and Sunday vandalism which result from there being too little entertainment. **Lord Strabolgi** mentioned the cinema proprietors who do not know which charities the charity tax from Sunday performances goes to. **Lord Furness** spoke unofficially as an RC and gave the Bill his support, as did **Lord Sandford**, a "leader of Sunday worship" but one who could see the anomalies of the present laws. This was not a moral issue, he said, but one of convenience.

LORD WILLIS replied, pleased with the support he had won, and agreeing to study the objections during the committee stage. These objections will clearly centre round the subject of professional sport rather than entertainment. Our congratulations and thanks to Lord Willis.

## NEWS AND NOTES (Continued from page 380)

After 12 months of Ministry of Health inaction in the face of an ever-increasing problem of drug addiction, Dr D. W. Wylie of the Bayer drug firm has estimated that **there are now more than 2,000 drug addicts in Britain**, mostly in their teens and early twenties. What is wanted in all such matters is not the means of moving swiftly but the realisation that swift action is urgently needed. If there were a typhoid epidemic the ministry would move fast enough. Special treatment centres for addicts must be provided *now*.

**Amnesty's accusation that the British have used torture in Aden** deserves the most thorough investigation. It would be as naïve to imagine that there is any army without the risk of sadism as it would be to imagine that people cannot be bribed by nationalists to give anti-British "evidence" for propaganda purposes. What matters is that the facts should be made known and that steps be taken to make absolutely certain that no guilty individuals (if there be any) are ever given such an opportunity again. As a supporter of Mr Benenson from the first announcement of Amnesty, I could not see why he had to be so discourteous to the Twenty-Four Hours interviewer, who, after all, was providing the opportunity for the case against the British to be put forward. On the other hand, if there is any attempt whatsoever to kick the dirt under the carpet, Mr Benenson's anger and disgust is understandable. While we look anxiously across to Germany for signs of neo-nazism, we cannot afford to ignore any moles in our own eyes.



**FREETHINKER**

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

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

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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**

Birmingham Branch NSS (New Victoria Hotel, Corporation Street), Sunday, December 4th, 6.45 p.m.: Mrs WHITELEY, "The Permissive Morality".

Brighton and Hove Humanist Group (Regency House, Oriental Place), Sunday, December 4th, 5.30 p.m.: BILL LUCKIN, "Understanding China Today".

Ethel Wormald College of Education, Duncombe Road, North Liverpool, Tuesday, December 13th, 12.40 p.m.: Speaker, DAVID TRIBE.

Leicester Secular Society (Secular Hall, 75, Humberstone Gate), Sunday, December 4th, 6.30 p.m.: T. HOSE, "Are the Jews a Race?"

Merseyside Humanist Group (Bluecoat Chambers, Liverpool), Tuesday, December 13th, 7.30 p.m.: Humanist Forum. Speakers include H. J. BLACKHAM and DAVID TRIBE.

South Place Ethical Society (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London, WC1), Sunday, December 4th, 11 a.m.: H. J. BLACKHAM, "Do We Need Agreement on Morals?"; Tuesday, December 6th, 6.30 p.m.: JULIA DIGHTON, "Mental Health and the Community".

South Place Sunday Concerts (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London, WC1), Sunday, December 4th, 6.30 p.m.: Cardiff String Quartet. Beethoven, Kodaly, Schubert. 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.

**INDIRA GANDHI—A HUMANIST**

Patrick Campbell

INDIA now has a lady at the helm. Mrs Indira Gandhi's election as leader of the Congress Parliamentary Party represents the choice of the right person for the job at the right moment. There are many characteristics which Mrs Gandhi has inherited from her illustrious father. Like her father, Jawaharlal Nehru, and her aunt, Mrs Pandit, former High Commissioner in London, her sympathies lie with Rationalism. It is important to record that when she took office, she broke with tradition and affirmed instead of taking the oath. The record must also be straightened on another matter. During the period following the death of Nehru, several published reports stated that his daughter had vetoed the instructions in his last will and testament that no religious ceremonies be performed at his funeral.

Mrs S. K. Khan, MP, niece of the late Prime Minister, and one of the founders of the Indian Radical Humanist Movement, recently explained the true circumstances surrounding Nehru's funeral.

As soon as his death was announced, religious leaders of all faiths arrived and began their various rituals. His daughter, contrary to reports, insisted that there be no religious ceremonies. However, the Indian Government insisted that some semblance of a ceremony be carried out because this was a national rather than a private family event. The funeral, as it actually occurred, was not a truly religious ceremony; many of the rites were incorrectly followed. For example, Nehru's grandson is a Parsee and his participation in the ceremony was a violation of accepted Hindu practice.

Mrs Khan claims that her uncle was a Humanist, and was on the verge of publicly stating this fact in an effort to overcome various currents of strife that exist in India. In fact, Narsingh Narain, chairman of the Indian Humanist Union, has a letter from Nehru written shortly before his death in which he openly stated his humanist and anti-religious beliefs.

(Reproduced from the "New Zealand Rationalist and Humanist".)

From IAN HALL, Grantham, Lincs.

**DEFINITION OF HUMANISM ON A POSTCARD**

HUMANIST beliefs are that right will triumph over wrong. Happiness will triumph over misery everywhere, and that the best way to bring this about is not by war, prayer, fasting, clerical intuition or divine revelation, but by examining all aspects of every problem in a scientific manner and by not being afraid to revise decisions taken in the light of new evidence.

[You are invited to send your own definition in not more than 150 words 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



## BOOK REVIEW

G. L. Simons

**The Science of Science** (ed. Goldsmith and Mackay, Pelican, 6s) is a collection of essays by well-known scientists. As the title suggests, specific sciences are not examined in detail; rather, an attempt is made to examine the social function of science and the way it can be fruitfully oriented for good.

The present work grew out of an earlier work by J. D. Bernal, *The Social Function of Science* (1939), and is cast as a virtual tribute to Bernal for initiating the present mode of enquiry. The introduction considers Bernal's earlier efforts; C. P. Snow gives a crisp biography of Bernal; and Bernal himself contributes the final essay in the volume.

A wide range of topics are dealt with: the problem of underdeveloped countries; genetic fallacies; communication of information; the cultural history of China; the actual mechanics of facilitating research; the growing impact of science on society, etc., etc. The contributors include such figures as Blackett, Haldane, Needham and Kapitsa.

The volume is a useful antidote to the idea that scientists are socially and politically irresponsible. The writers are obviously concerned that science be used for human benefit. There is an insistence, too, that human society can be understood in scientific terms: this doctrine, as a comprehensive view, can be traced to Marx, and there is a strong flavour of Marxism in the book from time to time (Bernal is a Marxist). To me this is fair enough; it seems that only under a socialist mode of production and planning can science be truly used for the good of all. Piel points out that poverty in the United States is officially acknowledged as an affliction of one fifth of the population, and that one third remains "ill-housed, ill-clad and ill-nourished".

The work is international in tone and underlines the fact that social problems are no longer due to scientific ignorance but to political prejudice and short-sightedness. There is however little controversy; some of the sentiments were rather obvious—I would have liked to see a more radical tinge. On the whole, however, the book is readable, and there are points here that should be widely appreciated.

## LETTERS

### Vietnam: The International War Crimes Tribunal

THE hearings of this tribunal convened by Bertrand Russell are planned to last approximately 12 weeks, starting in Paris in March, 1967. A team of eminent French jurists is preparing a plan of procedure for the attention of the Tribunal. Preparatory sessions will be heard in London; national committees are in the process of being formed in many countries to support the aims and work of the tribunal through discussion, meetings and petitions. Those who have so far joined the tribunal include Simone de Beauvoir, Jean-Paul Sartre, Isaac Deutscher, Danilo Dolci, Peter Weiss, Günther Anders, Stokely Carmichael, Josue de Castro, Vladimir Dedijer and former President of Mexico, Lazaro Cardenas. Defence witnesses cannot be compelled to appear, but the US Government and President Johnson have been formally requested to provide representation for their policies before the Tribunal, which will prepare evidence on the aggression, violation of treaties, experimental weapons, bombing of hospitals, schools, etc, torture, genocidal policies, forced labour camps, etc, in Vietnam.

At the tribunal it will be civilisation itself standing at the bar. It is time we all agreed that moral behaviour can NEVER involve indifference to killing, starvation, disease and cruelty. José Martí once said "He who witnesses a crime in silence commits it". Will YOU support the Tribunal? If you are willing to sign a petition, donate something or just wish to know more about it, write to: Bertrand Russell Peace Foundation, 3 & 4 Shavers Place, London, SW1.

Grantham, Lincs.

IAN HALL

### A duty to vote?

J. A. S. NISBET says in his letter in your issue of November 4th that "he can't stand party politics and never has voted". He seems to think he is very clever in talking like this. But I have had a lot of experience of politics including party politics; and I am quite convinced that behaviour of the type he describes is ruining British Democracy.

Co. Durham.

I. S. LOW

### Promoting sales of the FREETHINKER

RECENTLY I started a three year's course at Teachers' Training College as a mature student (28). Having been warned by various Humanists and Freethinkers to be careful, I was apprehensive as to how much irreligion I could get away with. I was surprised to see a table outside the dining room with a lecturer selling *Peace News*, *Anti-Apartheid News*, *Vietnam* and *Anarchist*. I put out a few feelers, and was told that the table was a sort of antidote to the Student Christian Union. I asked about selling the FREETHINKER and the lecturer was delighted. We obtained 15 copies from London on a month's trial (paying for the ones we sold). The first week we sold most of them, and we now sell about 10 regularly. I found that some of the students wanted a copy but didn't have any money, so I am giving some copies away at the moment.

We have a small "Heretics Society" in College and recently we had a debate with the God Squad on "Sex and Morality". Soon we are to have a talk on Thomas Paine. Some of the lecturers obviously disapprove of our activities but no-one has suffered in anyway because of them. Any readers of the FREETHINKER who are students in College could not do better to help Humanism than to try to sell Freethought literature in their colleges. And a debating society is a good way of putting Humanism over. Most people are humanists at heart, and it is surprising how debates on such subjects as apartheid, etc, can develop into religion v Humanism. In any activity associated with reasoning the Freethinker has the advantage from the start. Some students in particularly religious colleges do have to be careful, but the smallest effort does good. Some of our irreligious students are not very interested because religion does not affect their lives very much and perhaps students in the more churchy colleges would be even keener than in mine.

Grantham, Lincs.

IAN HALL

### Reason for joining the NSS

I AM APPALLED at the spectacle of some so-called Humanists engaging in "dialogue" with the Vatican, apparently under the impression that the leopard *can* change its spots, at a time when all Humanists and Freethinkers should be uniting more strongly than ever against the even greater threat to freedom and sanity that Christian unity represents. I have been an Atheist for four years and a contributor to the FREETHINKER for the past few months, but as a confirmed cynic I have never joined any secular organisation since I consider that mankind will never willingly come to its senses and forsake the ignorance, intolerance and superstition of religion. However, as it becomes more and more obvious that *militant* opposition to organised religion is needed more than ever, I cannot any longer allow my scepticism of mankind in general to excuse me from giving *my* support to the aims and principles of the National Secular Society, with which I am so strongly in agreement. It has a proud record of 100 years of tireless struggling for the greater freedom and enlightenment of mankind, but the greater part of the battle has yet to be fought. It cannot be done so without the support of all Humanists and Atheists who are in agreement with its aims. I therefore enclose my application for membership of the National Secular Society, and it is my hope that this letter may influence other readers of the FREETHINKER who are not already members to join.

I would also like to take the opportunity of recording my appreciation of the excellent lecture given recently on *The Church and Modern Doubts* by Richard Clements to the Manchester branch of the NSS. The words of Mr Clements, whom I later had the pleasure of meeting, together with those of branch secretary Mr Collins, played no small part in influencing me to finally take the decision to join the Society.

Salford, Lincs.

MICHAEL GRAY

### World Government

I WAS very impressed by the letter of I. S. Low (Sept. 2) calling for organisation towards World Government. Having campaigned intensively for WG and fought an election—Bath, 1964—on that subject, I realise the necessity for such organisation. I have devised a plan of party organisation from constituency to world level. On policy I have suggested eight basic points. In order to implement them, I suggest the formation of a Campaign Committee, to examine, amend if necessary, but, with an avowed intention to take action. I am prepared to do all in my power to make this reality, provided people will come forward to serve and co-operate in every possible way. Place, time, finance are considerations for interested readers' suggestions. My endeavours on WG party hierarchy and points of policy, would constitute the initial terms of reference, if such a meeting was convened.

Bath.

GILBERT YOUNG