

# **FREE**THINKER

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## GREETINGS AND REFLECTIONS

ON ONE OF THOSE BBC radio programmes of cosy cheer for elderly Christians last year, Lord Soper said something about non-Christians "cashing in on Christmas". Just one reliable recipe on "how to cash out" would have been more to the point! It is not just all the additional scope Christians are given for their propaganda (with the rationalist opposition even more efficiently stifled than usual), it is the nauseating accessories of plastic and pop-song donkeys and cribs, and the demonstrations of an affluence that so many people are busy insisting is nowhere to be found in Wilson's Britain. An affluence they are determined not to risk for the benefit of those British non-pink citizens in Rhodesia who are being denied the fundamental human rights.

American Humanists Margaret and Bob McCoy sent a 1965 card which read: "Let us joyously celebrate the birth of the World's Saviours—all sixteen of them" with a reminder inside about the 15 other December, cave and virgin-birthdays. As a unique religious festival Christmas is a washout. As a legend translated into modern terms, it is a fiasco in an age and a society where the majority of Christians (after nearly 2,000 Christmasses) still condemn the woman who conceives before marriage, and do little enough to make bearable the lives of sons who cannot write their father's name down on a form.

Nor has the "no room at the inn" theme been interpreted into nearly as practical terms as, say, the doctrines of sin and punishment and virginity. Three million families (some ten million individuals) are homeless or housed in intolerable slum and overcrowded conditions in Britain today; and this, we are told, is a Christian country. But at least some Christians have been revolted enough by the situation to found the "National Campaign for the Homeless" called SHELTER (40 James Street, London, W1), which deserves the support of each one of us, whatever our beliefs. Not because these families are "condemned to spend Christmas" in such appalling conditions, but because they have already endured such conditions far too long and must be given a chance to build their lives again in dignity and privacy.

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Christmas as a "special occasion" is something different. If there were no seasons, no end of terms, no family anniversaries, no "going away", those women who are lucky enough to have homes might never get down to putting them into some sort of order. And an excuse for a world-wide celebration is some antidote to the monotony which is the lot of far too many people today. But just because "everyone" is celebrating at home and the shops are shut and the streets and transport deserted, so do the days lengthen and drag for the lonely, and their loneliness cuts at the heart like a razor blade. It may be just living away in the services or hospitals, where, in spite of institutional programmes of festivity, home-sickness can creep up like a smog. Or it may be the sort of loneliness described recently by an illegitimate boy, a polio victim, who never has anywhere to go when he emerges from his frequent spells in hospital. For his 21st birthday he sent himself a card and went out and bought a swiss roll which he ate alone in his Paddington bed-sitter.

While half the world counts its Christmas cards ("Goodness, 150! And we only sent 135 . . .") the other half waits for the postman to bring the card it has sent itself. Thousands of people living alone can't even afford the coal to keep themselves alive with warmth. Nevertheless those who *are* surrounded by home, warmth, companionship and children would be cheating not to enjoy every minute of it. Pity does no one any good. Even compassion, if not translated into action, is as water running down a drain in a desert.

Traditions, in one form or another, provide us with a necessary sense of continuity and security. No need for them to be confused with "truth" or "morality" or "honours" (as are religious and royal occasions) but regular celebrations of one sort or another there must be. X-mas stripped of the gospel jargon and of the commercial racket is an excellent idea. It is too bad that "Winter Solstice" rolls off the tongue as comfortably as an over-loaded fork of spaghetti; I cannot get enthusiastic about a "Merry Winter Solstice" as a greeting! And "Yule" is altogether too "ye olde . . ." What can we have instead? We ought to think of something . . .

The incomparable Ogden Nash reminded us (even if our FREETHINKER readers didn't) that although

"The men who draws the Christmas cards, dear,  
They must have igloos in their yards, dear . . .

I loves their winter scenes and such,  
But still I thinks they don't know much,  
For Christmas wanders back and forth  
And travels south as well as north."

And east as well as west. In Vietnam Christians will pay tribute to their faith by having a break from killing Commies for Christ. Then the slaughter will begin again,



and mothers and fathers will be able to say, "Well, at least our children could see on Christmas Day" or "At least our boys waited until December 27th before their legs and arms were blown off . . ." or "My mother was the first victim of the cease-peace . . ."

This was meant to be a message of good cheer for non-Christians; but how is it possible to give more than a very small cheer for this celebration in which so many cannot take any sort of part? But it does bring greetings to all our

## THE CHRISTIAN CHRISTMAS

*Khamis A. Busaidy (b. 1940) has been a Freethinker and a Rationalist since he was 19. He is a free-lance journalist.*

JOHN MILTON, the blind English poet (d. 1674) rightly said:

"Give me the liberty to know, to utter, and to argue freely according to conscience, above all other liberties".

As the Christian Christmas—25th December—is here again with all its golden lights, its Christmas trees laden with glowing fruits, its drunken orgies, deaths on the roads and Church hymns, all to celebrate the birth of the Christian saviour-god, we wonder if Jesus was really born on December 25th. We would think that the very foundation of the church, the Bible, would give us an answer. We start looking for it. But the Gospels leave us cold. The date is nowhere mentioned. Hence, like all Christian beliefs, the birthday of Jesus is a myth.

How then did 25th December come to be recognised as the birthday of the sin-burdened Christian God? What is the origin of the date itself? Let us, with a free conscience, as Milton said, trace the facts:

From the earliest history of man, the sun has been the primeval source of all life. It has been the verifier and resurrector of dead nature, the upbringer of vegetation and bestower of blessings. The ancient world with an undeveloped mind craved for a deity. It therefore willingly bowed down to the Supreme Sun. It turned the various phases of the Supreme Luminary into occasions to celebrate its joys and sorrows.

When the great Sun began to decline, withdrawing its lights and warmth after the Autumnal Equinox, the people were filled with fear and apprehension. But the sun-god still went down. The nights became longer. His decline continued until on a certain day, the Winter Solstice, a climax was reached. The god had gone. The people were sunk in the abyss of sorrow. But behold! Suddenly there was hope. The Sun-god had reappeared on the horizon. And so 25th December was taken to be the date of the birth of the sun.

Christmas is thus a solar festival of unknown antiquity. It was taken up by the early Christians because they did not know the real time of the birth of their myth-god.

It is here expedient to say that, at Easter, most solar and vegetation gods were worshipped. Special mysteries were introduced to represent their symbolical death. There was, as well, the search for their bodies and their resurrection.

These sun-gods were in every country. The Greeks had Apollo or Dionysus. The Romans had their Hercules; the Persians their Mithra, Syria its Adonis and Attis; Egypt

readers, and especially good wishes and thoughts for those friends in the Humanist Letter Network who may find Christmas tough going.

"Peace on earth to men of goodwill" they sing. But in order to get rid of the causes of strife and conflict, be they in the mind, the family, the country, or the world of nations, men need more than "good will"; they need determination and tenacity; not prayers or carols, psalms or praises but activity on all fronts.

Khamis A. Busaidy

its Osiris, Isis and Horus. Baal and Astarte belonged to the Babylonians and Carthagians. It is significant that all these sun-gods were:

1. Born on or very near Christmas Day.
2. Born of a virgin mother.
3. Born in a cave or an underground chamber.
4. Called by such names as Light-bringer, Healer, Mediator, Saviour and Deliverer.
5. They descended into Hell or an underworld.
6. They rose again from the dead.

In his *Christianity and Mythology* J. M. Robertson writes:

"To be sure, the usage of the rest of the Church was itself an unquestionable adoption of a current Pagan one. The Western church, long after the time when the possibility of ascertaining any facts as to the birth of the alleged Founder had ceased, adopted the ancient solar festival of the 25th of December, then specially connected in the Empire with the widespread worship of Mithra. The facts are that it is a very great mistake in learned men to say that Christ's birthday was on 25th December".

In *Pagan and Christian Creeds* we are told that in the year 530 AD, or thereabouts, a Sythian monk by the name of Dionysius Exiguus who was an abbot and astronomer in Rome, was commissioned to fix the birthday of Jesus; it was he who chose the 25th December for the day when Christendom would praise a fictitious babe in swaddling myth.

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## UNWASH MY BRAIN

THEY TOOK my mind when I was a helpless child and could not rebel. They placed the image of God in it, a God they could have known did not exist.

They said God was good, and God was love, and God was all-powerful; he held the winds in his hands and the destinies of nations at his fingertips; not one sparrow fell to the ground but he knew. Mention the impossible, and God could do it; ask the ultimate in perfection and he was it. Moreover there was no other God but him, because nothing and no one could remain in his presence and not be consumed.

Yet this supposed God, from whom all loving kindness flowed, who was such a source of good, who loved his people so much he knew every hair on the head of each one; he caused me nothing but fear and torment, sorrow and misery. He broke my home, he ruined my childhood, he made me mean and selfish, he stole my carefree years away and forced on me a rigid discipline which made my friends despise me and my enemies hate me.

Who owes it to me, now that reason has prevailed in my mind, whose responsibility is it to *unwash* my brain from all the untruths of the Christian religion?

Whose responsibility is it to see that, from force of habit, I do not look over my shoulder in case God is censoring my every action.

Who shall stop my belly from squirming in reflex fear as I hear myself tell someone I am an Atheist, and instantly, hauntingly, into my mind comes the indoctrinated words "The fool hath said in his heart, there is no God". I am no fool, and my reason says there is no God, but the implantation is still there.

Why do I still wince when a man takes God's name in vain? God means nothing to me. "For Christ's sake", says my neighbour, and instantly and automatically I utter a silent prayer for his forgiveness. Why should I care? Christ means nothing to me, except that he has been stuffed down my spiritual throat from the day I was born.

When loved ones are sick or in danger, why do I still cry "Oh God"? For I know there is no God, or else there would be neither sickness nor danger. Whose responsibility is it to see that when I am laid low in health the old indoctrinated ideas do not take hold of me again and make me a mouther of insincere prayers, a moral and mental coward?

It is certain, sure, and true that those who have been forcibly fed with the Christian religion in their tenderest childhood find it hard to shake off that haunting fear which remains in the remote, unknown subconscious.

It is easier to be a Christian and never to reason these things at all; Rationalism brings its own problems. It has to root out the fear that is deep-seated in the minds of the indoctrinated. It is easy for a Christian; he has got his own personal Saviour, and he just prostrates himself before his God at night and mouths the ritual, with a yawn behind his clasped hands; or in the morning he bows down, with the crust of sleep still in his eyes, and says the words to bring him salvation for yet another day. He does not even need to notice what he says, because he knows it all by heart and can still, on his knees, work out the more important problems of the day.

But being a Rationalist you have to keep faith with yourself. You have no ritual, you cannot say you will

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leave your problems in the hands of God. You have to work out your own problems and resolve your own salvation, and, of all the problems, how to remove the ingrained, automatic fear of retribution from a Jealous God is the most difficult.

The very real problem of how to remove fear from a mind brought up under the influence of so strict a sect as the Exclusive Brethren, is one which took me long years to overcome.

The conviction of Secularism and Atheism was well established in my mind long, long before the automatic reflexes, attributable to my upbringing were removed.

I think no one owes me anything. I am glad, because the conquest is mine and "Reason's" alone. Together we have fought and won this battle, and I feel far more worthy and cleaner now than I ever did through being washed in the blood of the Lamb.

## ORGANISATIONS FOR SECULAR HUMANISTS: YHA

John Illingworth

THE YOUTH HOSTELS ASSOCIATION is a secular organisation that provides hostels to enable all, especially young people, to explore the countryside at low cost. It is not a business undertaking, but a voluntary organisation run by members for members.

The hostels are of great variety; farmhouses, water-mills, cottages, mansions, specially built hostels and even a Norman Castle complete with dungeon. Yet all have this in common: they provide simple accommodation, including dormitories, washing facilities, a common room and a members' kitchen. This kitchen is fully equipped with cooking points, utensils, crockery and cutlery: it is used by members not only to keep down their expenses but because they enjoy the fun of a "cook-it-yourself" holiday.

Other hostellers prefer to purchase meals cooked by the Warden in charge of the hostel. This service is available at most hostels, and the meals are substantial, suited to the appetites created by out-door activities. Incidentally, the Warden is not expected to do all the work, members share simple domestic duties and so help keep the charges as low as possible.

Membership of the YHA is open to all over 5 years of age and members under 12 years must be accompanied by an adult member. Those under 9 must be accompanied by a parent. There is no upper age limit. When hostelling, you should travel on foot, on horseback, by pedal cycle or canoe, which are the best ways of exploring the countryside. You may, of course, use other forms of transport to reach your holiday area.

You can become a Life Member for one payment of £8 8s or five consecutive annual payments of £2. Where both parents are joining, children over 5 and under 16 are enrolled free. The standard overnight charge is 5s for seniors, 4s for juniors and 3s for juveniles. Members must either take their own sheet sleeping bag of approved design or hire a freshly laundered bag at the hostels for 1s 6d.

Further details of the YHA can be obtained from the Youth Hostels Association, National Office, Trevelyan House, St Albans, Herts.



## NEWS AND NOTES

"WE ARE taking this stance solely on the Gospel. We are not joining in to defend the atheists," said Mr Donald Jack, regular outdoor speaker for the Free Church of Scotland for 16 years at the Edinburgh "Mound", now threatened by council replanning. Another minister, the Rev J. Glyne Middleton, however, who risked siding with atheists, said, "There should be an open platform in every city, and up to now Edinburgh has been fortunate . . ." Mr William Cronin, 83-year-old member of the National Secular Society, who has been speaking at the Mound for more than 50 years, said "I am absolutely against any proposal to abandon this public platform at the Mound". (*Edinburgh Evening News and Dispatch*, Nov. 7). But need freedom of town planning, traffic and speech conflict? Is there no other suitable site which would permit both sorts of progress at once?

### Another veteran atheist in the news

MRS MARY BEESLEY, who is 85 and still very busy with her writing, was given a whole page in the *Nottinghamshire Guardian* last September. She deserved it; way back in the 1920's she was advocating free speech and the Rights of Women in Nottingham, and shocking local pillars of society by recommending the use of contraceptives for poor families.

### Supremacist Smith

DAVID FROST did a very good job with his interview of Ian Smith over ITV. The little dictator came over more deplorably than even his fiercest enemies could have hoped, with his evasions, confusion, and falsifications of the facts. The *Sunday Times* (Dec. 11) listed his 12 apostles and their education: three were educated at public schools and one at a grammar school in Britain, one in India (and Windsor), one went to Oxford and one went to Sandhurst. Six went to Rhodesian or South African Schools and one to a SA university. Last week a young white South African was telling us about his "typical" prep (Baptist) school in South Africa, where the boys got up at 0500 for a cold bath, and where "antics" such as boys pouring petrol on each other's hands, setting light to it, and standing by with a blanket to put out the flames when the screams began, were taken for granted. "All boys are brutal," he insists. One can feel pity for the non-rebellious products of such education, but they should never be allowed to govern anyone. One of the most respected white men in Africa is surely Malcolm Macdonald. He was at Bedales, co-educational boarding school in the days when it was truly "progressive".

### Future teacher?

CLIFF RICHARDS (one of Billy Graham's converts) has decided that money and fame mean nothing to him, and that he is ready at any time to give up his career to take a training course so that he can teach divinity to secondary modern children age 11 to 15. Would the training course really be necessary? He must surely know it all after half an hour with Billy. The selling technique, I mean.

### The House of Lords thy God

"I MIGHT end up tomorrow as a Labour life peer, a position I have always thought of as theological proof of life after death," said Mr Jeremy Thorpe, MP (*Observer*, Dec. 11).

### From the Churches

THE POPE is still coping with heresy in Holland and

reprimanding the Jesuits. The Anglican vicar of Roydon, Essex, the Rev Christopher Wansey, is protesting against the Westminster Abbey service in which representatives of five religions took part, and calling it ". . . the most unfortunate and ill-advised approach towards those who have not the joy of our Christian faith" (*Observer*, Dec. 11). The *Sun* (Nov. 29) reported that the Rev John R. Gray of Dunblane Cathedral has called Dr John Robinson, Bishop of Woolwich, a "theological nincompoop", which is a bit like pots calling kettles black. "Blether" is a splendid word, and just about sums up the noises made by all theologians and far too many politicians.

### Memo for 1967

SUGGEST TO SOMEONE OR OTHER that, during next year, the government changes the names of the human race extinguishers from "Blue Streak", "Lazy Dog", "Thunderbird", "Bloodhound", "Victor", "Valiant" and "Hedgehog" to "Vomit", "Discharge", "Excreta", "Human agony", "Sewage", "Mucus" and "Sure Defeat".

### Can't tell the sexes apart these days . . .

SIX NUNS have received Leicester University pass certificates after a three-year course in theology "especially designed for lay Catholics" (*Catholic Herald*, Dec. 9). Sisters Christina, Clare, Ita, Agnes Genevieve, Maria Rosa and Thomas More . . .

### Does anyone know who wrote this?

"I honour the man who is ready to sink  
Half his present repute for the freedom to think,  
And when he has thought, be his cause strong or weak,  
Will risk t'other half for the freedom to speak."

which is a good deal better jingle than most Christmas cards.

### Carol 1966

MARGARET GREEN reports that when her seven-year-old son was asked what his favourite carol was, he chanted in reply, "Man, I'm a Humanist, man, I'm a Humanist . . ."

### What is our commercial TV waiting for?

THE *New Yorker* published an advertisement

"Gifts of the Three Wise Men. In keeping with the first Christmas and gifts of the Magi, we present our rich and resplendent package of scented soaps."

Imagine possibilities for next year:

*Wise men* use frankincense when they go to meet the stars!

Make up for all those presents Mary didn't get and give her Myrrh for Christmas!

Buy THREE KING SIZE of your favourite detergent for the price of six and share the traditional Christmas feeling!

Take a bottle of Plymouth Gin home with you: the only true spirit of Christmas!

### REMINDER!

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## AN APPRECIATION OF SIR ISAAC NEWTON (1642-1727)

Ian Hall

*Ian Hall (b. 1938) was mildly Anglican until 1964. He is now a militant atheist. After a variety of jobs from farm work, Royal Navy, Police Force to thatching and blacksmith, he is now at a Teachers' Training College for a three-year course on World History and Social and Environmental Studies.*

IT IS to science that we owe every cultural development of civilisation. The more we know why and how things happen, the more we can do to make the conditions we live under more tolerable. We owe more to Sir Isaac Newton for the many comforts of life than to any other. Since the Greek Empire scientific knowledge had stood virtually still until the 16th century. Galileo, Bacon, Tycho Brahe, and Leonardo da Vinci had advanced science and engineering in many ways, but Newton's work outshines them all.

Newton founded classical physics and mathematics. It was his laws that made possible the machines that now relieve us of so much work. Newton's physics were all that was needed to bring about the aeroplane, tractor, car, etc. His laws of gravitation were not to be superseded until Einstein came along with the theory of relativity some two hundred years later. It is sobering to realise, that if there had been Socialism and distribution of wealth in Newton's day, the mass of the people would not have benefited much from it. One man with a plough today can do more work in a day than a hundred could do in a week two hundred years ago.

Newton wasn't in it for the money. Many of his discoveries lay in his house unnoticed until found by friends. When he was 27 a correspondent asked Newton if he could publish in the *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society*, the solutions which Newton had sent him of some mathematical problems. Newton was at that time of life when most people want credit for their work, but he particularly asked that no mention be made of his name

"for I see not", he added, "what there is desirable in public esteem, were I able to acquire and maintain it. It would perhaps increase my acquaintance, the thing I chiefly study to decline".

After he had invented the reflecting telescope in 1668, he allowed the instrument to lie by him for several years before its existence became known to some of the fellows of the Royal Society, who induced him to send it to the Society, where it is carefully preserved today.

His important observations of the compound nature of sunlight, a beam of which he decomposed by passing it through a glass prism, were not communicated to the Society until 1672, though they were made before the invention of the reflecting telescope; and his discovery of the laws of gravitation was completed several years before Halley knew of it and was able to make it known to the world.

### Twenty years of his work destroyed

Newton had tremendous patience. Once, when he was at Cambridge nearing the completion of one of his important works, a lighted candle, which he had left in his room, burned down, set fire to his papers and destroyed them. It destroyed twenty years of his work on light and colour. One of his friends wrote, "Everyone thought he would have run mad", but all Newton said, when a friend asked him about it, was that he was obliged to do all his calculations again. To have to reconstruct an intricate work from the very beginning was sufficient to appal the strongest mind, but Newton set about it and accomplished the task.

You might think that such a man would have his work received with acclamation, but it was not so. Newton's experiments with a glass prism were marvels of accurate study and cautious conclusion, yet they brought him more trouble than praise. He was bitterly attacked by clergymen and philosophers who had other views on colour and light. At one time the opposition was so disturbing to Newton that he almost decided to do no more work except for private satisfaction.

"I was so persecuted with discussions arising out of my theory of light," he wrote in 1675, "that I blamed my own impudence for parting with so substantial a blessing as my quiet to run after a shadow": and again a year later he remarked, "I see a man must either resolve to put out nothing new, or to become a slave to defend it."

### The story of the apple

There is an anecdote that in 1665 Newton left Cambridge on account of the plague and was at his home at Woolsthorpe when an apple fell on his head which started a train of thought resulting in the discovery of the universal law of gravitation. Newton wondered if this force extended beyond the earth to the moon, and, if so, would it account for the motion of our satellite around the earth? Whether the story of the apple is true we don't know. There is not much evidence for it.

The meaning of Kepler's laws of planetary motion remained a mystery until Newton's discovery of the universal gravitation principle. Kepler first thought that the strength of the force of attraction between two bodies diminished in simple ratio to the distance separating them, ie, is halved when the distance separating them is doubled. Later he decided that the force varies at the square of the distance. When the distance is doubled the force is thus reduced to a quarter, when trebled, to one ninth and so on.

In January 1684 Sir Christopher Wren offered Hooke and Edmund Halley (1656-1742)

"the present of a book of forty shillings if either of them could bring him convincing proof that such a force would cause a planet to move in an ellipse".

Halley went to see Newton, and, without saying anything about the contest, asked him, "What will be the curve described by the planets on the supposition that gravity diminishes as the square of the distance?" Newton answered immediately, "An ellipse". "How do you know," asked Halley in amazement. "Why," replied Newton, "I have calculated it." Halley was thus the means of bringing Newton's immortal discovery to light.

### Halley's Comet

Using Newton's laws, Halley was able to calculate the paths of a number of comets. He found that three comets which had appeared in 1531, 1607 and 1682, had practically the same orbit, and concluded that they must be the same body travelling around the sun in a period of about 75 years. He predicted that it would come again in 1758. He wasn't there to see it, but it came all right. It came again in 1835 and 1910; the next one will be round about 1985. Halley's comet has been traced back in jumps of 75 years to 240 BC. For centuries these comets had filled people with dread fear, so Newton's discoveries did much to speed the decline of superstition.

From Newton's laws Adams and Le Verrier were able to discover the planet Neptune by pure maths. They observed that the planet Uranus was often slow or fast from

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## IDEAS FOR YOUR BOOK TOKENS

Ian Hall

**De-Canting Britain** by George Delf. (Obtainable from Interpress, 8 Castle Street, Framlingham, Suffolk. Price 10s; two or more 8s.) THE COVER of this book, showing a bespectacled Walter Mitty-like bloke complete with idiot-dome and beat-up broly, is just the sort to appeal to the people who most need to read it.

On turning the cover, though, the amusement is gone; what is that look on those faces—apathy? disgust? frustration? Shouting from the page beside this picture are everyday headlines from our newspapers. RIGHT TO USE FORCE SAYS RAMSEY . . . US ACTION IN VIETNAM UNAVOIDABLE (Mr Stewart) . . . CHEAPER WEAPONS WIN EXPORTS . . . LEGITIMATE USE FOR NUCLEAR WEAPONS? (ask the Bishops) . . . MORALS OF SOCIETY NEVER BETTER . . . GIRL DIES AFTER STABBING. And a host of others. I'd like to see large posters of this page all over the country. The whole book reminds me of Marlene Dietrich's sobbing voice "When will we ever learn?" Cant means the unreal use of words to imply piety. Reading this book would help even the most conscious person to be more aware of the hypocrisy of our times. The author is definitely anti-Church and anti-violence, but appears to believe that Christ existed and that he was good. He also seems to think religion could still do some good. Apart from this, the book is sound and is to be recommended to any Freethinker. This is the ideal Christmas gift for religious or bomb-happy relatives or complacent friends.

The book makes us look at ourselves, as we are—not as we think we are; at what we are like, and what our leaders seem to think we should be like. This is one way, perhaps, to attack organised religion. *De-Canting Britain* is well set out, with pictures on every page, lively prose, poems and quotations.

Is that look growing awareness on the back cover? Realisation? Hope? Some more headlines "PEACE" DAUBED ON ALTAR AT CANTERBURY . . . 20,000 MARCHERS DEMAND HALT IN BOMBING . . . BUMBLING TOWARDS THE TRUTH . . . ATTACK ON NEW THINKING IN CHURCH . . . VICAR RESIGNS TO SEEK NEW LIFE.

David Tribe

IT'S GOOD to see across from America the fourth edition of Corliss Lamont's *The Illusion of Immortality* (Frederick Ungar, £1.75), with an introduction by John Dewey.

Dr Lamont has given much attention to the problem of death and has compiled *A Humanist Funeral Service*, which, if its invocations are somewhat too florid for our appetite, is a rich source book of suitable songs and readings. In the present volume he has explored the philosophical, psychological and sociological implications of the widespread belief in an after-life. This is a question which every individual in every culture must face up to, and the author is right to censure F. C. S. Schiller for asserting that it is only a "literary tradition" foisted on the public by interested writers.

It is just because this is a "living" issue that there has been relatively little honest discussion of it. Sir Arthur Keith is but one of many unbelievers who have felt a "strange reluctance" to express their heresy. Dr Lamont bravely repudiates this position. Still more does he condemn Professor C. D. Broad for asserting that "it is quite possible that the doctrine of human immortality (whether it be in fact true or false) is one of these socially valuable 'myths'". He believes that the individual should be willing to confront the problem and he is himself prepared to confront those organisations which live on death. "The Church in its palmist days maintained its sway over the multitudes chiefly through appealing to fear of *post-mortem* punishment." But he is too sophisticated to attribute the idea of immortality simply to priestcraft.

Unerringly he deals with the philosophical and ethical justification of the idea and the chemical, physiological, psychological and linguistic impossibility of human life being continued in some recognisable form as soul, spirit or personality. Finally, for those who do not like to walk alone or in modest company he gives an impressive list of subscribers to mortality.

Oswell Blakeston

BRIAN WICKER, author of *Culture and Theology* (Sheed and Ward, 13s 6d), is concerned because some theologians are still thinking of man as a passive recorder of sense data, and not as an active participator in a community which can condition its own environment so that every dialogue, every Buber-esque turning together of individuals, "consecrates the place in which it occurs". But I don't think there is really any need to go into his

arguments for "the Church as extension into the sphere of self-consciousness of the human community" unless one can accept the assumption on page one that Catholic tradition is an essential conserving element in Western culture, and that therefore the Church deserves renewal through some new ways of thinking about old dogmas. Personally, I get stuck with the thought that Mr Wicker is talking about the Church which collaborated with Hitler, the Church which is so greatly responsible for the population explosion, etc, etc, and after that I can't find much virtue in manipulations of theories about participation perception.

Indeed, it seems to me that the very school-room authority of much of Mr Wicker's analysis of a certain arbitrary selection of philosophers, economists and novelists is just an hypnosis so that, when one is thinking how rational it all is, he can insert the concept of God without our having noticed that reasoning has jumped into "faith". For instance, Mr Wicker is capable of expounding Merleau-Ponty, and then slipping in a passing sentence which confesses that: "This is not to say that this is a conclusion which Merleau-Ponty himself accepts". Or he can blandly assert: "The very cogency of the argument exposes its manifest and intolerable absurdity".

Of course when one has crossed the threshold into "faith" one can talk about "outworn rationalism, out of touch with modern events". But if Mr Wicker had written a book discussing the immediate objects of the National Secular Society he would have been more in touch with today. One looks in vain for his chapters on (say) Auto-Destructive Art and Pacifism or Mescal and Mysticism. So I would say that a book like Mr Wicker's is generally dispiriting because it is so much a device to sustain theological ideas which are "intelligible only by faith". And heaven save us, Mr Wicker, from the faith of a Vatican which failed to condemn the horrors of the concentration camps.

G. L. Simons

IT IS very significant from the humanist point of view that modern thought is becoming increasingly secularised; metaphysics is quite unfashionable, and when people ask "How do you know?" they generally expect the answer to be given in empirical or practical terms. A consequence of this modern trend is that greater emphasis is being given to empirical psychology and sociology in attempts to understand man's nature. This tendency is very healthy.

A work which exemplifies well the current approach is Professor Berger's *Invitation to Sociology* (Pelican, 5s), formerly published in America (1963). To a large extent this work serves as an introduction to sociology; and it indicates the degree to which sociology can be regarded as a truly scientific discipline.

After the introductory chapter Professor Berger considers sociology as "a form of consciousness". The thesis here expounded deserves to be stressed. Whereas sociology can clearly be seen to enjoy scientific terms of reference, with allegiance to objective data, validity, truth, etc, it is also highly relevant to questions of value and morality. This is because it can have a "debunking" function.

There are so many prejudices, rationalisations, hypocrisies and the like in modern society that sociology is soon able to reveal them and their essential emptiness. It is to Professor Berger's credit that he sees sociology as a means of undermining prejudice and pretension, and it is this awareness that justifies the sub-heading of the volume: *A Humanistic Perspective*.

It is clear that sociology itself can have an orientation: for example, there can be economic sociology and biological sociology. Characterised in this way Professor Berger's brand is obviously "psychological" sociology. He is concerned with prejudice and conversion, with "rôle playing" and adjustment. He sees that people think and act within credal systems that their psychologies demand, and which cause their "biographies" to be interpreted appropriately.

It is also obvious that society is seen as a preconstructed frame into which men and women are obliged to fit: ". . . society is the walls of our imprisonment in history". But lest this worry us, we are assured that at the same time we work hard to keep the prison walls intact. We need social acceptance, and the existing social pressures usually suffice to inculcate the prevailing beliefs and attitudes.

There is a strong determinist element in *Invitation to Sociology*, which I think is quite proper. I firmly believe that man and society should be discussed in identical causal terms to any other natural phenomena. There is also a useful and perceptive analysis of such practical matters as racialism, homosexuality and capital punishment, leading to conclusions which humanists would find acceptable. A section of worthwhile "Bibliographical Comments" is included.

This is a useful volume. It is occasionally obscure, but on the whole it is readable and perceptive.



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**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.c 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, January 1st, 6.45 p.m.: Mrs WHITELEY, "The Permissive Morality".

Brighton and Hove Humanist Group (Regency House, Oriental Place), Sunday, January 1st, 5.30 p.m.: Informal gathering.

Havering Humanist Society (The Social Centre, Gubbins Lane, Harold Wood), Tuesday, January 3rd, 8 p.m.: MICHAEL LEE, "Acupuncture".

South Place Ethical Society (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London, WC1), Tuesday, January 3rd, 6.30 p.m.: STELLA LIEP, "The Rights of Animals".

The 59 Society (Kensington Public Library, London, W8), Thursday, December 29th, 8 p.m.: DAVID TRIBE, "What the Communists Want".

West Ham and District Branch NSS (Wanstead and Woodford Community Centre, Wanstead Green, London, E11): Meetings at 8 p.m. on the fourth Thursday of every month.

**ON THE ROAD TO DAMASCUS**

Oswell Blakeston

THE PRIEST was proud of his new car, for it gave him a definite sense of power. Then, to his extreme annoyance, he became conscious of the fact that another car was press-

ing up behind him. This car seemed, so insultingly, actually to be superior to the priest's; and—as final insult—the infernal machine was being driven by a negro. It was too sinister. Some dark enemy of God was following the priest, and—with what evil intent? What could the man of God do to protect himself? In his panic, the priest thought that he might be brave and front the enemy and rout him with the power of the Almighty. He jammed on his brakes, and the car behind him had to stop to avoid a collision. The priest turned and yelled to the negro: "How dare you follow me, my man? I will not be shadowed like a criminal. Have you no sense of decency?" The negro looked surprised, but he answered humbly: "I'm sorry sir. I am following you only because I happen to be going the same way". Such an outrageous presumption had never occurred to the priest. It was intolerable. Suddenly he knew that he could no longer believe in God, and he burst into tears.

**AN APPRECIATION OF SIR ISAAC NEWTON***(Continued from page 405)*

the position it should have been in, and by calculating they found this was due to the gravitational influence of a new planet.

Some of Newton's laws have since been proved wrong. It was found for instance, that the force necessary to fly an aeroplane was one twentieth of the amount Newton calculated. But through Newton's laws and observations of light by a glass prism, scientists were enabled to discover X Rays and the constitution of the sun and stars, to invent the telephone, the wireless, telegraphy, and the aeroplane.

**Unto us a scientist was born . . .**

Sir Isaac Newton was born on Christmas day. His father died three months before his birth. At one time some high church dignitaries tried to persuade Newton to become a clergyman, but he was always fundamentally a Unitarian. He never married. His gentleness and concern for the poor and helpless, and his disapproval of cruelty to animals (including hunting and shooting) was well known. He was made a member of the Convention of Parliament of 1689, and from 1703 until his death he was President of the Royal Society.

A short time before he died Newton expressed the memorable sentiment,

"I do not know what I may appear to the world, but to myself I seem to have only been like a boy playing on the seashore, and diverting myself in now and then finding a smoother pebble or a prettier shell than ordinary, whilst the great ocean of truth lay all before me".

But when the Queen of Prussia asked Leibnitz his opinion of Newton's work, the philosopher said

"Taking mathematicians from the beginning of the world to the time when Sir Isaac Newton lived, what he has done is much the better half".

Newton was the first scientist to be buried in Westminster Abbey, where he is tucked away in a dark corner, the best places being reserved for those famous men who are outstanding for killing people.

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## LETTERS

### Vote, vote, vote for Mr Macfarlane!

MAY I congratulate Mr G. L. Simons for writing "Should Humanism be Political?" Of course it should! I have been saying this for years. What is urgently required is a world-wide HUMAN civilisation (as opposed to a mass of anarchic local patriotisms) and we cannot expect this to take place if we leave political power in the hands of nationalists (of a local type), racialists, supernaturalists, and class-war theorists.

If anyone is interested in forming a Humanist Party which will undertake to work on assumptions of world patriotism and freedoms of thought, speech and political association, will they please write to me.

E. G. MACFARLANE

### Any Answers: Bias?

YOU published a letter (Nov. 25) querying the absence of Free-thought expression in the BBC's "Any Answers?" By coincidence I had heard read on this programme, only the previous evening a letter recommending the FREETHINKER, its Editor and several contributors by name. In the recent past I have heard the late F. A. Hornibrook's book *The Culture of the Abdomen* highly praised over the air, by two separate distinguished men. During *Any Questions?* I have heard the most forthright rejections of religion; not, incidentally, followed by the speaker's disappearance from the ether.

In the current *Radio Times*, it is stated that over 1,000 letters are received each day; and it is reasonable to assume that this number is stepped-up on the days during which *Any Answers?* are received.

As you yourself must be well aware, letters are, and must be, rejected, for quite a number of compelling reasons; the number unpublished for reasons of mere bias I would consider negligible—if not simply non-existent.

I have had several letters expressing unorthodox views read out in this programme; quite a few published in the *Radio Times*. I have also had dozens rejected; but, so far as I am concerned "the Editor's decision is final".

I think *Any Questions?* and *Any Answers?* are the finest programmes broadcast, in either medium. I can bear to see them criticised; but not to see them denigrated. ARTHUR E. CARPENTER

[In my view this is a fair assessment. I wonder who wrote about this paper and would like to thank them.—Ed.]

### Freethought and freelove

HUMANISTS should carefully examine such ideas as "free-thought" and "free" love. One should always ask "Free from what?" I think that Michael Gray's article (Dec. 2) is notably lacking in realism and responsibility, and I offer the following criticisms:

1. The assertion that "the human being is merely an animal" is a dangerous half-truth. Compared with other animals, human offspring are exceptionally dependent, and remain so for an exceptionally high proportion of the life span. Hence the importance of parents.
2. Love, whether officially sanctioned or not, is never free from risk and moral duty. To begin with, there is the risk of heart-break. Sometimes there are the added risks of contagion and unwanted conception. And the duty is not—as Michael Gray implies—solely to the loved one. There should also be an agreement, binding upon both partners, to provide for and cherish any children resulting from their union.
3. These risks and duties involve the woman more deeply and less escapably than they do the man. Men commonly regard them lightly—some indeed evade them completely. A woman therefore has the right, as the more vulnerable partner, to demand such protection and remedy as the law can provide in the event of her union being dishonoured. Therefore secular marriage is not "an unnecessary intrusion" into anyone's freedom.

By all means let us oppose inhumane prejudices and laws which support them, and by all means let us spread the knowledge needed to minimise the dangers of love. But let us not delude ourselves into thinking that modern knowledge has abolished risk or duty.

North Shields, Northumberland.

DAVID BIRD

### Reference: D. Hume

MY notorious fellow-townsmen David Hume boasted, mark ye!—in the subtle, perceptive and mellifluous Charles Doran phrase—that he was neither Whig, Tory, Christian nor English. He seemed to think he was very clever in talking like this but compared with

such productive intellectuals and penetrating philosophers as Messrs. Low and Doran he was a parasitic, moronic dreamer.

J. A. S. NISBET

### World Government

I WAS greatly encouraged by Gilbert Young's letter about World Government. His idea of a Campaign Committee is a good one and I am ready to do anything and everything I can to help. I would like to hear from him.

Co. Durham.

I. S. LOW

MICHAEL GRAY remarks that the assumption by the State of authority in matters of marriage and divorce is "an unnecessary intrusion into the freedom of responsible adults".

The majority of people in this world (including Humanists and atheistic communists) recognise that marriage is a necessary institution and helps to preserve one of the basic fundamentals of a stable society, a happy and secure home.

When mankind has reached a higher stage in his moral development the views expressed by Mr Gray would probably be sound, but unfortunately in the 20th century not all adults are morally responsible.

Mr Gray's views, if they became accepted by the majority, would result in social anarchy.

Benslet, Essex.

T. M. EDWARDS

### Labels

I SEE you would like to hear from your readers, definitions of the word Humanist and what it stands for. As a member of the human family it has no other meaning for me but that.

If the Humanist organisation wishes to convey to outsiders the specific aims and objects it stands for, then I would suggest it should summarise them "into a brief title, but leave out the word "Humanist".

Likewise, if I may digress a little, the title "Freethinker" of our brave little journal, is from my angle rather a misnomer. How can anyone be freethinking when they are subject to heredity qualities modified or otherwise by environment. If one must have a label like a jar of jam, may I suggest the term "Rationalist" or "Rational Realist".

Cheshire.

N. CASSEL

### Esperanto

HAVING attended many Freethought conferences, and almost all World Union of Freethinkers' Congresses since 1938 at Conway Hall, I was struck by the poor attendance this year at Conway Hall of Freethinkers, Humanists. Perhaps some of your readers could give an explanation. Many outstanding faces were missing.

Also Freethought being a progressive movement, don't you think it would be a great advance at World Union conferences if they used an international language like Esperanto? It would certainly help in a better understanding and relationship amongst fellow Humanists and Freethinkers. If fellow Freethinkers visited an Esperanto Conference they would see a vast difference, no headphones, microphones, interpreters, translators, with no misunderstanding through misinterpretation.

My wife and I have lost a great friend and helper in the death of Mr Bradlaugh Bonner of which I heard on the morning of the Conference in Freethinking Office, while visiting. Also many thanks on the change of aspect of FREETHINKER, good to have woman's point of view, and more success to your pen.

Durham.

G. SWAN

### Wartime experiences

TOM PRICE'S article about his experiences as an atheist in the British Forces during the last war and J. A. S. Nisbet's comments thereon remind me of an experience I had while in the RAF in 1943 at a station in the Midlands. When I joined up in 1939 I described myself as "C of E" to the station sergeant, although I had been a Freethinker since 1927, since I did not believe that Atheist was recognised in the Forces as a "religious" category. One day in 1943 I was informed that a RAF padre had paid a visit a few hours before to the orderly room, had asked to see the list of the religious denominations of the personnel on the unit, and, when he reached my name, had said "I am sorry for that man". I enquired the reason why, and was told that by the side of my name was the letter A, signifying that I was an atheist. How I came to be thus described I never found out. I do not recall ever discussing such matters with anybody during six years of war; one never did but I wish I could have assured the "sky-pilot" that he was wasting his sympathy!

Haslemere, Surrey.

EDGAR M. KINGSTON