

FREETHINKER

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

FOUNDED 1881 by G. W. FOOTE

Friday,
December 30, 1966

A TOAST TO THE NEXT HUNDRED YEARS OF THE NSS!

IN TWO DAYS' TIME the National Secular Society starts on its second hundred years. Even so, 1966 has not just been a year of patting the old man on the back and asking him what it was like in the days of Bradlaugh. It has, like all other years, been a year of activity with plans for the future. I write as an ordinary member; someone who, although by no means in love with organisations, is full of admiration for those who keep them going for little or no reward. And in my view, if you rely on organisations (as we all do) to fight for you, then they deserve as much of your support, time and energy as you can afford.

Whether members of the NSS call themselves Secularists, Freethinkers, Rationalists, Humanists or whatever, they know what they are expected to support. It is some years since I started qualifying my own Humanist label with "Secular", for I have a very strong disinclination to be linked philosophically with, say, the Roman Catholic Archbishop of Liverpool, the Most Rev G. A. Beck, who approves of the "higher education, technology and humanism" found in the "prosperous countries of the West". Nor with John Wren-Lewis, who (with a Jesuit Priest) proposed the motion, "that this House believes in God" at the London School of Economics. He and the Archbishop of Canterbury and the Bishop of Woolwich all insist, of course, that they are "humanists". Nor do I want to be patted on the shoulder by Christians who mince, "But Jesus was a Humanist too, dear, . . ." Any society that would satisfy their reported beliefs is "out" as far as I am concerned.

While wanting an "open society" and "co-existence" in which religious people are free to worship any way they choose, the only really democratic state is, in my view, a secular state. There would be no point in joining any association whose policy failed to deter people who, as members of religious organisations, automatically obstruct progress towards my kind of state and society.

Details about the NSS are printed this week instead of "News and Notes". I believe that the society could do worse than to approach other Humanist organisations with these principles and Immediate Objects, and ask where

they disagree. By such a process of elimination we might find out what *they* stand for . . .

To be honest, the image of the Rationalist Movement after the war was gloomy, especially for women. To join would have been rather like entering an all-male Turkish bath full of hot air. Not that there haven't been eminent women in the Movement. Margaret Knight, who made secularist broadcasting history in 1955 (the year she joined the society) has always made it quite clear that *her* Humanism was secular and "scientific". But having recently condemned name-dropping, I shall not start now. The NSS is not short of VIP supporters; what matters is the amount of time, publicity and dedication which our eminent men and women can give, and in this the NSS is particularly fortunate. You have only to read this paper and the Centenary Brochure for evidence of this.

The society has an excellent record of providing information to the self-educated (rather than to the intellectuals) but it now reports that the largest groups in its increasing membership are of lecturers, teachers and then of students. I only wish it had as many housewives and mothers! This is something the society must consider most seriously in 1967; how to reach the thousands of women in this country who still do not know about the existence of organised Secular-Humanism.

The NSS knows that it is not enough just to knock the churches and the Bible, the Pope and the parsons. Although (as Margaret Knight put it) "if you have a diseased appendix removed, you don't ask 'but what can I put in its place?'" just because of the churches' enormous wealth and opportunities, they have been able to provide services which must (until or unless taken over by the state) be matched in some degree by similar secular-Humanist services, from adoption to community welfare. Our Agnostics Adoption Society is a beginning, but to do anything at all we need money—lots and lots of it, and that has to come from you; that is, if you want people to be able to adopt babies, find companionship, and so on without professing a religious faith.

The NSS has fought an important battle for secular education over many years, with packed public meetings and informative literature. Christianity, we say, should be taught in the home, churches or Sunday Schools, and not in the form of indoctrination by the schools. The NSS doesn't lose such battles; if they haven't yet won them, then the fighting goes on. Who would have thought 100 years ago (when Secularist birth control pioneers were being persecuted by the churches) that Bishops would now be calling contraceptives a "gift from God".

Frequent and responsible Press Releases have brought the society into the public eye. We can no longer be

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ignored, and it is always encouraging when serious motives and efforts are taken seriously, as ours now are. Another important field which demands a great deal more activity (and perhaps a Secularist Committee) is broadcasting. There must be constant pressure and lobbying and requests for the right to share the air and screen with Christians. This links up with the concern of the NSS for the arts and for cultural life in our society.

The NSS of course supports such projects as the Rensburg School in Bechuanaland, the anti-famine project in Bihar and the Humanist Housing Association. It has fought on too many fronts to mention, from education, abortion, homosexual and divorce law reform to the attack on the Sunday Observance laws, and it is active wherever bigotry, injustice or obscurantism dribble their poison into the bloodstream of our society.

I am not personally enamoured of rallies and wreath-laying. By nature I am also a non-grouper, and I suspect there are better ways of contributing to and being recognised in local community life, but many NSS groups have done excellent work and also provide the ground for social life and discussion. NSS leaflets and literature are not only distributed at its own public and society meetings, but are made good use of by other Humanist organisations.

The Society doesn't go in for window-dressing. It doesn't wrap up faint hopes into glossy promises or big headlines. It has not yet had an expensive Sunday paper advertising campaign, and I have no idea whether it will. But its pur-

pose, energy and achievements should not be under-rated. If you cannot give money, then at least if you can, give your support by talking to others so that they may have the opportunity to help where you cannot. The NSS is in dedicated, enthusiastic and responsible hands. It has, I believe, what John Wren-Lewis (in another context) has called the "self-confidence that removes the temptation of paranoia", and those looking for a persecuted minority to tag on to must go elsewhere. But the NSS cannot stay healthy and grow large except by constant effort. If you claim to shun militancy, don't forget just how militant the churches are, or the fact that the inertia of so-called friends can often turn the necessarily militant into the unnecessarily aggressive.

When Swinburne wrote his *Hymn of Man* he referred to the "Lord God of tyrants" with his name written in "hell-fire"; he wrote "thy death is upon thee, oh Lord" as if any god had been real and living and was thus capable of death. But the hymn ends

"And the love-song of earth as thou diest
resounds through the wind of her wings,
Glory to Man in the highest! For Man is the master of things."

This is the spirit behind the whole Secular-Humanist movement, and the National Secular Society is one of the tools that Man has created and needs for the "mastering". Heres to its second hundred years!

And a very healthy and happy and active New Year to you, too . . .

SUBMISSIONS ON DISESTABLISHMENT

The following has been issued by the National Council of Civil Liberties.

THE ESTABLISHMENT of the Church of England (and to a lesser extent of the Church of Scotland in Scotland) is a historical survival which may or may not have been justified throughout the period in which it gradually came into being but which, in our submission, involves limitations on accepted freedom which make it inappropriate today. These limitations may be summarised as follows (though the list is not exhaustive):

- 1. Public Office Holders:** Her Majesty the Queen is obliged to be head of the Church of England in England and of the Church of Scotland in Scotland without regard to personal dictates of conscience. Though the matter has been disputed recently by Roman Catholic lawyers, eg, Mr Norman St John Stevas, it is generally assumed that the head of the legal system (excluding the Sovereign), viz the Lord Chancellor, is unable to be a Roman Catholic.
- 2. Public Privileges and Disabilities:** The House of Lords comprises mainly hereditary members, but they do not in theory represent particular ideologies which may influence them in their legislative functions, with the exception of the two Archbishops and twenty-four Bishops who compose the Bench of Bishops and have often introduced doctrinal considerations to debates and votes. Conversely, Anglican clergymen are—despite the opinion of a vicar who recently claimed they were automatically members—unable to sit in the House of Commons, even if elected, and if also barristers lose their right of audition in secular courts. Anglican chaplains are automatically appointed to State institutions like prisons and the armed forces. They also attend upon most mayors. The Archbishop of Canterbury crowns the Sovereign, and all State and many civic

occasions are conducted under Anglican auspices, whatever the wishes of the public figures and officials involved. The Archbishop of Canterbury has many *ex-officio* appointments, eg, as Trustee of the British Museum, where he is able to exert Anglican influence on non-Anglicans. As many Anglican clerics hold offices of profit *ex-officio* under the Crown, it is also pertinent to point out that women are debarred from such offices owing to sacramental views on ordination. Insofar as this concerns the internal ministrations of the Church it is no concern of this Council, but since establishment gives an official status to this form of discrimination, it is a matter of concern to us. These various *sequelae* of establishment are in our submission contrary to the spirit and intention of Articles 2 and 21 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

- 3. Church Courts:** In our plural society it is unjust that private disciplinary and adjudicative bodies should have the powers of ordinary secular courts. Anglican consistory courts enjoy the full majesty of the law, and may subpoena, apply to the High Court for committal for contempt of court, and enjoy absolute privilege. Whether or not justice is done it is not always seen to be done in these courts. The case of the former vicar of the Ascension, Balham, in 1961 provoked unfavourable comment inside and outside the Church. Subsequently the Ecclesiastical Jurisdiction Measure has been passed. It has removed certain anomalies, but from the point of view of the Council it leaves two startling anomalies, the absence of a proper jury system (the assessors provided are not quite the same thing) and of access to State Legal Aid (the Church Legal Aid offered is not obligatory) and introduces a new anomaly, absence of appeal to the secular courts. Just after the Balham case, it was brought to light how non-Anglicans can be caught up in consistory court proceedings other

than by subpoena or contempt. An invitation to protest at an extension to Digswell's twelfth century parish church was issued and responded to innocently by local artists. They found themselves cited as plaintiffs in a consistory court case instead of witnesses in a public enquiry, as they had expected. Naturally they lost the case and had to pay £137 costs. More recent cases involving the former church of St Chrysostom's, Southwark, and the former rector of Spaxton have suggested that there is still grave public doubt about the procedures in Church courts.

4. State Intervention in the Affairs of a Voluntary Body: Despite establishment, the Church of England is still a voluntary body and is regarded by most of its members as such. Yet it is unable to change its formularies and forms of service without approval by Parliament, which may be neither sympathetic nor interested. Often this involves merely vexatious delay, but there have been occasions, notably the 1927-8 Prayer Book issue, when Parliamentary approval has been withheld to the grave injustice of Church members and clerics who wished to adopt the revised liturgy. Higher Church dignitaries like Bishops or Deans are appointed by the Queen on the advice of the Prime Minister, who may be of any or no religion and acting according to political considerations. You will recall the outcry from local churchmen at the time of the Guildford appointment. It may, for all we know, have proved an excellent choice, but it certainly justified an accusation of State intervention in the affairs of the Church. Similarly, certain of the Church Commissioners for England—diocesan Bishops, Church Estates Commissioners, leading Judges and other officers of state and four layman nomin-

ated by Her Majesty—are Crown appointments directly or indirectly.

5. Indirect Results: Originally Anglican protestations were expected of all citizens. As enforcement broke down, non-Anglicans were tolerated, but had second-class citizen status. Gradually civil disabilities were lifted from Non-conformists, Roman Catholics and Jews, but they tend to remain for those who are agnostics or atheists. Though Christianity is not, in high theory, part and parcel of the law of England, establishment of a Christian denomination creates the impression that it is. In this way Christianity has a special place in the 1944 Education Act (not in its wording but in its operation) and the broadcasting acts that have set up religious broadcasting departments and allotted time on the BBC and ITV. Similar presuppositions underlie Admiralty Regulation 1827, the 1958 Adoption Act, and appointment in the youth, prison, probation and nursing services.

We are now sure that, however much you may regret the relative rise of other Christian denominations, the influx into this country of members of the world's great religions and the steady rise of religious unbelief, you recognise that these irreversible trends are in operation and would be loth to coerce citizens against their conscience into Christian protestations in general or Anglican observances in particular. With disestablishment of the Church of England the direct disabilities outlined above would disappear and the indirect injustices would gradually be eliminated. This would, we submit, give new freedom and self-awareness to the Church of England, and social justice to those outside her communion.

LETTER TO A BROTHER

A Freethinker reader was grateful for this letter, and has given the Editor permission to publish it.

Dear Jim,

Thanks for your letters. I think that you have very little chance of recovering your faith. Once you start thinking (like an intelligent human) instead of believing (like a superstitious idiot) you can't reverse the process. I've met a lot of people who are now Freethinkers or Humanists who were originally religious, and once they start questioning their beliefs and using their own brains for a change, there is no turning back.

I think there are basically two types of people in this respect; one type likes authoritarian rule and dogmatic statements. They want someone to tell them what to think, and what to believe, and they don't ask awkward questions or think for themselves. The other type is basically sceptical. They keep asking questions, they don't accept other people's views, they think for themselves and are usually unpopular with the ruling establishment who prefer the "sheep". The first type make good Catholics, Communists, Nazis, Royalists, etc. The second type usually end up as heretics, or hard-headed, bloody-minded, nonconformist individualists; they don't like the idea of being brain-washed to conform to someone else's pattern.

I don't think you'll ever return to religion wholeheartedly. Some people find it a comfort, of course, a crutch to lean on. What I like about it are things like old churches, some church music, church bells and so on. But these are things that could just as well be secular. Music such as Handel's "Messiah" could be regarded as man's aspiration in life and not necessarily religious.

What I detest about religion is that it makes people *believe* in whatever dogma they happen to be in favour of, instead of encouraging people to *think*. The only thing that has got people above the level of nonsensical superstition is intelligent, rational thought. If you think about such things, you will see that the individuals who came up with new ideas on all kinds of human problems were almost invariably in conflict with the established authority of the churches, and, after suffering persecution and delaying tactics, they were proved right. And eventually even the churches had to accept what was generally held to be right. If you look at the whole scope of human activity you will see that at one time the churches controlled thought on nearly everything, astronomy, medicine, economics, biology, physics, ethics and so on. However, people like Copernicus, Galileo, Darwin, Newton, Einstein, Lister and Pasteur discovered what the universe was really like and why things happened. Consequently the church has had to withdraw from areas where it obviously couldn't maintain its position in the face of indisputable experimental evidence.

Now the church restricts its field of activity to supernatural and ethical considerations. I think that where it is doing harm now is in making people feel like crawling sinners instead of being proud of being human. It generates a lot of guilt regarding sex, and takes a very reactionary stand on issues such as birth control, euthanasia, divorce and so on. The churches' attitude to sex is weird. Take the natives of Hawaii: before the missionaries went there they enjoyed mixed bathing in the nude, and thought

(Continued on page 415)

PRINCIPLES AND OBJECTS OF THE SECULAR SOCIETY

SECULARISM affirms that this life is the only one of which we have any knowledge, and that human effort should be wholly directed towards its improvement: it asserts that supernaturalism is based upon ignorance, and assails it as the historic enemy of progress.

Secularism affirms that progress is only possible on the basis of equal freedom of speech and publication; that liberty belongs of right to all; and that the free criticism of institutions and ideas is essential to a civilised State.

Secularism, affirming that morality is social in origin and applications, aims at promoting the happiness and well-being of mankind.

Secularism demands the complete separation of the Church from the State, and the abolition of all privileges granted to religious organisations. It seeks to spread education, to promote the fraternity of all peoples as a means of advancing universal peace, to further common cultural interests, and to develop the freedom and dignity of mankind.

MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION

To the Secretary, NATIONAL SECULAR SOCIETY,
103 Borough High Street, London, SE1.

Accepting the Principles and Objects of the National Secular Society as printed above, I hereby apply to be admitted as a Member.

Name

Address

Telephone

Occupation

Date

This declaration should be sent with a subscription.

Beyond a minimum of Five Shillings per year, members are left to fix their own subscriptions according to their ability to support the cause.

Members' subscriptions date from the 1st January. New subscriptions paid after 30th September are accepted as being for the following year.

Banker's Order Forms obtainable from Head Office.

IMMEDIATE PRACTICAL OBJECTS

The promotion of peace between nations, the substitution of arbitration for war in the settlement of international disputes and the countering of militaristic propaganda, leading to the recognition that modern war is futile and can only bring about the ultimate destruction of civilisation.

The secularisation of State propaganda, and the provision by the BBC of adequate facilities for the expression of minority opinions on matters of public interest.

The abolition of the Blasphemy Laws, in order that Religion may be discussed and debated as freely as other subjects, without risk of fine or imprisonment.

The Disestablishment and disendowment of the State Church.

The abolition of all Religious and Political Tests and Disabilities in schools and colleges, municipalities, parliament, the Judicature and all Public Services.

The abolition of Religious Teaching and Worship, and the introduction of objective, evolutionary and scientific instruction, in schools and other educational establishments supported by the State; and their removal therefrom of all clerical control and influence.

The opening of all publicly-owned educational institutions to pupils and students irrespective of wealth, position or class.

The Sunday opening of State and Municipal Museums, Libraries and Art Galleries, Parks and Playing Fields; and the abrogation of all laws interfering with the free use of Sunday for purposes of culture, recreation and entertainment.

A reform of the Marriage Laws, especially to secure equal justice for husband and wife, with a reasonable liberty and facility of divorce.

The equalisation of the legal and economic status of men and women, so that all rights may be independent of sex distinctions.

The strengthening of the law protecting children from all forms of violence and cruelty and from the exploitation of their labour.

The abolition of all privileges based on hereditary, racial and colour distinction, fostering a spirit antagonistic to justice and human brotherhood.

The improvement by all just and wise means of the conditions of daily life for the masses of the people in all lands, especially in towns and cities where insanitary and incommensurable dwellings and the want of open spaces cause physical weakness, disease and the deterioration of family life.

The upholding of the right and duty of labour throughout the world to organise itself for its moral and economic advancement, and of its claim to legal protection in such combinations.

The elimination of the idea of punishment in the treatment of offences against the law; the abolition of capital punishment; the prohibition of corporal punishment in all prisons, reformatories and other places of detention; and the introduction of humane treatment for those convicted of offences against the Civil or Military Law.

The humanisation of the treatment of the insane, the abnormal and the mentally defective, and the protection of the latter against economic exploitation.

The extension of the moral law to animals, so as to secure for them legal protection against cruelty, including all types of blood sports.

REMINDER !

Have you made sure of next year's FREETHINKER ?

If you have not already done so—

ORDER NOW !

THE invitation to contribute "Definitions of Humanism" is **now closed**. The Editor will "sum up" on January 6th.

THE SOLEMNIZATION OF MATRIMONY

David Collis

THE SILLINESS symbolized by the Church of England Solemnization of Marriage is emulated by the silliness of those who participate in it.

"I A, take thee B, to be my wedded husband, to have and to hold from this day forward, for better for worse, for richer for poorer, in sickness and in health, to love, cherish, and to obey, till death do us part, according to God's holy ordinance: and thereto I give thee my troth."

Now consider the following. A loves B because A is at present in state p and B is in state q and A's reactions to B are cde. B loves A because B is in state q and A is in state p and B's reactions to A are fgh. But neither A's nor B's state is static. A is perpetually changing and so is B. Likewise their reactions to one another change. Now some people change less than others, some more than others. And even where A and B change considerably their reactions to one another may still be such as to permit the feeling of love. But this much is certain. Although A and B say "I will love you in two, twenty, forty years' time", they cannot *know* that this will be so. Indeed there is no certainty that they will love one another at all some time in the future. Thus, for two people to promise that they will love one another "till death do us part" is rank stupidity.

However, we must not judge too harshly the millions who go through this mumbo-jumbo. They are taught from early years to say what they do not mean and to affirm what, on sane reflection, they would deny. Maudlin emotion usurps sound reason and the damage is done.

A curious model for brides

Even internally, and judged apart from the realities and confirming experience of everyday living, the Church of England Solemnization of Matrimony is a little silly. Consider this passage which is solemnly uttered during the ceremony: —

"O Eternal God, Creator and Preserver of all mankind, Giver of all spiritual grace, the Author of everlasting life: Send thy blessing upon these thy servants, this man and this woman, whom we bless in Thy name: that, *as Isaac and Rebecca lived faithfully together*, so these persons may surely perform and keep the vow and covenant betwixt them made, and may ever remain in perfect love and peace together, and live according to thy laws: through Jesus Christ our Lord."

Now read from the 27th chapter of the Book of Genesis.

"And it came to pass that when Isaac was old, and his eyes were dim, so that he could not see, he called Esau his eldest son, and said unto him My son: and he said unto him, Behold here am I. And he said, Behold now, I am old, I know not the day of my death. Now therefore, take, I pray thee, thy weapons, thy quiver, and thy bow, and go out to the field, and take me some venison; And make me savoury meat, such as I love, and bring it to me, that I may eat; that my soul may bless thee before I die. And Rebekah heard when Isaac spake to Esau his son: and Esau went to the field to hunt for venison, and to bring it. And Rebekah spake unto Jacob her son, saying, Behold, I heard thy father speak unto Esau thy brother, saying, Bring me venison, and make me savoury meat, that I may eat, and bless thee before the Lord before my death. Now therefore, my son, obey my voice, according to that which I command thee."

Most of you know how this oft told story finishes, how Rebecca dresses Jacob in such a way as to deceive Isaac into mistaking him for Esau and consequently conferring his blessing on his younger instead of his eldest son.

Now I ask you. Did Rebecca live and deal faithfully with Isaac, her husband? Does it make sense that she should be held up to women as a great example of how to love, cherish, and obey, in sickness and in health, till death do them part? She knows her husband is ailing and near to death. At a time when any loving woman would have given him the support he needed, she deliberately and with malice aforethought sets out to deceive her husband and act directly contrary to his known wishes. Was this an act of love for her husband? Was this her means of cherishing him? Can even Christian sophistry turn this utter disobedience into obedience? She misappropriated his wealth. She made a mockery of his physical disability. The "better or worse" part of her conjugal obligation she interpreted as making it better for Jacob, but worse for Esau and her husband. But all this means nothing to the professional MC, as he calls on Eternal God, Creator and Preserver of Mankind, to

"send thy blessing upon these thy servants, this man and this woman, whom we bless in thy Name: that, *as Isaac and Rebecca lived faithfully together*, so these persons may surely perform and keep the vow and covenant betwixt them made, and may for ever remain in perfect love and peace together, and live according to thy laws".

Our infinite capacity for being stupid

Do the sacred stories of the Holy Bible mean nothing to this priest? Do they mean nothing to the man and woman about to be pronounced husband and wife? Must all three make a moment of important contractual agreement a moment of high farce? Do good sense and verbal integrity mean nothing to them? That this should be the way in which two otherwise thinking human beings should wish to embark on a period of living and loving together never fails to astound me. Fortunately my astonishment temporarily subsides when I remember that animal man still has an infinite capacity for being stupid.

Long live (though where I do not know) the late departed Archbishop of York, who in 1912 said "The State has already departed in its marriage legislation from the principles of the Church. But these are principles which the Church cannot surrender, for they are laid upon its loyalty by the Lord himself". He was at least more consistent than those present-day paid ecclesiastics of the Church of England, who, on the one hand, say that the *Book of Common Prayer* principle of marriage is no longer reasonably applicable to all and sundry, yet, on the other hand, connive at and actively participate in the musty mumbo-jumbo with all and sundry would-be wedders who seek enjoyment in this overplayed charade.

I conclude simply by saying that such dishonesty and hypocrisy as is displayed throughout the length and breadth of this land every week of the year will be continued as long as dishonesty and hypocrisy are fostered by the enforcement of religious worship in our schools, as long as the Church of England remains an established pillar of the State, and as long as our civil registrars' offices remain as bleak and dispiriting as many of them are.

Postscript. Since writing this article I see that the Association of Municipal Corporations suggests that to simplify legal requirements marriages should become civil functions. Where desired, the civil function could be followed by a religious ceremony. If this suggestion becomes practice there are good grounds for believing that registrars' offices would be speedily made more attractive.

IDEAS FOR YOUR BOOK TOKENS

Ruth Samuel

The Moon and Two Mountains by Pedro McGregor (Souvenir Press, 25s).

PEDRO MCGREGOR traces the development of magic and spiritualism in Brazil since the coming of the slaves from Africa. It is fascinating to read how Roman Catholicism and magic underwent a marriage of convenience at this time; Portuguese law and social structure adapting themselves to the new situation so that slaves were encouraged to practise both Christian and their own magical rites. There are some lengthy and involved descriptions of negro cults which can only be of interest to those who have a particular inclination to study magic rites; these are by no means simple or straightforward in their derivation. Like every other form of religion they are bound up with myths and legends which are allied, as always, to the social and geographical background of the participants. The book also traces the story of the development of spiritualism in Brazil. One cannot help but be interested, however sceptical, in the apparent success of current Brazilian mediums. Literary masterpieces have appeared and medical cures have taken place which defy the understanding of man, assuming that their apparent authenticity can be supported. These stories hold plenty of human interest and will appeal to anyone with a mild curiosity for the more exotic aspects of religion; at times the text is repetitive and long-winded, at others surprisingly lacking in detail. One wonders how much the author has seen and how much is mere repetition of reports. If the book is trying to persuade us to believe in the phenomena, it is unconvincing; but it does hold interest for those fascinated by the magic of magic.

David Reynolds

World Religions: A Dialogue by Ninian Smart (Pelican 1966, 4s 6d).

MR SMART has set out to contrast the beliefs of the six most popular world religions, by devoting his book to a conversation between a Christian, a Jew, a Moslem, a Hindu, a Cingalese Buddhist, and a Japanese Buddhist. He succeeds in giving a good overall picture of their complex views, which all appear illogical to different degrees. However, he attempts the impossible by endeavouring to reconcile these widely diverging and largely ill-founded doctrines. The Christian above all is constantly trying to find tenuous similarities between such concepts as the Christian "god" and the Buddhist "nirvana". A futile task and as the Jew remarks, "I'd like to hear a bit more about your disagreements".

The book is further restricted by the necessity for each religion to have only one spokesman at this "great debate". Mr Smart is thus forced to discuss only those topics on which all members of the individual religions are agreed.

How much then does this book establish? It merely gives a good picture of certain beliefs of these people and contributes nothing to the controversy, which is raging in the world today, the split between believers and non-believers. If a secularist and an agnostic had been included in the book, and the discussion could have been somehow extended to the more material views held by these participants on such subjects as war and birth control, Mr Smart's clever treatment, namely a dialogue, could have produced a most interesting book.

Charles Hennis, MA(Cantab.)

Paul, The Man and the Myth, A study in the authorship of Greek prose, by A. Q. Morton and James McLeman (Hodder and Stoughton, 35s).

"THE likelihood is that Paul's experience and his interpretation of it were his own, and neither in content nor in expression capable of being a pattern for the ordinary Christian."

Paul was, of course, obsessed with the idea of the *parousia*, the belief that Christ would come again during the lifetime of his generation to punish the wicked and the heathen—the great majority—and to reward the very small minority of Christians—the good. After the death of Paul, when the harsh reality of the executioner's knife showed that Jesus apparently was in no hurry to leave his heaven to reward his followers, this *parousia* was conveniently postponed to the end of the world.

All this makes Paul's theology completely unreal, and, therefore, as the writers of this book point out, there are only "two forthright intentions in reading Paul's letters"—one is to obtain an understanding of the kind of man he was; the other is devotional—for those who believe that his writings were somehow directly inspired by God.

This relegates Paulinism to the historian and to the credulous. It is surprising therefore that the greater part of this book, instead of developing this thesis is given up to ingenious but in-

conclusive methods of demonstrating, on a mathematical basis, that Paul wrote only five of the fourteen letters attributed to him in the New Testament. It is highly likely that some of the so-called Pauline Epistles were not written by the man we know as Paul but they still maintain the dogmas that run through these letters such as natural depravity and justification by faith.

As "A study in the authorship of Greek prose" the book has a certain interest but the amount of space given to the importance—or, perhaps more correctly—to the lack of importance of Paul today is disappointingly small.

The number of readers therefore to whom this book will appeal will be very limited.

G. L. Simons

THE nineteenth century was rich in reformers. And not surprising. Most of the injustices and privations introduced by the Industrial Revolution still remained, and gave ample scope for enlightened men. In England many people, children included, laboured under deplorable factory conditions, lived in slums, and had short life expectancies. The franchise was heavily restricted and social services virtually non-existent. Abroad—in Ireland, India, Africa and other countries—British oppression of colonial peoples was terrible and enduring.

Many of the reformers were atheists or agnostics (see, for example, Joseph McCabe's excellent *The Social Record of Christianity*). The Established Church was very poorly represented; the non-conformists did a little better, in particular the Quakers. One of the most significant of the Quaker reformers was John Bright (1811-1889). His qualities and limitations clearly emerge in Herman Ausubel's *John Bright, Victorian Reformer* (John Wiley, cloth 45s, paper 23s).

John Bright was active in the Anti-Corn-Law League (with Richard Cobden, who later pressed him to stand for parliament). Bright saw the need for cheap bread, which was prohibited by the Corn Laws. At this time he argued with the Chartists, seeing free trade as a greater priority than an extended franchise, factory legislation and other measures; later, without becoming a Chartist, he espoused such causes.

He became an MP for Manchester, lost his seat and stood in Birmingham. Later he became President of the Board of Trade, resigned through ill-health, re-entered Parliament and became Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster. He lost two wives.

In his later years Bright supported an extension of the franchise, factory reform, state education, the disestablishment of the Church of England and restriction of the Second Chamber. He detested colonial oppression. Significantly, as a Quaker, he opposed the war propaganda which accompanied the onset of the Crimean War. These efforts earned him the comment from *Punch*—"JOHN BULL disclaims all and every connection with JOHN BRIGHT, alias JOHN MUSCOBRIGHT". Throughout his life he attacked the aristocracy and landowning classes. More oddly he opposed the extension of the franchise to women, believing it would undermine the family.

He admired America with its "democratic" institutions, but detested slavery and was pleased when the North became committed to its abolition. Of the negroes, he said they were people "made black by the very Hand that made us white". He also opposed capital punishment, preferring banishment, for the worst crimes.

Ausubel's biography is clearly written and well-documented; but it is a "small" book. To my mind Bright is drawn in isolation, too divorced from the parallel reform threads that ran through the century. There is nothing of the growing Labour movement, and too little description of the injustices and miseries suffered by ordinary people throughout the land. The author's candour is refreshing; he is well aware of Bright's shortcomings and sense of failure. I feel the book serves as an introduction to Bright and Victorian society, but for my money I would want something deeper.

Bright himself was typical of the reformers. He took a number of selected issues and tried to exert an influence for improvement. But he had no systematic view of society. His understanding of social phenomena was largely in terms of current personalities, rather than in terms of a scientific grasp of the motive forces behind social change. He was plagued by ill-health and easily discouraged by political failures and other reverses. But though John Bright was not perhaps a great man, he was clearly impressive.

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

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

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THE FREETHINKER, 103 BOROUGH HIGH STREET, LONDON, S.E.1.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Items for insertion in this column must reach THE FREETHINKER office at least ten days before the date of publication.

National Secular Society. Details of membership and inquiries regarding bequests and secular funeral services may be obtained from the General Secretary, 103 Borough High Street, London, S.E.1. Telephone: HOP 2717. Cheques, etc., should be made payable to the NSS.

Humanist Letter Network (International): send s.a.e to Kit Mouat, Mercers, Cuckfield, Sussex.

OUTDOOR

Edinburgh Branch NSS (The Mound)—Sunday afternoon and evening: Messrs. CRONAN, McRAE and MURRAY.

Manchester Branch NSS, Platts Fields, Car Park, Victoria Street, Sunday evenings, 8 p.m.: Messrs COLLINS, DUIGNAN, MILLS and WOOD.

Merseyside Branch NSS (Pierhead)—Meetings: Wednesdays, 1 p.m.: Sundays, 3 p.m. and 7.30 p.m.

Nottingham Branch NSS (Old Market Square), every Friday, 1 p.m.: T. M. MOSLEY.

INDOOR

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 LIEF, "The Rights of Animals".

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.

LETTER TO A BROTHER

(Continued from page 411)

of the body as beautiful and natural. But what did the missionaries say about these innocent activities? They said that nudity is evil and sinful and dirty and wicked and nasty. They must cover themselves up and feel guilty and ashamed. Some Catholics even take their baths wearing a sort of apron, so that they won't see themselves; did you ever hear of anything so stupid?

To sum up: I don't believe that there is a God (if there were, what sort of a half-wit could he be?) We are here on our own, and the best way to improve things is to do it ourselves and not to appeal to supernatural intervention. The best way to understand things is by scientific experiment, not by clerical intuition. People achieve their best by using their full faculties of thought and imagination, not by being brainwashed into believing some ancient superstitious nonsense. Further, I think that people reached their greatest heights when religion was least influential. Take the Greeks; their religion was very tolerant and easy-going, and they excelled in philosophy, mathematics, ethics, art and sport. Do you think they could have amounted to much if their religion had regarded thinking as a sin?

Christianity is one of the worst religions because it is extremely intolerant; more intolerant than any other religion, it even persecutes other Christians. It is also far more materialistic and power-hungry than most other religions. I think you will find that people have prospered and progressed in inverse proportion to the power of the church (look at England under Elizabeth I compared to the rest of Europe).

I seem to have rambled on a bit. I don't often discuss religion, and I tend to let fly a bit when I do. I'm only expressing my own views, not trying to convert you. Everyone can Hail Mary all day and kneel down all night for all I care, so long as they leave me alone. I wish that we had had a more liberal intellectual upbringing at home. I don't think the old man was very religious, but he hadn't the sense to think about it, and Ma was mildly religious as are so many middle-class housewives, so I never thought much about it until I was getting on. If I had been exposed to more ideas, I could have found out what I really thought twenty years sooner, and consequently been much more sure in my mind what I really felt. As it is, I have spent half my life being confused by the conflict between what I thought and what I was supposed to have thought. Never mind, I got there and I'm happy with my outlook.

If you feel a bit as I do, read a few books by Bertrand Russell and get a Humanist journal. You may be surprised at the half-formed thoughts that you have that other people can put into words.

This gospel according to Saint Robert may not appeal to you, but I enjoyed trying to knock that self-perpetuating institution, the church.

All the best,
BOB.

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.

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LETTERS

Mr Collins replies

TO RECEIVE "honourable mention" in two consecutive copies of the FREETHINKER (the first in large type) is pleasing—and embarrassing. My thanks to "Birmingham Branch Member" whose suggestions and efforts we might all emulate, and Michael Gray. But my efforts cannot compare with those of Mr Geo. Woodcock, who, until age and bronchial trouble compelled his resignation, was for 15 years or more, Literature Secretary to Manchester Branch. He rendered yeoman service, travelling to Manchester four days a week, where on various pitches he built up a steady sale of the FREETHINKER and Pioneer Press and RPA literature, and made many members. "George" lived, and loved, Free-thought—where shall we find his like again? There are no "medals for martyrs" (and George has had his share of that) or "plums for propagandists" in the Freethought movement. We give because we want to give and the reward is in the giving. To offer a reward to such a man would be an insult—the Branch therefore did the only thing it could do, made him our first Honorary Life Member.

Reverting to the Northern Humanist Conference at Swanwick my good friend Mr J. McCarthy (President, Manchester Humanist Society) suggested I should bring some FREETHINKERS and NSS literature. They also had a stall and we both did good business. The Toc H held their Conference at the Heyes Conference Centre at the same time—their delegates outnumbering us by 5 or 6 to one. And many of them bought the FREETHINKER and other Humanist and Secular literature for the first time—I hope some seed fell on fertile soil.

In conclusion, a minor correction. There is not a Stockport Branch of the NSS at present although I believe there was some years ago. When I joined the movement some 45 years ago I was living at Prestwich (some four miles north of Manchester) and joined the Manchester Branch.

W. COLLINS

In defence of cynicism

FROM the first half of D. L. Humphries letter I was afraid he and I—and perhaps others—were not speaking the same "language". However, by his further explanation, he is quite clear about the modern usage, and I wonder why he thinks we should attempt to alter that—it is not the only word that has changed its meaning—and in this case, a most important word and meaning for an all too common failing.

I don't know enough about Beatniks to include them, but intelligent and could-be influential people so often mark themselves as quite useless to help any cause by their cynical reflexes. In some circles it can raise a laugh or seem clever, but it becomes a habit that cripples mind and body—inertia.

A suitable case for personal discipline.

JIM LITTLE

Commemorative stamps

DAVE SHIPPER in a recent article (Nov. 4) drew attention to the fact that the United States has yet to issue a stamp commemorating Thomas Paine, an individual to whom it owes as great a debt as to Washington. Early this year the philatelic press both in Britain and abroad carried a note to the effect that the United States postal authorities did intend to issue a Paine commemorative. Enquiries made by the Thomas Paine Society in this country and the United States brought a confirmation of the announcement, though modified in that the stamp was to be a definitive rather than a commemorative issue. So far the stamp has not appeared, and we have been unable to obtain from any official American source an indication of just when it will be put on sale. The long delay has caused some suspicion that unseen and unheard parties may be trying to have the issue suppressed; we can only hope such thoughts are without foundation.

R. W. MORRELL

Secretary, Thomas Paine Society.

Request for article about the Scrolls

BEING a new reader of FREETHINKER I take this opportunity to tell you how impressed I am with your articles. May I suggest we have, an article on John Allegro, his findings and conclusions on his Dead Sea Scrolls research, and his reasons for turning his back on Christianity.

E. ROBERTS

[Am hoping (and trying) for this too.—Ed.]

Sexless pronouns

MR STREIT pleads for the introduction of a sexless pronoun. It is noteworthy that Ido, the elegant reformed Esperanto, uses *Il* for *he*, *El* for *she*, and *Lu* when indication of sex is unnecessary.

HENRY MEULEN

I'M AFRAID Mr Charles Doran's "proof of the cause of source of aggression" isn't quite as convincing as he thinks. No doubt the outlook of the capitalistic gentlemen disclosed in the article he quotes is a bad one. But one thing seems clear. These people who are anxious that the war in Vietnam should continue, seem to realise that, in spite of what they want, it might not. They fear that "tentative projects may fail to receive a green light": they think there might be "a cessation of hostilities in Vietnam". If the capitalists were the people who really caused aggression, as Mr Doran hints and as the Marxists assert, they wouldn't be worried about "cessations of hostilities"—they would know there wouldn't be any!

Mr Doran says "... the big Imperialist powers will discover plenty of reasons to save a 'backward' nation from 'the horrors of Communism'. The British practised that for 300 years". May I point out that Communism in its present form hasn't been in existence for three hundred years. And if capitalism is the cause of aggression can Mr Doran explain Russian aggression against Hungary in 1956?

There are plenty of reasons for opposing "capitalism"—though the expression is a bit inexact and rather out of date now; "private ownership" is more accurate. But if you want to get rid of an evil it's vital you should understand its real cause. The real cause of aggression is National Sovereignty—the fact that the world is divided into different nations, that there is no World Government. And the reason why we can't get World Government is that certain people won't recognise the truth, keep leading us off after "red" herrings, blaming the wrong things for it and making it impossible to get a really up-to-date outlook on politics. This is the way the Marxists have helped to make it more likely that an H-bomb comes down on us any minute.

I. S. LOW

The Lord Willis v Legerton Debate

MY admiration on the occasion of the Lord Willis v Legerton Debate went to Ted Willis and Bill McIlroy. The former of course is a practised speaker, and the latter although called upon in the absence of Lord Sorenson, made at very short notice an admirable chairman, acting with skill and under the circumstances, great restraint.

Would John Shepherd have preferred to have Bill McIlroy adopt (which to me) was the ranting style of Mr Harold Legerton?

Considering the large numbers of LDOS followers in the hall, I don't think the Secularists did too badly. Those who spoke were logical and to the point, more likely to impress an impartial listener. They have nothing to be ashamed of.

(MRS) SARA MULLER

I DON'T KNOW why John Shepherd snipes at Bill McIlroy, who was chairman of the meeting, for tending "to bend over backwards to be fair to the opposition, instead of putting Legerton in his rightful place". This was a debate, and a chairman must be fair to both sides—as McIlroy was. Right from the start he made it clear that he would be fair, whatever his personal feelings were—and very firm. If he had deviated, he would have had a near-riot on his hands that would have done no good to the National Secular Society as organisers of the event.

The meeting shook me—I had never realised that in this scientific age there could be so many, serious supporters of Sunday observance. The effect on me was astringent, for I did not assess the LDOS supporters there as representing only a small bunch of cranks who could be ignored (as I had previously thought them to be). I hope we can realise that atheists have a lot of hard work to do—which is not helped by lectures on our alleged apathy nor on petty and untrue attacks on our General Secretary.

London, SW7.

CHRISTOPHER BRUNEL

Secular-Humanist Ethics

I WAS very interested in Isobel Grahame's article with which I agree, especially the exclusion of the word "love"—altruism is much better and with kinship "all men are my brothers" is sufficient for an ethical basis. Am very glad to hear she is going to write books for children. I am very depressed at the number of religious thinking writers who are doing this.

LILIAN MIDDLETON

A duty to vote?

I. S. LOW maintains that people like J. A. S. Nisbet are ruining British democracy by not voting; what rubbish. For many years I have not voted as we have only two representatives, and both are equally bad in my opinion. Surely the right not to vote is as important as the right to vote?

ROBERT DEWAR