

FREETHINKER

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UNWANTED—UNBORN—UNHURT

ON Wednesday, February 22nd, the Commons Standing Committee on the Medical Termination of Pregnancy Bill decided by a large majority to retain a provision permitting an abortion where there is a substantial risk that if a child were born it would suffer from such physical or mental abnormalities as to be seriously handicapped. Mr Abse, a great humanitarian politician, made a passionate plea *against* this provision and based his opposition on personal experience concerning one of his own children.

On the same day the House of Lords debated the social and legal position of the illegitimate child. Opening the debate, Baroness Summerskill said that to discriminate against illegitimate children was to punish them for a wrong of which they were not guilty. "Reform should be based on the principle that all children are of equal value, and that they should be granted all the rights and privileges which their innocence merits." The Bishop of Exeter supported her. He said that the law, by regarding the illegitimate child as legally fatherless, contributed to dissatisfaction and unhappiness in the child's life.

The two debates, the issues, the views of Mr Abse and the Bishop of Exeter are not unconnected. It is interesting to note that the Bishop of Exeter, who, one assumes, does not base his support of reforming the illegitimacy laws on such intimately personal experience as Mr Abse bases his opposition to the aforementioned provision for abortion, is being impassionately reasonable in this instance whilst Mr Abse is being passionately unreasonable. Thus, for once, a pillar of the Established Church supports the alleviation of human misery whilst a humanist with considerable general concern for the welfare of others opposes a move for the mitigation of unhappiness.

Mr Abse's case is broadly this. In some circumstances out of every four births one child might be handicapped. He questions the right to kill off the three who are not handicapped. During the committee debate he said, "If I had listened to some people I would not have had my eldest child. He was born prematurely and, although in fact he has some minor handicaps, he is blessed with an

exceedingly high intelligence quotient. In fact his handicaps, as he gets older, are diminishing each year." He went on to say that many people could be denied the happiness he was receiving from his children.

I suggest to Mr Abse that the operative word is *could* and that this is an issue where one must take the broad rather than the narrow view. The first point is that in such a case as Mr Abse has cited, the mother-to-be would not be *compelled* by the provisions of the Act to have the foetus aborted. The second is that whilst a handicapped or initially unwanted child *may* bring happiness to one mother in one set of circumstances the birth may bring *unhappiness* to another mother in another set of circumstances and, in addition, unhappiness to the child who, as an aborted foetus, would not have experienced the misery he may now have to endure. One cannot legislate for the unknown. One can legislate for the known. It can be known, at a certain point in time, that a mother does not want the foetus to become a baby whom she will have to support for many years. And it can be known, at a certain point in time and in certain circumstances, that there is a substantial risk that the foetus will develop into a deformed, handicapped baby.

One point which opponents of abortion tend to overlook is the enormous number of illegitimate and unwanted children who are healthy in mind and body and *alive*. In this country there are many thousands of so-called illegitimate children. Some of them do not have the adequate care of the mother, some of them are with foster parents, some of them are in orphanages, many of them do not know their father. All are in the eyes of the present law sub-standard citizens. Their low social status does not dispute one fact. They *have* been born. They *are* alive. Many of them are quite healthy in mind and body. They could be happy. But they are not accorded the circumstances in which that happiness may be realised.

What is needed is far less emotion about ten-week old foetuses and far more concern about living children. There are millions of children alive today, in this country and elsewhere, unwanted, ill-fed, ill-clothed, ill-loved, desperate for affection, desperate for happiness, who are the third-rate citizens of this world. To hear some opponents of abortion one could be pardoned for thinking that in their eyes the first-class citizens are those who have not yet been born and who are as yet mere appendages of pregnant women.

It is true that prevention of unwanted conception by effective contraceptive methods is far preferable to abortion. But sometimes the tenacious little spermatazoa get past the guard and the dilemma develops. The dilemma is more easily resolved with straight rather than crooked thinking. Surely what is immoral is to allow an unwanted

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foetus to become an unwanted child when there are already alive so many unwanted children wanting to be wanted. Better to terminate the life of a thousand fetuses who will thus experience neither happiness nor unhappiness, neither pleasure nor pain, than that one living child should unnecessarily continue condemned to an existence in which he or she is unwanted, uncared for, unloved. If the world were faced with depopulation to an extent which threatened the extinction of the human species, the matter might be different. However, the world is faced with over-population and already suffers from a nauseating surfeit of hell-living, misery-ridden children whom nobody wants.

I sympathise with Mr Abse on this sorry aspect of life or death. But I am convinced that the adoption of his advocated action, or rather lack of action, would cause more suffering than it would allay. I too speak with some personal feelings of the issue involved. I was an unwanted child conceived, so the legend goes, in the heat of passion north of the border. My mother was kicked out of house and home when her irate parents learned of their wayward daughter's pregnancy. She travelled and travailed with her unwanted load to the impersonal metropolis of London where pain bore me a Cockney within the sound of the Bow Bells. Passion does not desert so quickly those whom

she has fired and a few months after my birth, so the legend continues, my mother became pregnant yet again and yet again was troubled by another unwanted foetus. Twenty-nine years ago the law insisted the unwanted bastard be born and it insisted he be born a sub-standard citizen. It forbade the bastardly foetus to be aborted by the doctors of the State in a State hospital and it forbade the State to pay my mother £100 so that she could join the privileged rich in Harley Street and there have an end put to the regrettable affair.

Of course I realise that, had the present Medical Termination of Pregnancy Bill been born into the House of Commons as law some thirty years ago, my end might well have been different. Unwanted I would quite probably have been unborn and unheard. Being sentient and selfish I am glad I arrived on dry land before the onrushing tide of progressiveness and humanitarianism overwhelmed me. But one happy story does not invalidate the unhappiness of many of my generation who, born unwanted, still feel unwanted. Some of them are miserable cabbages disenchanted with life but incapable of finding the courage to terminate their living wretchedness. For such unwanted bits of unhappy flesh it were better had they been unborn and, most important of all, un hurt.

SOME POINTS ABOUT JOSEPH McCABE

R. W. Morrell

IT WAS good to see that the twelfth anniversary of the death of Joseph McCabe did not pass unnoticed in the FREETHINKER. McCabe gave the better part of his life to the cause of rationalism and provided a large number of important works that secularists cannot have but found of great value. It is regrettable that many of the best are now out of print and difficult to locate secondhand.

McCabe was described by the anonymous writer of his *Times* obituary as "a pillar of Rationalism as a way of thought and a movement in this country". Yet he was more than of just national importance for he lectured extensively abroad and for many years co-operated with the American publisher E. Haldeman-Julius (of Little Blue Books fame). This co-operation saw the publication of a stream of important little works and even for a time a *Joseph McCabe Magazine*.

I never had the privilege to hear McCabe speak or debate but from all accounts he was first rate. The published accounts of some of his debates make very interesting reading and his opponents found to their cost that he not only read his own side but was equally at home with theirs. The late Douglas Dewar, who made great play of being an evolutionist converted to anti-evolutionist, debated evolution with McCabe and later published an account which left McCabe's side out. Dewar claimed that McCabe put up such a poor show (and as the book is still in print the claim is still made) that he "refused" to allow his part of the debate to be published. However, in a McCabe letter I own he sets out his reasons (which I have not seen in print) as being that Dewar wanted to fully revise his side while leaving McCabe's untouched. Naturally McCabe refused to agree to this one-sided treatment and would not permit his side of the debate to be published.

In so far as I remember without checking my copy, the FREETHINKER published McCabe's last article, "A Sick Man Looks at Life", while his first after leaving the Roman Sect appeared in *The Agnostic Annual* for 1897. This article has provided a slight bibliographical puzzle for the date of the *Annual* is given as 1897 while the article

reprinted with additions was published by Watts bearing the year of publication as 1896. This makes the reprint appear before the original publication. The only answer to this seems to be that the *Annual* also appeared in 1896. It has often puzzled me to find that McCabe published so little in the FREETHINKER, and I think that the answer to this lies in the strong willed character of both McCabe and Chapman Cohen, the Editor for so many years of the paper. In a letter I recently acquired, Cohen makes some rather strong criticisms of McCabe and casts doubt on his ability as a scholar. Reading between the lines, so to speak, it would seem that a conflict of character did exist and thus explain why really so little of McCabe's work did appear in the pages of the FREETHINKER.

I do not accept the validity of Cohen's criticism of McCabe's scholarship and suggest that anyone who has read McCabe's more detailed works could not do so either. McCabe was no scientist in that he made original contributions to our fund of knowledge. However, he was very important as a populariser of science, in particular of evolutionary studies and such people are certainly required. In the field of history on the other hand McCabe certainly made important contributions, but as many of these were not favourable to the orthodox history of the Christian Church's rôle in the past they are conveniently overlooked.

The time will come when McCabe obtains the wider recognition he deserves and even now it cannot be disputed that his works are essential reading if a really good insight into religious history as also the history of the Rationalist movement is to be obtained. His two volume *Life and Letters of George Jacob Holyoake* is about the best work on this great figure, while his *Biographical Dictionary of Modern Rationalists*, which has been criticised on grounds of too general a classification, is almost a must—if one has the good fortune to locate a copy for sale. Finally there is his famous *Rationalist Encyclopedia*, a work that many will have found invaluable. It is a great pity that this fine work was allowed to go out of print and it is to be hoped that one day it will be revised (essential in the case of its scientific data) and re-published.

GOD AND VIETNAM

F. H. Snow

SOME READERS of this article will probably take objection to my mentioning God in connection with Vietnam. They may or may not be Christians; they may be Humanists or Agnostics, some of whom are not very distinguishable from our believing friends. I can imagine them asking: "What has God to do with Vietnam?"

Well, as the deity of the American forces, with Cardinal Spellman as their vicar; of the Hitler-admiring South Vietnam dictator, and as the alleged creator of all the combatants, the Lord of Heaven can hardly be cold-shouldered out of concern with the South-East Asian war.

Were I, as in young manhood, a believer in the reality of God, I would visualise him watching the grisly business, though I would not be worried by his doing nothing about it. I wouldn't expect any more manifestation of his might on behalf of the burned, blinded, tortured, homeless and bereaved, and for the prevention of further suffering from the effects of bombs, shells, liquid fire and the other hideous agents of agony and death employed in Vietnam, than he has manifested on behalf of the victims of prior wars and butcherings. I would have long since hatched up justifications of his inertia, in face of the most terrible occurrences, and closed my mind on the matter. "What has God to do with Vietnam?", I would righteously ask.

But my tone is probably too sceptical for the *soi-disant* secularists who favour mild 'dialogue' with those whose main aim is our conversion into virtual fellow-travellers along the obscurantist road—whose vital need is to take the sting out of rationalist propaganda, keep the masses ignorant of atheism's unanswerable case, and so perpetuate religious belief. Why bring God into the Vietnam picture? Who else, if he be indeed Above—real, compassionate, mighty beyond comprehension—could compel a stoppage of the maiming and slaughter?

Don't let us ask why he doesn't. That smacks too much of atheism. Nobody asks such questions these days, except old-fashioned rationalists. Criticism of God's ways is in bad taste, evidence of his works unnecessary, and controversy on the subject profitless. It's not 'done' to exacerbate believers by challenging their deity's literality, nor impute to him any obligation in human events, however dreadful.

Unfortunately for the patrons of sophistical religiosity, quite a lot of people persist in being unfashionable. They decline to have their thinking patterned for them and push God into the limelight of logical reason. These people vexatiously insist that if he were not just an Idea, and possessed the attributes his worshippers claim, he would have the will and power to halt the Vietnam horror. It would be simple for the maker of heaven and earth, the destroyer of Sodom, the preserver of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego in the fiery furnace and of Daniel in the lions' den, these hateful atheists assert. He wouldn't have to side with either belligerent; he could just immobilise the warring forces. With guns, flame-throwers, all the instruments of devastation unable to function, God would need do nothing more. Not only the contending armies, but the whole world, would be stunned into recognition that a supernatural hand had gestured, that God was no mere object of worship, and that the reign of violence and cruelty was over.

But I am again expressing myself unfashionably. One shouldn't talk of absurdities. It is wiser to ethicise. That way one does not hurt the feelings of Christians, and one escapes the charge of flogging the metaphorical quadruped of sceptical controversy, which they have tried so hard to

kill. They would hate to think that the animal has a chance of survival—still more that it could recover health.

I believe that to be so. There is a considerable body of people who believe, moreover, that the old horse can be so revitalised as to kick to pieces the edifice of superstitious belief. Our experience is that acquaintance with the sceptical viewpoint stimulates the critical faculties, submerged by childhood indoctrination, of most folk, and kindles their interest in rational argument. The Churches' deadly fear of direct attack on their doctrines; their shirking of discussion with secularists, save those of the tepid kind, except under conditions loaded against challenge of their fundamental beliefs; their anxiety that the Press and broadcasting authorities shall keep their virtual stranglehold on the throat of Freethought, affirm the potential of the 'dead horse' they and their non-Christian friends accuse us of vainly beating.

That Vietnam is none of God's business, in the view of those who proclaim him the almighty arbiter of human affairs, is characteristic of the twisted thinking that defence of the indefensible entails. God has to be associated with nothing that can expose him to the analysis of objective logic, and his worshippers are strongly concerned with keeping the matter of his authenticity, and that of their religion, in uncontroversial obscurity. Our indomitable aim, as truth lovers, must be to drag it into the open.

It is essential to the realisation of humanist ideals—the abandonment of force in the settlement of national and ideological conflicts; the recognition of the right of all peoples to enjoy their own way of life and to pursue their legitimate aspirations; the abolition of want through the development of the earth's resources in the common interest; the full employment of rational thought for reform of autocratic institutions and the removal of the archaic and oppressive restrictions on the liberties of individuals and communities imposed by the Churches—that the sky ghost be definitely laid.

The case for the supernatural must be brought to the people's forum. It must be adjudicated in open court. It must be made incumbent on the advocates of the god that skulks beyond the blue, to furnish evidence of his reality before the supreme judge, Reason, with the great public, from whom sceptical opinion has been sedulously screened, as jury.

The religious have no illusion as to what their verdict will be.

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NEWS AND NOTES

THE FATHER McCABE affair continues to trouble the Roman Catholic Church. Father Kenelm Foster, who was the censor of *New Blackfriars*, has been relieved of his post on orders from Rome. Father Foster's misdemeanour was that he allowed Father McCabe's editorial ("the Church is quite plainly corrupt") to reach the presses.

However, the Vatican is not having it all its own way. Roman Catholics have organised a pray-in at Westminster Cathedral for tomorrow, Saturday, March 11th, between noon and 6 p.m. This is part of the protest against Father McCabe's dismissal from the editorship of *New Blackfriars*. A leaflet issued by the leaders of the protest movement sets out the point of the pray-in. In part it reads:

"We ask you to join with us in a day of voluntary fasting and abstinence in reparation for sins against justice and love committed in particular within the Roman Catholic Church, and for which we are all responsible. On this day we especially ask you to remember those who suffer for conscience's sake."

More trouble

FATHER ARNOLD McMAHON, who recently gave notice of his intention to marry, has clerical company on the celibacy issue. Mr Malcolm Tudor, former assistant priest at St Michael's Church, Merry Hill, Wolverhampton, has given up holy orders because he does not agree with the Church's rule that priests must be celibate.

Humanism in schools

IN THE HOUSE OF COMMONS, February 23rd, Mr David Kerr (Wandsworth Central, Labour) asked the Secretary of State what proposals he had for introducing into primary and secondary schools courses in the principles

of humanism as an alternative to religious instruction.

Mr Crosland replied that Sections 25 to 29 of the Education Act, 1944, laid down certain requirements about religious instruction in maintained schools. He had no power himself to dictate what should or should not be included in the school syllabus.

Religion in schools

THE MEETING at Caxton Hall on February 10th was a great success. Now that all the press reports are in, two rounds of applause must go to two people who received little press mention but contributed largely to the success of the occasion. David Tribe was first-class as chairman. And William McIlroy, General Secretary of the National Secular Society, worked very hard behind the scenes—as usual I should add.

NSS Essay Competition

THE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE of the National Secular Society invites members and non-members to submit essays on the subject "HOW TO PROMOTE THE INTERNATIONAL FREETHOUGHT AND HUMANIST MOVEMENT". These will be judged by a panel of five, and there will be one prize. The following rules will apply: (1) Essays of 1,500 words typed on quarto paper or written legibly on foolscap, double spacing on one side of the sheet. (2) All entries must reach 103 Borough High Street, London, SE1, not later than Monday, May 1st, 1967. (3) The winner of the competition will receive a prize of £10. If in the judges' opinion none of the entries are of a sufficiently high standard to merit an award, none will be made. (4) The judges' decision will be final and no correspondence will be entertained. (5) The copyright will be vested in the Executive Committee of the National Secular Society.

THE CHURCH MICE COULD HAVE TOLD HIM . . .

Oswell Blakeston

THE BISHOP had wanted certain papers, and so the priests had hired a certain man to get them. But he had been caught, and he had been thrown into a dungeon where one screaming captive could leave a thousand ghosts behind. Yet the bishop's men had rescued him. It was the bishop's promise and boast: if you worked for the Church, the Church would look after you. Many men who had been employed by the bishop had been snatched from the cruel hands of their captors and then spirited away from the city into safety beyond the reach of the local magistrates. It was known to have happened, and it made it easy for the bishop to find men to do for him things which should not have been done. It gave the men a special daring, and their daring was the weapon which made the bishop invincible in intrigue.

What courage the rescuers had shown, what ingenuity! They had seemingly walked the prisoner through stone walls; and they had brought him, in the early hours of the morning, to a room with a fire and a woman who gave him soup. It was good soup, but the woman looked frightened as if she were for ever watching for the Evil One who might come and kneel on her chest. She was not anxious to talk.

"I have heard", she admitted, "that in the morning you will make your escape from this hiding place with the bishop. No one will dare to touch you, when the bishop himself is at your side."

It was strange, but how could he question the plans of one who had engineered his escape from gaolers who were capable of picking up live coals to throw them at a cat?

And then the woman fell asleep by the fire. The man could not sleep, for he felt that he could never rest again until the bishop had smuggled him out of the town.

In the morning, the chill wind of fear still honed itself against the man's cheek, although the room was airless. Then the priests came and told him that the bishop was waiting. He was to walk a few paces behind His Eminence, behind the splendour of His Lordship's presence. So the small procession marched through the empty streets, and the man knew that eyes were watching from the windows; and when he glimpsed a face at a casement, he thought that the eye-sockets of the watchers were filled with rice.

In the cathedral, they led the man to the stair which wound down to the crypts. He faltered, and the bishop spoke to him: "My son, your troubles are over". The man tried to stammer his thanks, and the prelate silenced him. "It is now known", he said softly, "that once again I have performed the impossible; yet now I cannot risk the chance of your being recaptured, my poor fellow." A priest drew from his robes a long, thin sword. "Although you did not bring me the papers," the bishop said sadly, "I will forgive you, my son. You have served a purpose. You have provided me with another opportunity to prove that I do not abandon men when they are in dire need. I promise you that Father Ignatius is an expert swordsman. Your death will be painless."

In the silence, the church-mice seemed to clamour. So this was what had happened to the others who had been "saved": saved by the Church meant . . . saved for nothing!

SEX AND THE LAW

A. C. Thompson

PARLIAMENT, in 1959, enacted the Street Offences Act to prohibit prostitutes from soliciting on the streets, although it has refrained from making criminal either prostitution itself, or fornication or adultery. Thereafter, one Shaw provided a service in the form of a book or magazine sold on news-stands, called the "Ladies' Directory", in which prostitutes advertised their services, with their addresses, descriptions and photographs. He was prosecuted under the Obscene Publications Act and the case went on appeal to the House of Lords.⁽¹⁾ His defence was that since such publication was not specifically forbidden by this or any other Act, he had violated no law. He was found guilty not only of obscene publication, but also of "conspiracy to corrupt public morals". The view taken was that, regardless of statute, the dictum of Lord Mansfield of 1774 which the House dug up, bound the court, as *custos morum* to restrain and punish what is *contra bonos mores et decorum*. These phrases, used as substitutes for reason, overawe the gullible into an impression that Latin expressions which mean nothing more than their equivalents in plain English indicate some sacrosanct, inviolable principle existing from antiquity.

This judicial injustice, perpetrated upon Shaw with no more valid reason than personal aversions and Latin phrases, has caused logical difficulties. What is morality, that it is not to be corrupted? Is it to be whatever the courts say it is? Should not criminal acts be precisely defined so that one can know beforehand what acts are criminal and what are not? It is held that an act is immoral which "offends public feeling". Why should this cause it, or indicate it, to be wrong? Is it the alleged offensiveness to some people that makes the act wrong, or is the offensiveness merely a prejudice resulting from custom? The idea that morality is no more than custom (Austin's conception of law) was that of ancient Greek Sophists who said that we call things good because they please us or the majority of people, and truth, ethical conduct, government and law are matters of individual opinion and self-interest. Common law is essentially custom.

The proprietor of an art gallery⁽²⁾ was fined £20 for exhibiting paintings which displayed male and female sex organs, on the ground that they were "offensive". But an autopsy, refuse disposal, or even changing a baby's nappy may be offensive to some people; are they therefore criminal? The male sex organ is shown on Greek, Roman and much modern sculpture and is not objectionable; why is it wicked to paint it? Would the Utilitarian principle of the greatest balance of happiness justify fining one person £20 or confining him in prison in order to protect another from a moment's disgust? Why should anyone feel disgusted by any part of human anatomy? Why sanctify such disgust with law and legal proceedings?

Surely we need a rational basis for sex morality; and I venture to propose here three principles for clarification of the legal aspects of sex.

First, every human being should have a natural right to mate and reproduce and voluntarily to choose or accept the sexual partner. Society therefore has an obligation to permit marriages and to protect its members against rape and other sexual assault, although it may restrain institutions persons who, by reason of insanity or criminality, menace society. A society has no defensible right to forbid sexual stimulation of its members, particularly of those who enjoy such stimulation.

Second, society has an interest in the sexual activities of

its members in so far as the survival of society depends upon the reproduction and care of its new members of the next generation; and there is no other justification whatever for the law's regulation of love and sex. Indeed, the morality of all human conduct is based ultimately upon the universal ethical principle that society must survive. Hence, the duty of the law is to fix responsibility for the care, rearing and education of the children which are an indispensable necessity for the propagation of society. If it is the parents, rather than the state, who are to have primary responsibility for children, then society must demand that sexual unions be openly declared and recorded, and births also, so that neither parent can evade the care of the child; and since human children require for their maturation a substantial portion of an adult lifetime, society can not tolerate irresponsibility in begetting children.

It is the survival of society, and not custom, which must form the basis of all morality. Customs, in this view, are practices which the experience of humanity has found roughly effective in preserving society. People cling to customs without knowing why they do so because their very existence indicates that they are practical. But changing conditions render customs impractical. Two great changes make it necessary to re-examine and perhaps to alter ancient sex customs in the modern world. The first of these is the increase of population which is beginning to crowd the earth; the second is the availability of contraceptives which prevent the pregnancy which was once the rather inevitable result of sexual intercourse.

In ancient times, humanity was sparse, and the defence of a society against enemies required increase of population. Throughout the Bible, it is a disgrace for a woman to be barren. Sexual perversions, such as homosexuality, enable one to gratify sex desire without producing a baby, and society is cheated of another member; hence the ruler would proclaim laws against such practices, the priests would damn them with violent curses and the literature would contain stories about Sodom and Gomorrah⁽³⁾, and Onan struck dead by God when he withdrew and spilt his seed⁽⁴⁾, and a feeling of revulsion would be engendered among the people. In the present day, there does not remain the same reason for prohibiting perversion to those who want it.

The third principle is this, that there are known three possible forms which society may take for the propagation of children: the monogamic, the polygamic, and the free-love forms.

Consider first the polygamic form. This is the practical form when there is grave inequality in the numbers of men and women, eg, when large numbers of men have been killed or captured in war. In such societies which need as much population as possible to be either soldiers or soldier-breeders, it is the duty of everyone to propagate, and it is the duty of the man with many wives to impregnate all of them, playing no favourites. But when society contains equal numbers of men and women, polygamy becomes unjust, for as Kant observed, if a man has two wives, each wife has only half a man. It is unjust, further, because if some men have more than one wife, other men are sexually deprived.

In the free-love type of society, the law recognises promiscuity and not the family. Fathers generally would not care for their children; in fact the true father of most children could not be known. Children would be cared for

by the State and would be deprived of the benefits which fathers bestow on their children. The male population would be taxed for the support of all children, for many females would be caring for them instead of doing productive work. It would be just as expensive for men, but a man would support everybody's children rather than his own. Recent psychological research shows that institutionalised children progress slower, physically and mentally, than children who grow up in families with the love of both parents. It has long been known that "gifted" children do not come from institutions, but from families. Mothers especially may be dissatisfied with a free-love type of society and demand a family type.

If society is based on the monogamic family, all sex laws must be based on it. Here, for example, is a key to the law of bigamy which has been a puzzle to so many jurists. If a man leaves his wife and children, lives with another woman, has children with her, supports her and in all respects lives with the second family as husband and father, without divorcing the first wife, he violates no law; but if he has a ceremony of marriage with her, he commits the crime of bigamy and is liable to imprisonment. In the first case, he offends individuals and it may be, if all circumstances were known, justifiably; but if he commits bigamy, he strikes at the very structure of monogamic society. He seeks to destroy the legal foundations upon which the monogamic family is erected.

In a monogamic society, fornication and adultery are immoral, but it is not practical to declare them illegal, for want of suitable sanction, which does not also punish the child. Law differs from morality in that it is enforceable by a penalty. The customary penalties of fine and imprison-

ment, if applied against illegitimate parents (there exists no illegitimate child—this concept has been an error of law through the centuries) would impede the rights and the care of the baby, who is innocent, and even unusual punishments such as public whipping produce a shame which is adverse to the child's welfare. If illegitimacy is to be penalised by nothing more than social disapproval, it seems unreasonable to punish fornication or adultery which does not result in childbirth.

Freethinkers face the task of saving our morality from collapse by analyzing and upholding natural, rather than inadequate supernatural bases of ethics. It is certain that as long as we live in society, we do need an ethical principle to guide our social relations. This principle can be found in the simple formula that the morality of all conceivable human acts is based upon and can be judged by the standard of the survival of society. In the religious world, morality is now disintegrating. Everywhere people are asking, "If religious morality must go, what can take its place?" The challenge is to the Secularists to provide humanity with a rational morality standard based upon the nature of man and of society rather than on the spiritism bequeathed by prehistoric man.

In the next issue of the FREETHINKER, I shall indicate "A Solution to the Sex Problem".

REFERENCES

- (1) *Shaw v Director of Public Prosecutions* (1961) 2 AER 446 (1962) AC 220.
- (2) Robert Fraser Galleries, paintings by Jean Dime, 27 Nov. 1966.
- (3) Genesis xviii, 20; xix.
- (4) Genesis xxxviii, 9, 10.

UNHOLY REFLECTIONS

HOW nice it must be to boast of parents who saw to it that you went to Sunday school to be taught the lessons of the Church. What one must have lost in not listening to the vicar preaching moral values. How awful not to have been given the hand of God.

My inter-war years were not spent at Sunday school. In fact my council school saw too little of me according to the school officer. Dodging as many school days as possible, months away through illness; more time away for hop-picking; all this gave me rest from brain fag.

There were other forms of (self) education. Listening to the bugs racing over the wallpaper—the marks that were left after my kill taught me the value of life. Telling the rent geezer, Mum said she's out, was the art of diplomacy. Eating the wonder breakfast of stale bread, warm water and condensed milk was an education in economy. Watching Mrs Francis cry near an empty food cupboard must have been an affirmation of humanity. Feeling the cold and wet pavements of West Ham, London, with the aid of my hole-in-the-sole boots was a denial that 'London's streets are paved with gold'. I could have drowned Dick Whittington and his cat. There were no 'O' levels for such an education. Its syllabus was free to all who trod the path. It was an utter disgrace to Britain and its leaders. Whether it was Westminster Abbey, Big Ben or the free soup of the Salvation Army.

The friendly trams

The friendly trams of West Ham Council would pass my dirty bedroom and light up the stinking world around. My world of question. My whole being wondering as the pubs closed and mouths opened to sing away the horrors around them.

Arthur Francis

My friendly trams chased a few more years away. I became a devoted reader of *The Magnet*, twopence every Saturday. How I loved the antics of Harry Wharton and Co. Billy Bunter and his greed warmed the bottle of cheap pop that passed my smiling lips. Greyfriars School and the little gentlemen versus Burke Senior School, London, E13, and the *enfants terribles*. No prayer to Jesus could have given me more hope.

I did have religious lessons at school. I sang with the other sheep of the Lord. Playtime came. We sang in unison. 'Ow coo blimey, sale-vation army, flying up to 'eaven in a cornbeef tin'.

More years passed. The stupid trolleybus drove my tram from the gutter. Society demanded I worked. Boys of fourteen were wanted. Married men with children to keep were too expensive. My first ten shillings earned were grand. Eight and six for the old lady left me one and six for a Saville Row suit and a night out in the West End. The Lord shall provide.

Hitler raved 'Mein Gott'. Christians collected TNT in the name of Him. The murder began. London was visited by the 'queer' Herr Göring. Strange, food and work became of some importance. 'Freedom' shouted the politicians, who before could not see any further than Number Ten. It was a blessing for Mum. Her troubles were blown away October 10th, 1940. Some of the scrap iron we had exported to the Fatherland had been returned free of charge. Five of the family were caught in that shelter. I missed it by going to another one. But it did not make me hate the Germans. I had become a man who had lost things he never wished to see again. And thank goodness the bug population has diminished in many of our lives.

LETTERS

Irresistible urge

TWO articles in the FREETHINKER of January 20th have filled me with an irresistible urge to write this letter.

The first is "A Survey of my Belief", by Gregory S. Smelters. It is very probably the fact that I was brought up as a Methodist, and still have many Methodist friends, whereas he was apparently brought up as a Roman Catholic, that causes me to be astounded by one or two of his clauses.

"Christian ritual is a savage survival of witchcraft". There is very little ritual in the Methodist Church, or any of the other non-conformist churches which I have attended. "Christian ethics belongs to a society of lords and slaves". This is completely untrue of the Christian ethics I was taught. "... sacrifices to him and his priests are futile, barbaric survivals." I was completely unaware that they had survived, being under the impression that the last sacrifices in any way connected with Christianity were those made by the Jews in their Temple, some two thousand years ago. And we do not have priests in non-conformist churches.

The second, and to my mind much more valuable and thought-provoking article is that by A. C. Thompson. Clearly he understands that clergymen are not deliberately endeavouring to propagate a lie. He realises that when they enter the ministry they really believe in the truth of the doctrines of their church—which ever of the various sects it may belong to. And he shows a genuine sympathy with the dilemma of those who later realise that they can no longer believe. I feel that it would be a good thing if all Humanists, Secularists, and other Atheists would note, and try to remember his words: "No doubt about it, clergymen are good men: they try to accomplish rectitude, they encourage others to do what is right, they are a potent influence for morality. It may be that the world is better because of them".

Then he goes on to consider the future rôle of the clergy and the churches, in a paragraph concluding with the sentence, "The good which the church does could be done (without religion)—without belief in spiritual beings, without post mortem sanctions".

I have enclosed the words "without religion" in brackets, for it is in this paragraph that Mr Thompson comes nearest to an idea which has been stirring in my mind for some time, but is not yet clearly formulated.

Briefly, so far as I have yet worked it out, it comes to this. Belief in supernatural beings arose in the very earliest days of man's existence, as an attempt to explain all sorts of things which are nowadays clearly explained by science, and particularly to explain things of which men were afraid. Hence gods were beings to fear, and also, as man had no other way of visualising them, he modelled them upon himself. So we find the Jewish God Jahveh, in the earliest Bible stories, an autocratic, vindictive, and bloodthirsty person. But gradually the best of the prophets of Israel invested him with more and more good moral characteristics until, even before the time of Christ, he had become barely recognisable as the same God. Christ's chief contribution would appear to have been his insistence upon love, the fatherhood of God, involving the brotherhood of man, and the fact that love of one's fellowmen, and reasonable (rather than conventional) moral behaviour were of far greater importance than public prayer, ritual, and sacrifice. Hence, in spite of the fact that dictionaries still define religion as a belief in a supernatural being to whom one owes obedience, I would maintain that all the items which Mr Thompson lists in the passage beginning "they could fulfil an important social function, encouraging morality, bringing comfort to the afflicted..." and so on, are all vital parts of religion.

And I would go further, and maintain that as science has made it more and more unnecessary, or even impossible, to believe in a supernatural God, these things have become the most important part of religion. There is a great deal of truth in Mr Thompson's statement that "In religion, devotion to truth is not to be tolerated. One must swallow the dogma entire, and for the whole of his life..." But it is not absolutely true. Through the centuries, religious ideas have changed, and at no time, I should imagine, have they changed more rapidly and radically than they seem to be doing at present. There are still many stubbornly immovable supporters of orthodox doctrines, and even those who would have us go backwards to beliefs which liberal Christians gave up years ago. But many modern theologians seem to be moving steadily in the direction of atheism, if they have not already reached that point. I sometimes wonder whether Humanists should not attach themselves to some of the less reactionary churches, and help to encourage this movement, so that these churches could continue and perhaps even expand the good work which they undoubtedly do, while abandoning their belief in fairy tales, and the somewhat rigid attitudes which they still adopt in some fields. But I can see

that there would be great difficulties in such a project. Nevertheless, even if we cannot go as far as that, I think we would do well to consider co-operating as far as possible with such churches, instead of assuming that all Christians deserve the condemnation implied in Mr Smelters' article.

A. O. DAWSON.

Religious belief not universally beneficent

I WAS extremely interested in the article by somebody whose childhood had been blighted by the environment of Welsh Methodism. It is interesting to recall that such is often the effect of religions of various kinds and that it is one of the potent arguments for the resisting of the view that religious belief has been universally beneficent in its social results. In the same way, it is interesting to notice the effects of religious belief upon personal character. In the convinced devotee, it may well breed a personal fanaticism making against tolerance and understanding. But the most objectionable characters are those who accept it as a convention when the original fire of conviction has died away.

F. H. AMPHLETT MICKLEWRIGHT.

The joy of living

IN ANSWER to P. P. Commelin's letter (Jan. 20th). Why, if death is not a tragedy, are such tremendous efforts made to keep us alive and every discovery made to lengthen life greeted with applause? Some old people are mourned more than the young. I am 84 and have had a long, enjoyable and I hope useful life, but I am sorry to go. I would like to live to 100 (if I thought I could do so without becoming senile), and to see all the exciting things that are going to happen, but I know I shall not. However, it has been said the last enemy to be conquered will be death. It would be nice if we could take it literally, as the doctors are trying to do. When P. P. Crommelin is 84, perhaps he will think differently, if still *compos mentis*, about the tragedy of death.

With regard to N. J. Teape, if a God is not almighty, I don't see how he can be a God. What is he worshipped for? If it is for being a kindly, loving Father then he is only on a par with a lot of other people. If his powers are not unlimited what exactly is the limit?

LILIAN MIDDLETON.

BOOK REVIEW

David Tribe

I HOPE people are continuing to buy **Richard Dimpleby, Broadcaster** (BBC, 10s 6d). when it first came out this year it attracted considerable interest from the sad death of its subject and the donation of all profits to the Richard Dimpleby Cancer Fund. For this reason and the fact that it is a must for all students of broadcasting and of considerable interest to the general public, the book should command a steady sale.

Dimpleby had become the embodiment of Establishment before he died. Yet his origins were far from true blue. His father, for many years political correspondent of the *Daily Mail*, fell out with the paper over pre-war attitudes to fascism and withdrew to the modest field of the family local papers. For economic reasons Richard had to go from Mill Hill public school into the family business instead of into surgery, his lifelong ambition. His first application to the BBC was turned down because he wasn't a graduate, and even after his appointment as topical talks assistant he was for some years not quite "in". In the News Talks Section he was "Bumble".

When he did find his idiom he rose quickly and soon learned to present the Aunty image demanded by Lord Reith. But friends and associates said that he never lost his personal charm and kindness, and something of this was already showing through in his later broadcasts when the BBC had assumed its new look, socially conscious, warm-human-smile-from-anchorman aspect. He still had a more unctuous way of saying "Her Majesty" than even Wynford Vaughan Thomas, but few save the jealous or the incompetent could fail to be impressed by his mastery of detail, his clarity, his poise and his endurance. I was one of those who knew of his courage in carrying on as before while undergoing treatment for cancer. (It was a fairly open secret yet, as far as I know, never leaked to the public; and showed the press in a warm light only too rare in that most wintry of professions.)

In technical terms his achievements could hardly be rivalled. He was first: BBC news observer, civil war broadcaster, BBC war correspondent, airborne reporter of the bombing of Berlin, witness of the horrors of Belsen, correspondent to enter defeated Berlin, Coronation television commentator, weekly anchorman, live broadcaster across the Channel, through the Iron Curtain, over the Atlantic via Telstar, round the world from Japan. Editor Leonard Miall comments: "Dimpleby's subsequent respect for the stability of established procedures, the security of an evolving history, and the consolation of organised religion derives from Belsen". Be that as it may there was more secular than religious sanctity in the manner of his parting, delivering up his soul to science.

FREETHINKER

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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 Holidays. Hastings: Thursday, March 23rd to April 1st
Burton-in-the-Wirral, Cheshire: Painting Holiday, July 29th to August 12th. Details from Mrs M. Mephem, 29 Fairview Road, Sutton, Surrey. Telephone, Vigilant 8796.

Humanist Letter Network (International) and Humanist Postal Book Service. For information or catalogue send 6d stamp to Kit Mouat, Mercers, Cuckfield, Sussex.

OUTDOOR

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

Glasgow Secular Society (Grand Hotel, Charing Cross), Sunday, March 12th, 2.45 p.m.: TOM HYSLOP, "Brainwashing".

Havering Humanist Society (affiliated to the National Secular Society), The Social Centre, Gubbins Lane, Harold Wood, Tuesday, March 14th, 8 p.m.: Annual General Meeting.

Leicester Secular Society (Secular Hall, 75 Humberstone Gate), Sunday, March 12, 6.30 p.m.: C. Shuttlewood, "Astronomy for Beginners".

Manchester Branch NSS (Wheatsheaf Hotel, High Street), Sunday, March 12th, 7.30 p.m.: Branch meeting to discuss Conference arrangements. Members only.

South Place Ethical Society (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London, WC2), Sunday, March 12th, 11 a.m.: RONALD MASON, "The Poetic Imagination"; Tuesday, March 14th, 6.30 p.m.: JACK ROBINSON, "Authoritarianism and Politics".

South Place Sunday Concerts (Conway Hall, London), Sunday, March 12th, 6.30 p.m.: Alberni String Quartet. Beethoven, Rawsthorne, Dvorak. Admission 3/-.

The Progressive League. Easter Conference at Grittleton House, Chippenham, Wilts. Details from Ernest Seeley, 38 Primrose Gardens, London, NW3.

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.

Vaudeville Theatre, Strand, London, WC2. Evenings at 8 p.m., Saturdays 6 p.m. and 8.45 p.m. Matinee, Wednesday, 3 p.m. Brigid Brophy's Comedy, "The Burglar".

RECORD REVIEW

Douglas Bramwell

A Sailor's Garland. Transatlantic Records, XTRA 5013.

SOME TIME AGO, at a beery folk session in the Charing Cross Road, Alex Campbell remarked that folk singing must lose its 'Have another bun, vicar' image. This LP will help.

It is a collection of shanties and forebitters—shanties helped with sail and capstan, forebitters were for fun—sung by Ewan MacColl and A. L. Lloyd. Accompaniments are by Alf Edwards, concertina, and Dave Swarbrick, fiddle.

Sleeve notes by A. L. Lloyd serve to place seamen's songs, their origins and their purposes into perspective in the folk revival scene. The record, with the notes, ensures that ghosts of bloodless schooldays' versions are finally laid. There is a suggestion, on the sleeve, of censorship; if so there is enough full-bodied material left to send Mrs Whitehouse off on a 'Clean Up Folksongs' campaign.

The relentless pressures bearing on virile men under forced sexual abstinence burst into these songs, especially the hoisting shanties whose strong rhythms are an ideal vehicle for thrusting bodily drives. The songs reflect, too, the bitterness that Jack feels over the exploitation that gets under way the moment he sets foot on shore. But there is also the tender side of life—even life at its roughest. This record has light to shed on seamen's expression of that tenderness; perhaps nowhere better than in Ewan MacColl's 'Leaving of Liverpool'.

Folk song, when it is worthy of the name, breaks through the barrier of sophistication and convention with which society buffers the impact of human being on human being. Buffering is certainly necessary if we are not to become immobilised by sheer weight of involvement. But we run the danger of becoming 'mere' buffers—sophisticated protectives with little inside worth protecting. Folk song—real folk song—can be bitter, rough and vulgar; it can also be immensely delicate. Above all, it is poignant, breaking through the buffer to the human core. And it is good fun over a pint.

NATIONAL SECULAR SOCIETY: 61st ANNUAL DINNER

OWING to circumstances beyond our control it has been necessary to change the venue of the Dinner. It will now be held at THE HANOVER GRAND, 6 HANOVER STREET, LONDON, W1. The Hanover Grand is conveniently situated, and is only a few minutes from Oxford Circus Underground. Walk down Regent Street towards Piccadilly and Hanover Street is the second on the right. There are ample parking facilities.

We are certain you will be impressed by the catering, service and decor at The Hanover Grand which was opened only a short while ago. The speeches by Baroness Wootton, Lord Willis and Margaret Knight will add much to the occasion, and we confidently predict that the 61st Annual Dinner of the NSS will be memorable.

Guests will be seated at round tables accommodating 12 diners, so why not make up a party? Tickets are still available for the very modest sum of one guinea. ONLY THE VENUE HAS BEEN CHANGED, the date, time and speakers are as previously announced.

It will greatly help if you complete and return as soon as possible to National Secular Society, 103 Borough High Street, SE1.

I have been notified of the change of venue of the 61st Annual Dinner.

Name

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