

# FREE THINKER

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## 'THE ESSENTIAL STERILITY OF SECULARISM'

"When so many people are hungry, when so many families suffer from destitution, when so many remain steeped in ignorance, when so many schools, hospitals and homes worthy of the name remain to be built, all public and private squandering of wealth, all expenditure prompted by motives of national or personal ostentation, every exhausting armaments race, becomes an intolerable scandal." (Pope Paul—*Populorum Progressio*.)

"It would now be better if all *secular* Humanist projects, groups, and activities were labelled as such so as to make it clear that they are non-religious, non-Christian and non-theistic." (Kit Mouat—*Humanist*, April 1967.)

"So far as the BHA is concerned the answer is that any qualification of Humanism is unacceptable, since it mutilates the comprehensive character of Humanism and disqualifies its claim to universality. . . . If Humanism stands for the cultivation and development of human life by all human and natural resources, on the assumption that man is on his own and this life is all, it cannot afford to be qualified: it is secular." (H. J. Blackham, Chairman of BHA—*Humanist*, April 1967.)

"The BHA will take the theory of Humanism beyond the essential sterility of Secularism so that it provides a comprehensive warm and rational outlook on all these social questions." (Anon.—*Humanist News* (editor Tom Vernon), December 1966.)

FEW HUMANISTS, if any, would disagree with the Pope's views as expressed above. But many secular humanists would disapprove of his means of tackling the problems. They would support world-wide birth control schemes on a large scale. The Pope would not. The Pope, although a humanist in his concern for other human beings, is primarily a religionist. His conception of life, its nature, purpose and end, is a religious one. More particularly it is a Christian one. More particularly still, it is a Roman Catholic one. I do not doubt that he is genuinely concerned about hunger and destitution. I do not doubt that he wishes to mitigate suffering. But whereas the secular humanist determines the means whereby this may best be done simply by reference to scientific knowledge and scientific methods, the religious humanist, and in this case the Pope, determines the best means permissible by reference to science *and* the Will of God. The secular humanist decides that birth control, whether achieved by sexual abstinence, the condom, the IUD, the pill or whatever, is

one practical means of checking the growth of population and thereby decreasing the extent and degree of hunger and destitution. The religious humanist, again in this instance the Pope, decides that birth control can indeed check population growth but that continence and judicious exploitation of 'the safe period' are the only permissible methods since the others, interfering as they do with the natural process of copulation and conception, are contrary to the Will of God and hence impermissible. The secular humanist and the religious humanist are both humanists. The difference, and an important one, is that the former believes human problems should be solved without reference to theology; whereas the latter tends to, and if he is the Roman Pontiff does, apply theology to the determining of what is right and wrong. Whether we like it or not, some Christians refer to themselves not only as 'Christians' but also as 'religious humanists'. They would be the first to deny, and quite rightly so, that they are not concerned with the welfare of other human beings. They *are* concerned. The difference between the secular humanist and the religious humanist is one of premises and criteria.

In the April issue of the *Humanist*, British Humanist Association Chairman, Harold Blackham, says that Humanism cannot afford to be qualified. He then goes on (see quote above) to qualify it. It is secular, he says. Unless Mr Blackham believes that there is no such thing as religious Humanism, one is bound to wonder what he means by saying that Humanism cannot afford to be qualified since it *is* secular—as though the only kind of Humanism were secular Humanism. I wish it were. If it were there would be no cause for the controversy on 'How Secular is Humanism'. Kit Mouat, author of that fine book *What Humanism Is About*, points out that Humanism is *not* necessarily secular. Religionists talk about Humanism and mean secular Humanism. Or they talk about Humanism and think of themselves and Jesus. Or they talk about Humanism and mean religious Humanism one minute and secular Humanism the next. It looks therefore, as though Humanism *is* qualifiable and *is* being qualified. Kit Mouat should not be rebuked for suggesting that the BHA should make *its* brand of Humanism readily distinguishable from the other brands of Humanism on the market.

Mr Blackham says, "If Humanism stands for the cultivation and development of human life by all human and natural resources, on the assumption that man is on his own and this life is all, it cannot afford to be qualified: it is secular". So Humanism, according to the BHA Chairman, is secular. Now, secular Humanism is demonstrably Secularism. I say 'demonstrably' because I can demonstrate it and indeed may be obliged at some time to do so. Descriptions of Humanism similar to that of Mr

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Blackham's can be found in many pages of Secularist literature of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. What intrigues me is why the BHA, on another occasion, gives its members grounds for suspecting that BHA Humanism is *not* secular. Only four months ago the BHA publicly repudiated Secularism in the December issue of *Humanist News*. I do not know who it actually was who wrote that the BHA 'will take the theory of Humanism beyond the essential sterility of Secularism so that it provides a comprehensive, warm and rational outlook on all these social questions'. But I do know that this statement has created a problem. The Chairman of the BHA says that Humanism is secular. Some other BHA official says, in an official BHA publication, that it is not. How very confusing. Up and down the country there are many autonomous Humanist groups. Some of them are affiliated to the BHA; some of them are affiliated to the NSS; some of them are affiliated to both; some of them are affiliated to neither. Whatever their affiliations, many of their members may well be interested to know whether the Humanism of the BHA, one of the leading Humanist organisations in the country, is religious, or secular, or religious *and* secular. The National Secular Society has made it clear and is continually making it clear that the Humanism it promotes is secular Human-

ism. It behoves the BHA to be equally distinct. Mr Blackham says that 'one can never be safeguarded against misrepresentation' (*Humanist*, April 1967). But clearly an organisation can take steps to make sure that, at the very least, it does not misrepresent itself. After all, if one official says BHA Humanism is secular and another says, in effect, that it is not and indeed that Secularism is essentially sterile, is it any wonder that many rank and file members may become, if they are not already, bemused, bothered and bewildered?

I invite the BHA official who wrote about 'the essential sterility of Secularism' to amplify the position. Is BHA Humanism secular or religious? What does he understand by Secularism? And on what grounds does he contend that Secularism is essentially sterile?

I thus invite the BHA to safeguard itself from misrepresentation. I am sure that the BHA Executive will welcome this opportunity to clarify its position to our many readers and thus dispel any misunderstanding which may have arisen.

1967 is an important year for the BHA and the entire Humanist movement. As editor of the movement's only weekly journal, I am glad to make space available for the elucidation of such a vitally important issue.

## PLEASE DON'T SHOOT THE PIANIST

David Tribe *President, National Secular Society*

THE NSS is not a monolithic organisation. Its officers welcome constructive criticism, though they do of course prefer help to histrionics. I am sure plenty of members and supporters have their own ideas about what the society ought to be doing, and how, and may want to go on telling us in the pages of the FREETHINKER. Special provision is being made at this year's Annual Conference (Manchester, May 13-14) for ample debate of policies and plans on the eve of drawing up a new constitution and the dawn of the second hundred years. Soon after there will be an informal meeting in London to discuss implementation of the ideas put forward. These will be occasions for me to be still, and perhaps I should be so now. But I think it may be useful to comment on Cynthia Blezard's *Humanist Policy for the Future*, and in this way amplify my statement *The Second Hundred Years*.

The statement was, as Mrs Blezard knows, a press release used to stimulate discussion at the NSS policy meeting in London last January, and passed *nem. con.* for general release at its conclusion. Its purpose was to tell outsiders the range of the society's interests and show new and potential members the opportunities they have for service, propaganda and self-realisation inside the secular humanist movement. It was not designed as a blue print for tactics and relative emphases. There is, as it happens, little need to tell even the outside world that our main concerns are the harmful impact of organised religion on social life, secular education, the population explosion and freethought broadcasting. The popular misconception is that we are obsessive about these things. Our task is to show that they are not isolated "sectarian" claims but platforms of a world view whose vision is responsible freedom, understanding and a richer life for everyone.

When I spoke of the nineteenth century as an ideological, and the twentieth as a sociological age, I wasn't implying that ideology can be ignored today any more than that social reform was absent last century. The fact that my contributions to the FREETHINKER recently have been

mainly in the field of drama criticism does not mean that I have escaped to a world of phantasy and need to be lectured on the machinations of the Archbishop of Canterbury. I think I have given sufficient warnings of the danger of interpreting humanism as a blend of parapsychology and Christian Action, or of making the humanist movement a mere kennel in Mr Wilson's Animal Farm. My point about sociology was that challenges to freethought and secularism are rather more complex and subtle today than when the NSS was founded a hundred years ago.

Outside very narrow academic circles, nineteenth century issues were simpler: God or Darwin, the Bible or the *Bible Handbook*, aristocracy or democracy, *laissez faire* or State planning, Providence or Malthus, magnates or managers, share holders or workers, imperialists or internationalists. Now we are all, ostensibly, Darwinians, biblical critics, democrats, planners, Malthusians, managers, workers and internationalists. The difficulty is that the ghosts of the alternative are still haunting us. A hundred years ago the NSS had the ear, and in many ways was the voice, of the working-class radical movement. What is the working-class radical movement today? Who has its ear, what is its voice? Then week-long debates between clerics and secularists numbered their audiences in thousands and sold their transcripts in hundreds of thousands. Now clerics have gone into hiding and emerge only in the sanctuary of an *Epilogue* studio; and, despite a threefold increase in population, the NSS plans its major public meetings in terms of hundreds and its publications in terms of thousands. We have free, compulsory education, which is less secular now than in 1870. As a community we have assimilated our Darwin, Freud, Einstein, Keynes and even Marx, so that there seem to be no exciting new ideas around any more for adventurous young people outside the sham world of psychedelic drugs and pop art. But we have no general agreement about how to solve the great problems of our age—the arms race, population explosion, starvation, pollution, neurosis—only a bogus "consensus"



devised by the masters of politics and admiss. Disheartening as it may be, there is nothing for it but to keep a clear rational light burning in as much of society as we can reach (even if for a while television appearances are "brief", but not, I hope, "furtive", and "at inconvenient hours") and turn it on one social issue after another.

We must however admit that these issues are not as simple as once we thought. We must have the humility to realise that there are no panaceas, and the realism to admit that man has many psychological impediments to following the clear light of reason. Particularly is this so in the field of population. Cynthia Blezard suggests that the NSS is somehow unaware of this problem. Charles Bradlaugh was responsible for launching the Malthusian League, out of which grew the Family Planning Association. When its poster was banned on the London Underground in 1960 the NSS organised the only protest demonstration, with FPA support. But generally the association has preferred to operate without too close a link with the society, or any other humanist body, which might embarrass it in its proliferation throughout the bible and rosary belts of the land. And when one considers the way in which it has spread from clinic to clinic, town hall to town hall, with the minimum of fuss and adverse publicity, I am sure it has been wise to operate in this way. I have been one of those to urge it to be more adventurous in provision for the unmarried, but have not pushed the point in the face of arguments that precipitate action could imperil the aura of respectability necessary for the pursuit of its major work. When the Freedom from Hunger Campaign was launched in 1960, the NSS was probably the only body to point out that ignoring the population problem was too big a price to pay for Catholic support. It tried to get the Humanist Council to realise the gravity of the situation, and in the atmosphere of factitious "dialogue" and "unity" which was then in the ascendant did not shirk exposing the hypocrisy of the Vatican. Since the Charles Davis affair, recognition of this has become almost axiomatic. But this is a world problem. Contraceptives must reach the remotest villages. Illiterate people must be persuaded to use them when they arrive. Rhetoric will not help. What precisely is the NSS to do which it is not already doing?

Cynthia Blezard does make some proposals in the social welfare field, most of which—contraception under the NHS, sex instruction, family planning as part of overseas aid—the society is already advocating, with growing signs of outside interest. But once one enters the field of local deterrence to large families, all sorts of problems arise. The Queen and most of the middle classes will not be distressed by the withdrawal of family benefits after the first two children. How will one ensure that taking this action among the lower income groups will make feckless parents more responsible and not bear adversely upon innocent children? Personally I believe there is a good case for investigating "problem" families and the parents of delinquent children in family courts, and authorising compulsory sterilisation in some instances. But this is no easy matter. The relation between the rights of the individual and social convenience is very delicate. Who would really want to see a Brave New World? This is but one of many social fields (divorce law reform is another) where it is easier to denounce the humbug of the present situation than to devise a foolproof alternative.

Lastly, a word or two on "a humanist syllabus of ethical teaching for use in schools". The NSS is very concerned about the foundation of ethics, and I rarely speak of secular education myself without mentioning social

morality and citizenship. Over the years I've written about this in some detail in the educational press and elsewhere, and given every encouragement to the Humanist Teachers' Association, whose most active members are staunch secularists, in the outline syllabuses they have ratified for use in secondary schools. Should something more be done? The NSS is very critical of the Churches for meddling in the school timetable, and must be careful to stay innocent of the same charge. Further, it is sociology and philosophy which demonstrate that ethics and religion are disciplines capable of living independently, and that the "Christian way of life" is something which in many ways is to be deplored. Bertrand Russell's *Why I Am Not a Christian*, which the society has just republished, brings this out clearly. A detailed syllabus of social morality and citizenship must ultimately be worked out for the schools by the schools, and insofar as it is generally acceptable it will not be explicitly "humanist" save in the Archbishop's sense. The NSS has however many teacher members, and an extended prototype may be useful at this stage. In deciding this was not our precise rôle, perhaps I was rationalising to avoid the setting up of yet another committee I might be expected to serve on. Mrs Blezard believes both that we are doing too many things without adequate resources and that we are not doing more things despite limited resources. If she is prepared to convene a committee of the type she proposes and edit its deliberations I am sure that the executive of the NSS would view the idea with every sympathy.

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## NEWS AND NOTES

I RECENTLY heard of an evangelical crusader—one of a team conducting a mission at a university—who claimed that the majority of people are Christians, and when all the arguments in support of this contention had been demolished he blandly asserted that he was including those in heaven in his calculations! Juggling—or to put it bluntly—rigging statistics is an old device used to impress the gullible and frighten the politicians, particularly those who have only a three-figure majority.

In the past when Roman Catholic leaders made pronouncements on education, birth control, abortion, etc., they claimed to speak on behalf of every Catholic (including the lapsed and new-born babies), and would usually quote a figure which, because of its preciseness, appeared to be absolutely authentic. Many have suspected that the agreement and obedience of the laity, and the apparent harmony in the Roman Catholic Church was a façade which would sooner or later crack. Such suspicions have been justified by the Gallup Poll conducted on behalf of *The Sunday Telegraph*, covering a sample of 400 practising Catholics.

Certainly the substantial support for some reforms is not surprising, for it is largely accepted that probably the majority of English Catholic couples use effective forms of contraception, the more educated Catholics are embarrassed by the exclusiveness demanded by the hierarchy, and clerical celibacy is widely regarded as unnatural and cruel.

Not quite expected was the revelation that 23 per cent of those questioned think that the local authorities should take over Catholic elementary schools. True, 66 per cent favour the present arrangement, but in view of the great emphasis which has always been made on the aim of every Catholic child being educated in a Catholic school, the fact that 23 per cent favour a takeover by the local authorities (plus 11 per cent who “don’t know” and presumably would not be prepared to man the barricades in defence of Church schools) will alarm the hierarchy and Catholic educationists.

The results of the poll are not very comforting for Catholic politicians and others who have been conducting a scurrilous campaign against the Abortion Law Reform Association and David Steel’s Abortion Bill. 64 per cent said they would approve legal abortion where the mother’s life was in danger, and 39 per cent where a child may be born deformed.

The day after the poll was published, *The Daily Telegraph*—sister paper of *The Sunday Telegraph*—carried an article which stated that the Roman Catholic Church has never claimed the obedience of its members beyond certain defined areas affecting faith and morals. This is true, but the Church has always insisted that such questions as birth control and abortion are within this area. The poll shows that large sections of the faithful are not in agreement with their leaders, and this should be remembered when bishops claim to be speaking on behalf of all Catholics on social questions. Clearly they are not.

### The Brighton Church court case

On Sunday, October 2nd, 1966, there was a larger congregation than usual at Dorset Gardens Methodist Church,

Brighton. It included reporters and television cameramen, wondering no doubt, why it should be their lot to have to spend Sunday morning in such unfamiliar surroundings. Perhaps the spectacle of Harold Wilson and George Brown reading the lessons made it all seem worthwhile.

The majority of those present were delegates attending the Labour Party conference. But several members of the Committee of 100 were in attendance, and during the proceedings expressed their disapproval of British support of the war in Vietnam. They were prosecuted and two of the defendants were sentenced to two months’ imprisonment.

The Committee of 100 (13 Goodwin Street, London, N4) has published a pamphlet entitled *Indecency in Church* (6d) and a Defence Fund (c/o Jeanne Smythe, 68 Hewitt Road, London, N8) has been opened.

### Where innocence is bliss

In a special Bank Holiday edition of *Till Death Us Do Part*, the down-to-earth Alf Garnett spoke of the Prime Minister “dropping a Pollock”. This was a reference to the by-election result at Pollock, Glasgow, when the Conservative won the seat.

Mrs Mary Whitehouse, leader of the Clean-Up TV campaign said of the “Pollock” joke: “It went straight over my head. I heard it, but I didn’t realise that it was ambiguous. What did it mean?”

Please, will somebody tell her?

### TPS Bulletin

The current issue of the Thomas Paine Society *Bulletin* is an interesting 25-page affair. The contents include two long articles, *Tom Paine and the Vulgar Style* (James T. Boulton) and *Notes and Documents, Thomas Paine and Comus* (Alfred Owen Aldridge).

Robert Morrell, 443 Meadow Lane, Nottingham, is co-editor of the *Bulletin* and secretary of the Thomas Paine Society.

### Bertrand Russell pamphlet

In his review of Bertrand Russell’s *Why I am Not a Christian*, Simon Ellis gently chides the National Secular Society for not having printed it before. In case anyone got the impression that this was the first time the text of the lecture has been published, it is worth noting that it has always been obtainable from the Rationalist Press Association. (The RPA own the copyright and gave the NSS permission to reprint.)

This 40th anniversary edition is available from the National Secular Society, 103 Borough High Street, London SE1 (price 1/4 including postage).

### Religion is such a comfort

From the Question Box column of *The Faith*, a Roman Catholic journal published in Malta:

Question: *How can we be perfectly happy in heaven if we know someone near and dear to us is in hell?*

Answer: In heaven our happiness will consist essentially in the vision of God. We shall see Him as He is and we shall understand, as never before, the reasons for every act of His Will. We shall see clearly the justice of God’s punishments even when they are meted out to those near and dear to us. Indeed, it will be impossible for us to wish them in heaven since this would imply that God had been unjust in condemning them to hell.

EA.



## SUBMISSIONS TO THE ARCHBISHOPS' COMMISSION ON CHURCH AND STATE

The British Humanist Association

THE British Humanist Association submits this evidence in response to the public invitation issued by the Chairman and Secretary of the Commission, and on behalf of citizens who are responsible and thoughtful unbelievers. The Commission's concern to examine 'the fundamental principles and assumptions that underlie the constitutional and statutory forms that at present govern the Church of England, and their validity in the social structure of the nation' is a concern that comes home to our own central interest in the conditions and development of an 'open society' in this country. We therefore welcome the opportunity of stating our opinions to the Commission.

Constitutional principles and assumptions are visible only in the light of history. At the Reformation the Church of England was established by an act of State. The King of England was reorganised the Church in a way that was both revolutionary and conservative. No issue between Church and State was raised. Later, Puritan opposition to Elizabeth's ideas of a religious settlement turned to a struggle for control of Parliament which issued at length in civil war. The Restoration could not restore Hooker's conservative ideal of ecclesiastical polity, Church and State as two aspects of one society. More contemporary was William Warburton's conception of an alliance between Church and State. But the alliance was and has continued to be ambiguous. If toleration is forced on the polity by deep and stubborn disagreements, if the magistrate has no jurisdiction over conscience (Locke), is not a formal alliance with one Church anomalous, although the largest; is not the logical solution the American separation of Church and State? Even if religion is politically useful, how can the State use it effectively? Can a national church be more than a name unless it manages to collect and articulate popular religious opinions, and can it then be the church of Christ?

During the 19th century the formal toleration which had been forced by the civil war became practically effective and comprehensive; and in this sense the State became secular, as the guarantor of religious freedom. At the same time, the Broad Church party in the Anglican communion still hoped that the Anglican Church could after all be comprehensive and include the whole nation by becoming 'liberal' in theology or latitudinarian. On the other hand, others were driven to feel that disestablishment might be necessary to safeguard the Christian character of the Anglican Church. The Gorham case was a centre of controversy and an occasion of disquiet.

In an article written in 1864 Dean Stanley of the Broad Church party wrote of 'that mischievous separation of the civil and ecclesiastical powers, which it has been the object of all wise statesmanship to conciliate, and which the whole constitution of the Church of England, as expressed in its formal acts, and defended by its greatest writers, has hitherto tended to bind together in indissoluble union'. Even at that date this must have seemed a wilful and almost perverse assumption. In 1838, Gladstone in his twenties had published *The State in its Relations with the*

*Church*, an intensely argued rebuttal of the 'strong disposition to overthrow the principle of an established church; and therein ultimately to deny that religion is the greatest sanction of civil society'; but the rapid development of democracy during his lifetime, and experience of its relative trustworthiness, brought him to a revolutionary change of mind that acknowledged public opinion as the paramount moral authority in the State. The statesmanship which accepted the practical secularization of the State remained compatible with staunch High Anglicanism.

The passions of 19th century controversies are hardly active today because time has settled the issue in reality if not yet in appearance. Does establishment or disestablishment matter to anyone any more, save perhaps to those whose hopes are vested in the modern ecumenical movement? If all parties accept in practice that the Christian churches in this country exist in and have their mission to a secular society, the establishment like the monarchy is conserved, so long as it is conserved, as a token of allegiance and a link with the past. But the Anglican Church makes itself gratuitously questionable as a token of common spiritual allegiance. A staunch High churchman and learned historian, J. N. Figgis, arguing that relations of Church and State involve relations of the State to all societies and persons, insisted long ago that the time had come to reject theories deriving from City-State and mediaeval Christendom and base theory on actuality (*Churches in the Modern State*, 1913). He put it forthrightly thus:

"What is clear to me is this fact. Even if some . . . look either backward or forward to a day when men shall be organised in society on a basis of religious unity, it must be plain that we do not live in such an age; that there is nothing to be gained by pretending that we do; that whatever unity of opinion may underlie or come to underlie any probable polity, it will not be that body of doctrine which we know as the Catholic Creeds. . . . All we can claim, all we can hope for, is freedom for ourselves as one society among many."

His fear was that the authority, character, and influence of the church would be diminished by continuance of the claim to embrace the whole nation legalistically within a comprehensive established church, and even by any attempt to impose on the nation Christian ways of life by Christian votes in favour of Christian legislation, eg, in the matter of divorce.

The contrary argument was perhaps most plausibly stated by T. S. Eliot in the *Idea of a Christian Society* (1939). At that time he thought there was still a choice. Either the secular drift would carry the nation inevitably sooner or later to an authoritarian State with a materialistic ideology, or the nation could choose to reaffirm its Christian character, in the sense that there would be a Christian community of citizens who acknowledged Christian standards and ideals, however far short of them they fell in practice, a Christian State of which the government would never legislate contrary to Christian principles, and a community of Christians who strove to live and exemplify the Christian life. In such a society, unbelievers would be marginal and exert only a marginal influence.



Eliot's ideal has been tested. His *Idea of a Christian Society* was exemplified in the religious clauses of the Education Act of 1944. Here was a Christian State legislating for a Christian community at the behest, or at least with the consent and aid, of the community of Christians. The assumption that the county school is, or ought to be, a Christian community because Britain is a Christian society has produced in practice enough concealment and pretence to pervert the influence of Church and State in the school. The treatment of Religious Education in the Plowden Report reflects the inescapable difficulties in working on this assumption and the hopeless confusion which results. If the figures of the opinion polls are used to warrant the assumption, the figures for church membership or attendance should also be brought into account. It is surely catching at a straw to identify as 'Christians' those who call themselves Christians without knowing or wanting to know what they mean. What has this to do with the establishment of the Church of England? *A fortiori*, if there is no warrant for the assumption that the nation is a Christian community, there is none for the establishment by law of a national church, which then has the character of a social lie and is a corrupting influence whilst claiming to be the instrument of regeneration.

Two arguments are relied on to resist any proposal to change the formal relations of Church and State. There is the argument that disestablishment would be regarded as a national repudiation of Christianity (eg, Archbishop Garbett in *Church and State in England*, 1951), an official blow to the churches and a sanction for irreligion. And there is the argument that unless our society maintains the official stamp of Christianity, sooner or later it will have an alien, anti-Christian official stamp. Eliot uses both arguments. Neither is really plausible, still less conclusive.

The effect on the public of disestablishment would be largely in the hands of those who put forward and carried through the proposals. It could be made the occasion of national re-thinking of the rôle of the churches, and give a new seriousness, reality, and impetus to their mission. The assumption that the masses have the idea that the Church of England is the nation's pledge to the Christian faith is more an ecclesiastical notion than a commonplace of opinion. Only those who really want to maintain the special relation on other grounds would want to press this argument on second thoughts—Eliot's argument that disestablishment today would not be merely recognising an already existing situation, but would positively create a shock situation. There is no reason why disestablishment, proposed by the Church of England and debated and sanctioned by Parliament, should not be brought home to public opinion as an act of house-cleaning and a sign of new energy and purposefulness.

The other argument, that if the Christian stamp is officially removed sooner or later an official anti-Christian stamp will take its place, is an exclusion of the possibility of neutrality: 'He that is not with me is against me'. This is a saying more properly addressed to the many who call themselves Christians and belong to no church than to the citizen. It belongs to the religious not the political universe of discourse. Social agnosticism may be more justifiable than personal agnosticism: it is not the place of a society to make up its mind and take a decision on such questions; it is neutral by constitution rather than by choice. Just because the faith and doctrines of a church are *questions* they cannot be the basis of society. When they were unquestioned they could be. But there is no new unquestionable ideological basis to take their place. The

basis of a modern society is different in kind. It is political and moral, not religious. In a populous industrialised society there is close interdependence and a need for mutual trust and dependability, which can be regulated by agreed rules for living and working together, not by common ultimate beliefs and personal convictions. Agreed rules and accepted procedures, shared general social purposes and common institutions, actual problems: these are the concrete conditions and this is the community of interest that constitute the unity and identity of a modern democratic society, which can accommodate a diversity of beliefs and opinions about ultimate questions. The Highway Code or the democratic constitution is a better model of the moral basis of society than the Apostles' Creed or the Ten Commandments. A society certainly can be, and in modern circumstances as certainly should be, religiously neutral.

The constitution of the Church of England represents the Tudor concept of a uniform society. Nonconformity had to be accommodated in a pluriform society, with written and unwritten rules and procedures to regulate the behaviour of more or less segregated religious communities. The next step could be (we think, should be) in the direction of an open society which shares common institutions for all general social purposes—schools and universities, youth organisations, cultural associations, welfare services, and the like. This trend would seem to be desirable not only on social grounds but also on religious grounds. On social grounds because citizens of diverse background and ultimate belief are brought into fruitful contact which socialises without destroying their specific inheritances, and because civic union is more stable and productive on these terms which satisfy harmoniously both personal and social demands. On religious grounds because in an open society religion finds its essential rôle in its influence upon personal thinking and living. The churches and other such institutions compete in trying to influence the personal choice of life of the individual in his independence. This indirect influence of religion, mediated through the individual influenced by its teaching, discipline, and community, this education in living is the most telling contribution of religion to society, and the conditions of the open society encourage religious institutions to concentrate upon this task.

We therefore submit that if the Commission should recommend disestablishment, instead of merely a reform of the Establishment, this could be a major contribution to the establishment of the conditions of an open society whose actual political and moral foundations would be brought to public attention, to the general benefit, and in which the Anglican Church along with other churches, and with a new respect, would be as free as every other interest to exert its influence and play its part.

#### FREETHINKER FIGHTING FUND

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The FREETHINKER, 103 Borough High St., London, SE1



## NOTES FROM THE EDITOR

### Biographical Details of Harry Lamont

SEVERAL ARTICLES by Harry Lamont have already been published in the FREETHINKER. We shall shortly be publishing more in a series. I believe that Harry Lamont's articles will be enjoyed by many of those who find some of our material 'hard-going'. Anecdotal and epigrammatic, often racy and zestful, his articles contain many perceptive comments on human beings and life. Having said this I should add that the nature of Harry Lamont's articles call for some biographical details. These give no more than a mere outline of his eventful life, but they are enough to point to a colourful character and make it easier to understand why Harry Lamont is so often near the heart and truth of a matter.

HENRY PARKYN LAMONT (who formerly wrote under the *nom de guerre* of Wilfred Saint-Mandé) was born in Birkenhead on February 9th, 1896, one of seven children. His father, a boiler-maker, got a job as foreman in a Bilbao (Spain) shipyard when Harry was three and there they remained for the next three and a half years until the firm went bankrupt with all Lamont *père's* savings.

With borrowed money the family returned to Great Britain, landing at Swansea. They rented a house in Sketty at 3/6d a week. As his father was often unemployed and there was no dole, Harry sold newspapers at a pay of 1½d a dozen.

At first he and his brothers attended Sketty old school, then transferred to Brynmill. Harry won a scholarship to the Grammar School, but ran away to sea when he was fifteen. His mother feared he would be drowned, so he swallowed the anchor and tried various jobs before deciding to become a teacher. He transferred to the Higher Grade School, passed the London Matric., and was teaching at Brynmill when World War I started.

Harry at once enlisted and served on the Western Front until the armistice. He was wounded twice, gassed, blown up, buried and contracted what was known as trench fever.

Demobilized in February 1919 he taught at Brynmill for six months, then entered Cardiff University College where he graduated with first-class honours in French three years later.

He then took up a post as senior English, French and History master at the Jamaica College, West Indies, where he remained for three years.

Returning to England he taught at the Judd School, Tonbridge, for two years while completing a thesis for the degree of MA (Wales) which he gained in June 1926.

He spent his holidays abroad, mostly in Paris and Besançon where he obtained diplomas.

Early in 1927 he was appointed Professor of French at the Transvaal University College (now Pretoria University) and remained there for six years.

In 1932 Cassells published his book *War, Wine and Women*, in which he incorporated his experiences on the Western Front. It became a best-seller. But it brought trouble also. Two minor characters in the book briefly criticised predikants and rural Boers, giving a gang of thugs the pretext to attack the author and assault him so viciously that he lay in hospital on the danger list for ten days. His real crime was that he had also written a series of articles advocating economic, political and social justice for Africans. He was awarded damages against his assailants, but left the country in disgust.

After an attempt at farming near High Wycombe he taught for six years at the Preston Grammar School, then did four at the Beckenham Grammar School.

In August 1947 he sailed for East Africa, having been appointed Education Officer in Kenya. He wrote three small books of poems poking fun at the stupidity and hypocrisy in conventional British morality. The Establishment was displeased, and he left. He served in the Kenya Police Reserve during the Mau Mau rebellion. Later he tried various jobs (including that of barman in Mombasa) before being appointed Head of a large Indian secondary school in Uganda. There he contracted an obscure tropical malady that did not yield to treatment, so he returned to England and shortly after retired.

Harry Lamont has tramped with hobos in this country and bums in the USA. He claims to have always had a partiality for low life, rebels and misfits.

## FILM

David Tribe

CLEAN-UPPERS, prudes and anti-vivisectionists can enjoy 73 minutes of apoplectic indignation at the Jacey Cinema, Piccadilly Circus. *The Mystery and the Pleasure* is a remarkable *mélange* of beauty and savagery, less shocking but more harrowing than *Mondo Cane* 1 and 2. The ingredients range from male and female beauty shows to human and animal corneal graft operations, claimed by Miracle Films to be the first public showing and poignantly given their *première* on the occasion of Sir Benjamin Rycroft's death: from the skinning of animals to the models who wear the products; from the extraction of a tooth to the picking clean of mice skeletons by specially reared insects; from the "backs" of Cambridge to a caesarian on a sow. An intelligent, if somewhat didactic, commentary by producer Harold Baim just hold it all together. To those who ask why such things should be shown (in the absence of warning, some patrons are certain to faint), it may be answered that knowledge is power. Many who will denounce not only this film but also the activities it represents gladly avail themselves of surgery, suede coats, and old master nudes as a capital gains tax-free investment. In the sensitivity of Eastmancolour and Edward Stewart Abraham's direction, knowledge is also beauty. The outstanding *vignette* is of nude female models, a poem of colour, light and elegance devised by secularist Jean Straker, founder of the Academy of Visual Arts in Soho and presenter of the first programme of Freedom-in-Art. A sequence with coins in golden light is of rare beauty.

Anyone with an IQ over 70 is advised to miss the supporting "attraction". *The Topless Story* is a thoroughly phony threadbare tale of threadbare busts. It lasts an hour, but it seems like an eternity in Abraham's Bosom with Malcolm Muggeridge.

## LETTERS

### Church and State

WHILST I have the greatest sympathy with the general outlook of the NSS memorandum on Church and State, I would like to make two points of criticism:

(1) The opening paragraph dealing with the Middle Ages needs a great deal of correction and revision. Mediaeval ecclesiasticism in England was a facet of the state, the Norman view. It was therefore interrelated with feudalism and declined greatly with the decline of feudalism during the fourteenth century, a point much elaborated by Dr G. G. Coulton. Its relationship to Rome was closely intertwined with the traditional view of the dominance of the Roman see in Western Europe and was bound up with the clash between the Holy Roman Empire and Byzantium. Papal canon law extended to England. But the mediaeval church, like feudalism itself, was *sui generis* and following F. W. Maitland, it may be disputed whether it found a successor in either Reformation Anglicanism or Tridentine Romanism.

(2) The memorandum pleads for complete religious freedom for the Crown and for the Lord Chancellor. But, does this mean that we should tolerate the opening up of these positions to Roman Catholics? The present restriction was rooted in constitutional law and not in religious prejudice. It was designed to safeguard the political settlement of 1688 and thereby to prevent the highest offices of state from falling into the hands of those who owed subjection to a foreign pontiff, legally a rival head of state, who would not of necessity favour the constitution of this country. Memories of Pius IX or of Pius XII enforce the wisdom of our ancestors. In fact, it would perhaps be as well if the ban were extended to higher civil servants, members of the judiciary and others who hold important administrative positions in the state. Religious freedom is clearly a desirability where it can be granted but it must never be extended to the allowing of Papal interference at the roots of constitutional administration, thus ensuring the destruction of freedom which such a step would be bound to entail. It has been a following out of the general principles of 1688 which has prevented England from falling a victim to the destruction of liberty which Vatican fascism has created again and again within modern history and it would ill behove the NSS to take any steps or to underwrite any opinion which would sanction its weakening.

F. H. AMPHLETT MICKLEWRIGHT.

### Please Note :

The third part of "New Thinking on War and Peace" by A. C. Thompson, will appear next week.



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## ANNOUNCEMENTS

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, Art Holiday, Burton Galleries, Wirral Cheshire, 29th July to 12th August. Small Youth Camp near Yeovil, Somerset. Details of both from Mrs M. Mephram, 29 Fairview Road, Sutton, Surrey.

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, McRAE and MURRAY.

Manchester Branch NSS, Platts Fields, Car Park, Victoria Street, Sunday evenings, 8 p.m.: Messrs COLLINS, DUGNAN, 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

Manor Park Methodist Institute, Romford Road, London, E12, Friday, April 14th, 8 p.m., Public Debate. Subject: "Increased State Aid for Churches?" Speakers: R. J. CONDON (NSS) and Rev. J. H. K. PORTER.

Manchester Humanist Society. Informal meeting at 28 Alma Lane, Wilmslow, Wednesday, April 26th, 7.45 p.m.

Merseyside Humanist Group (Bluecoat Chambers, Liverpool), Friday, April 14th, 7.30 p.m.: J. FLASHMAN, "Buddhism".

Progressive League, Weekend Conference, Plaw Hatch, East Grinstead, Sussex, April 21st-23rd. Subject: "Is the Labour Party Progressive?" Speakers: REGINALD FREESON, MP, HUGH JENKINS, MP, DAVID WINNICK, MP. Details from Mr T. Graham, 33 Dickens Close, St Albans, Herts.

South Place Ethical Society (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London, WC1), Sunday, April 16th, 11 a.m.: Dr STARK MURRAY, "New Ethical Problems in Medicine"; Tuesday, April 18th, 6.30 p.m.: TONY LYNES, "Poverty and the Child".

South Place Sunday Concerts (Conway Hall, London), Sunday, April 16th, 6.30 p.m.: Amici String Quartet and Colin Horsley. Haydn, Dvorak, Shostakovich. Admission 3/-.

Freedom-in-Art. Jean Straker at the Academy of Visual Art, 12 Soho Square, London, W1, Friday, April 14th, 8 p.m. Tickets 5/- each from the National Secular Society, 103 Borough High Street, London, SE1.

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.

# LETTERS

## Who knows?

ALTHOUGH I propose rejection of the last sentence in the article "Religious Education", let me also say that I very much admire the remainder of A. C. Tompson's article (Feb. 10th, 1967).

Mr Tompson writes, "Solutions for social problems have been sought in religion and prayer for centuries and have not been found; let us turn now towards reason and science". Mr Tompson evidently has not realised that "reason and science" are not equivalent substitutes for "religion and prayer" and that therefore his last sentence is rubbish. Perhaps he has not noticed that "religious" people are quite capable of using "reason and science" in pursuance of the purposes which derive from their religious beliefs (cf. the penultimate paragraph of G. L. Simons' "Reply to Mr Quiogue").

The modern substitutes for religion and prayer are not reason and science but 'personal speculation about the ultimate significance of living' and the translation of these speculations into practical purposes such as Mr Tompson's 'search for truth' and 'the survival of society'; but we cannot prove that such purposes are better than religious purposes, we can only say that we believe they are better, because we don't really know. After all who knows that the truth is worth finding or that the human race is worth survival? I certainly don't and I'm equally sure that no RC or Communist, or anything else, knows either. Nor can I see how any amount of reasoning or science can establish a personal faith for anybody.

I am not disagreeing with Mr Tompson's outlook or perhaps with the things he would like to see reformed in the world. I am just trying to point out that his argument is invalid in his final sentence.

E. G. MACFARLANE.

## Lincoln's religious beliefs

AS A STUDENT of Abraham Lincoln, I was interested in the two-part article "John Brown's Soul" by I. S. Low in your issues of February 3rd and 10th. Although not a student of the Civil War battles, I was intrigued by the religious construction put upon some of them in the articles. However, I wish to comment upon the statements made at the end of the second article about Lincoln's religious beliefs.

Lincoln, I am sorry to say, got more religious as the war continued, and he was most pious in his Second Inaugural Address delivered shortly before his death. You could call him a Deist in that he believed in a God, but not of the 18th century type, as Mr Brogan says. Lincoln really had a religion of his own made up of some strange beliefs. He was quite superstitious and a fatalist, and his God was something of the avenging Jehovah, who punished the nation as a whole (the innocent with the guilty) for the national "sin" of slavery, while he (Lincoln) was chosen by God to carry out the Divine Plan. In spite of General McClellan's shortcomings, Lincoln believed in a Divine Purpose.

SHERMAN D. WAKEFIELD

## That wool

I AM SORRY that Isobel Grahame should be recommending "wool" for Humanists, and would have thought that there were enough of it in the Anglican Church alone. Fortunately we do have the National Secular Society and the RPA for those people who want an organisation with a declared commitment to Rationalism; both have already had a "long life" and intend to continue! Nor does the fact that the B.H.A. has no openly declared policy mean that it may not at any time decide that someone has offended against whatever its undeclared non-policy is at the moment. As for instance when an invitation to me (a non-member) to speak to a public meeting on "Humanism" was cancelled because I did not share the BHA views about dialogues with the Vatican or RI in schools. And Baroness Wootton, we know, had her own experience of finding thorns in the wool. I agree that this is a cold climate for us all and wool may seem to offer protection, but I do suggest that we should make sure that none of it is pulled over our eyes.

KIT MOUAT.

## BHA Constitution

I SHOULD not have thought that Isobel Grahame, or anyone else, could realistically argue that, even in the far dim future, an advocacy in a BHA Constitution of Rationalism, Humanism, Secular Education, together with a denouncement of sacerdotalism and religious myths (none of these are even mentioned in the new BHA *Primary Objects!*) would be likely to be limiting to a virile organisation true to its aims and purposes. On the contrary such open avowal should be stimulating and promote and sustain secular-rationalist purposes.

E. HUGHES-JONES.