

FREETHINKER

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ULYSSES — UGH !

A LIBRARY of banned obscene books has been started by the Home Office for MPs to refer to. It is the Director of Public Prosecutions who decides, in effect, which book shall gain admission to this exceptional library. Only those books which have been the subject of a successful prosecution under the Obscene Publications Act are eligible for inclusion in this elite literary collection.

The library has been started because in the past MPs have found it difficult to obtain copies of obscene books which they have to debate in the Commons. It is rumoured that since the library opened one honourable gentleman, renowned for his self-sacrificial efforts to protect the morals of millions less able to contain themselves than he, has been studiously reading as much of this obscene muck as he can, so that his extraordinary sense of disgust will not lose its edge.

Of course, there are those whose sense of disgust has such a perpetually sharp edge that they do not need to whet it as does the aforementioned honourable gentleman. The *Daily Telegraph* reports (September 18) that the Southampton public safety committee has banned *Ulysses*, the film of James Joyce's book, without even having seen it. Mr R. W. Russell, a Labour member, had proposed that the council should continue to follow the GLC when granting film certificates, but his motion was defeated by 30 votes to 26. Alderman M. W. F. Pettet, the Conservative committee chairman, told the council he did not think it right that "people should waste their money on this kind of rubbish". What we need is more public spirited persons like Alderman Pettet. His keenness, indeed his insistence, that he should assist the men and women of Southampton in the proper spending of their hard-earned money is nothing less than admirable. Alderman Pettet deserves the commendation of every decent-minded citizen. How dare Alderman

P. Barnes condemn the wise council decision as being "hypocritical, obscurantist and smacking of bumbledom". I will not stand idly by and see such righteous men as Alderman Pettet thus vilified. Alderman Pettet said the committee had decided that the film would not "come thundering filthily down here from London". Nor should it. Such filth as *Ulysses* should rightly be banned from public view. It is deleterious to social health, inimical to the general welfare of the community and contrary to true religion and morality. It is the function of a public safety committee to protect the public and filth, whether it thunders down from London or steals quietly, is indisputably unsafe.

Alderman Mrs H. K. Johnson described the book as "disgusting and degrading". Those of us who have not read the book and have any sense of decency will surely agree with her. It is all very well for the Labour group leader, Mrs Irene Candy, to say that adults should have the right to see the film if they wished and that nobody was going to drag Mrs Johnson screaming to the cinema. On second thoughts, it is not all very well. How dare Mrs Candy even conceive the idea of Mrs Johnson being dragged screaming to the cinema, or anywhere else for that matter. As for actually mentioning such a thought even in the relatively safe confines of the public safety committee, well, one can only deplore the utter immorality of such a conception and regret that such a disturbing idea should have been mentioned to others.

Thank God, there are still some people left in the British Empire who care for public decency.

Since writing the above, I have been told that the Home Office is to set up a filthy films library, not for MPs but for public safety committees. The idea is that members of public safety committees will be invited once a quarter to London, where the collection will be kept with a round-the-clock guard. They will be shown films which have been banned during the previous three months by other committees. This will help them to keep abreast of current filthy cinematic trends which threaten public safety. I understand that one Borough Council which announced the scheme prematurely has been inundated with requests to serve on its public safety committee.

So ladies, if your husband tells you that he will be thundering up to London shortly to see some filth, don't fear the worst. He may simply have become a public spirited man whose destiny is to safeguard the public from wasting their money on rubbish.

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THE CHRISTIAN SLAVE-OWNER

W. Stewart Ross

[The television documentary about 'The Colour War', September 13, was introduced by the following blurb in the *Radio Times*:

"The world has 250 million Negroes. Many live in societies dominated by whites, scattered across four continents from the slums of Rio de Janeiro and Harlem to the back streets of Brixton and the townships of Johannesburg. Their attempts to win equality have opened up an era of racial tension, hatred, and violence which may last for generations. This programme examines the origins and implications of what is perhaps the gravest and most intractable issue of our time."

'The Colour War' was a first-class documentary which did much to explain the thoughts and emotions motivating the Black Power movement. The way in which the programme depicted the horrors of the enslavement of Negroes reminded me inevitably of one of the most searing indictments of the role of white Christians in the slave trade. I refer to *Woman: Her Glory, Her Shame, and Her God* (2 vols., 1894) by that great freethought writer, William Stewart Ross—better known perhaps by his *nom de plume* of Saladin. His style is firmly rooted in the nineteenth century but what he has written in the following extract from the aforementioned book serves to increase one's understanding of the present-day tensions and conflicts between Negroes and Whites.—Editor.]

THE CHRISTIAN, quoting texts from his Bible, fell upon a harmless and defenceless people and shipped them over the ocean to do the work of beasts. The Christian slave-owner elevated woman by tearing her away from her husband and children and father and mother and native land to toil for his profit, with the lash of the whip ever liable to descend upon her naked back and limbs. The captive families had sometimes to march for hundreds of miles from their homes to the sea coast in order to be shipped for the cotton plantations. They were tied together in groups, bound together by thongs, and prodded on with sharp sticks, and slashed at with whips; and, manacled as they were together in rows, the stronger had to help to bear along the weaker.

Down glared the sun of the tropics. On, in front of their mounted drivers, with whips and fire-arms, marched, lashed to beams of wood, the men and women and children of Africa. Fatigue was insupportable, hunger a torment, and thirst an agony. The limitless waste of desert sand blistered and burnt and blazed like hell. No oasis, no palm-tree—only a boundless canopy of flaming sky; only a measureless ocean of fiery sand; only a remnant of human beings frantic with thirst, mad with suffering. There is now not one in ten of those who were driven away from their happy homes by the white Christian. For miles on miles the dead lie behind in their thousands. The survivors, where possible, have drunk the blood of the dead to assuage their phrenzied thirst. Behind there is a death trail of hair and bones and stench, and vultures, tearing at carnage-ribbons made of human bowels. That larger jumble of bones was a man, that smaller a woman, that smallest a child. In front, chained to the beams, now much too long for their purpose, straggle on, in the phrenzy begot of suffering, the comparatively few in whom life is not extinct. Loud are the oaths and the curses of the mounted followers of Jesus. Merciless are their prods, remorseless their whips, and, ever and anon, the report of their muskets rings through the hot air, in the interests of *discipline*.

On stagger the beams, and the wretches that are chained to them, swollen, blistered, and bloody, and burnt and battered almost out of human shape. Their huge and parched tongues loll out of their heads, their eyes are wild with the light of insanity. The sand is stained with the marks of dysentery and great drops of blood from lacerated backs and limbs; and, ever and anon, a dead man, or woman, or child, is detached from the beam, flung back upon the sand, and left to the vultures. This is the species of civilisation Christianity introduced among the negroes, and the Christian priesthood supported the traffic, and Bible texts were preached from to condone the enormities of crime.

Then comes the Christian ship-owner, eager for the Mammon of Unrighteousness, to export the wretched remnant to the land of their slavery. Man, woman, and child of the survivors are stowed into the hold of the vessel in lodgments more dirty and confined and horrible than those in which any modern ship stows cattle. Man, woman, and child are packed promiscuously into the same seething hold by day and by night, close as sardines are packed in a tin. For Christianity has ennobled man and elevated woman, and lent a halo of innocence to the life of the child.

The ship sets sail. Some phrenzied and half-dead relics of the awful march through the desert are pushed in among the hardy and more fortunate, in the hope that under the influence of the sea voyage, they may recover, and, in the American or West Indian market, make some dollars pass from the pocket of the Christian purchaser into the pocket of the Christian vendor. Sometimes this sordid hope was realised. At other times the over-exhausted and diseased did not recover. They died, standing among the living, and without space to lie down. The corpses were dragged out from amid the stench and filth and flung into the sea, where the shark became their sexton, his belly their tomb, and his rows of teeth their terrible epitaph.

But, occasionally, they had not been flung overboard in time to prevent the evils of contagion or infection. God "hath made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on all the face of the earth". But the dominant white man on the deck was scatheless, and the servile black man in the hold was ill, in dozens, in scores, then in hundreds. The plague threatened to visit with its indiscriminating terrors the dominant whites—the captain and crew. These dominant whites must be saved at all hazards. The hatches are nailed down, to prevent the escape therefrom of the cries of misery, the howls of delirium, and the germs of pestilence. Too late!—the white men have caught the plague; they die to a man. Down amid suffocation and darkness and disease, under the nailed hatches, lie three hundred human beings, men and women, indistinguishably mixed and intertwined, naked, rotten, and loathsome; for Christianity ennoble man and elevates woman and casts a halo of innocence round the life of the child!

The wind blows, the sails are spread; but dead hands are on the ropes. There is a dead man at the windlass, and a corpse at the helm; and dead men lie on the deck, with grinning teeth and empty sockets glaring and staring up at the red, fierce sky. For the talons of the shrieking sea-fowl have bored out the eyes and torn away the lips and cheeks from the rows of teeth that there lie clenched in a ghastly grin. The slave-ship, this time, is a loss, not a profit. The ship is a coffin—nay, a graveyard, a floating graveyard, in

which lie buried and unburied over three hundred human beings. On drifts that graveyard. Never more till the blare of the trumpet of the Archangel wakes the dead shall that crew respond to the call of "All hands ahoy!" On drifts the necropolis. By day a blood-red sun glares down upon it from a copper-coloured sky. Solemn Night mourns over it with her silent shield and her starry eyes. Now the wind blows, and the ship drifts like fury. Now there is a calm, and the ship is motionless, or wheels slowly round on the axis of the centre of her keel. There rises a hurricane: on the vessel flies, as if impetuous to hurry her dead to hell. There is a rock ahead. There is a crunch and a crash, and a hollow roll of waters; and the three hundred and over go down without a cry, and the sea-birds rise reluctantly from the feast of corpses as the waves close over the deck. This is no hyperbolical scene, O Christ, but simply a phase of the devil-work that has been done by those zealous in thy cause, and who quoted from the Book of God in support of their devilry. Behold the religionists and the religion which have done so much to elevate woman and ennobel man and to effect the brotherhood of the human race!

And not here, even here, ends the record of how Christianity has civilised the negro. Over the degradation and ignominy of the slave-market, and Christians buying heathen men and women as they buy brute beasts, I draw the curtain in anger and shame. I dare not entrust myself to make special reference to the revolting fact of husbands being separated from their wives, and of some huge negro, reserved for the purpose, being, at stated times, let in among the negresses, that he might impregnate them, and thus provide a new relay of slaves, so that the Christian owner of these negresses might become rich, and keep concubines, and endow a church. Nay, not content on all occasions with the huge and healthy negro, who was kept just as a stallion is kept, the Christian slave-owner would personally supplement the offices of the human stallion. Thus a Christian man would register his abhorrence of those whom he pretended not to regard as human beings! Thus his own quadroon children, born to him by his female slaves, became his slaves. Thus his revolting adulteries increased his property and his worldly substance, and placed him in a position by which his chapel could be enriched and his God be glorified. All his slaves were not pure negroes; a few of them were quadroons, and when they were flogged, the blood that reddened the lash of the whip was the blood that flowed in his own veins. How repulsive is the task of referring to matters to which no decent-minded man can allude without a shudder of horror! But this Mokanna of Christianity cants and lies till, in avenging rage, I feel irresistibly impelled to tear away the veil; and, if the face it concealed be unspeakably hideous, the fault is not mine: I did not make the face. By day and night I labour to transform those ghastly features into lineaments more simple and honest and human; or, failing that, to dash them to pieces with the axe of destruction.

Not always did the owner have the whips of his own drivers red with the blood of his own children. These children were liable to be sold to other planters, that their Christian fathers might coin gold out of their slavery and shame. I remember, when I was very young, reading Longfellow's verses, "The Quadroon Girl", and they left a melancholy and imperishable impression upon my memory. In the little epic the Planter and the Slave-dealer are brought together to do business. The Planter evinces an amount of reluctance to sell, because, on this occasion,

the particular slave for which a price has been offered is his own daughter: —

"Before them, with her face upraised,
In timid attitude,
Like one half curious, half amazed,
A quadroon maiden stood.

"Her eyes were large and full of light,
Her arms and neck were bare;
No garment she wore save a kirtle bright
And her own long, raven hair.

"And on her lips there played a smile,
As holy, meek, and faint,
As lights in some cathedral aisle
The features of a saint.

" 'The soil is barren—the farm is old,'
The thoughtful Planter said;
Then looked upon the Slaver's gold,
And then upon the maid.

"His heart within him was at strife
With such accursed gains;
For he knew whose passions gave her life,
Whose blood ran in her veins.

" 'But the voice of Nature was too weak;
He took the glittering gold!
Then pale as death grew the maiden's cheek,
Her hands as icy cold.

"The Slaver led her from the door,
He led her by the hand,
To be his slave and paramour
In a strange and distant land!"

But this father would be a perfect repertory of Scripture texts. In the local gospel-shop his voice would ring out sonorously in the Wesleyan hymns, he would whine piously in the prayer, he would let his dollars ring ostentatiously into the plate to support the local gospel-grinder, or to carry bible and brandy to "the poor heathen"; and he would devoutly murmur, *Amen!* when the gospel-grinder snivelled that Christianity had elevated woman and ennobled man! Tear the veil off your hideous face, O Mokanna! Would to God I could rend the skin off also, in the bitter detestation of Hypocrisy and in the temporal and eternal interests of the Human Race!

WRITERS

The first issue to come out under the new editorship of Mr Karl Hyde will be that of November 3rd.

Articles are required immediately.

Mr Hyde is already considering material for his forthcoming issues.

Manuscripts should be addressed to:

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NEWS AND NOTES

AFTER the Billy Graham show at Earls Court at which a motley collection of has-been actors, would-be singers, weightlifters and politicians told the old, old story, Londoners were regaled last week by readings from the Bible in public places. This latest gimmick to re-awaken interest in religion was promoted by The Word, and launched at Trafalgar Square where readings were given by Lord Stonham and John Biggs-Davison, MP. Joan Turner the comedienne—on a busman's holiday—sang *Land of Hope and Glory*. Umbrellas were much in evidence throughout the proceedings, for it would be expecting too much of the Almighty to do something about the English weather and anti-social behaviour of Trafalgar Square pigeons even on such an auspicious occasion. Anyway, "whom the Lord loveth, he chasteneth".

The National Secular Society in a press statement described the event as "another vain attempt to boost the world's best-seller nobody reads". It points out that the Christian Bible has occupied an undeservedly prominent place in this country for centuries. Once the daily reading of respectable, middle-class families, and still enshrined by law and custom in school and broadcasting strongholds, it is a national monument of historic interest, like the telephone directory or the highway code.

The statement continues: "Other things are claimed for it. It is hailed as a great force for good in society which has inspired millions. Millions have certainly influenced, even deeply stirred, but they have been moved more to religious wars and prejudice than to peaceful coexistence and enlightenment. Its impact on the visual arts and music of Christendom has been lauded. All this really means is that, as the wealthiest organisations in the community, the

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Christian churches have often employed artists and musicians for propagandist purposes and the Bible has proved, not unnaturally, as evocative as any other narrative of comparable length. Some of them, out of personal piety, have chosen its themes for non-commissioned works but would, one imagines, have become steeped in any other book as well promoted during their impressionable years. The same is true of writers. A special claim is made here, for the Bible is held to be not only fruitful source material but a great work of literature in its own right. Attention is drawn to the many vivid phrases in regular English use which have come from it. On investigation they all turn out to be from the Authorised Version and are a tribute not to the Author (or authors) but to King James's translators. The scores of later translations have failed to capture the public imagination, and their jejune texts fully show how trite or false is much of the original.

Above all the Bible is proclaimed, even by clerics of dubious orthodoxy, as the Word of God. All one can say is that if he wrote certain parts of it he must have been vile or mad. Apologists now say these parts derive from human error, but once that is allowed no text can be seen to be automatically sacred and the basic structure of Judaism and Christianity, 'religions of the book', collapses.

No doubt this explains the anxious attempts to promote the Scriptures in public places. We may yet see the Bible as a musical extravaganza, *Don't Knock the Impregnable Rock* at Drury Lane Theatre, or even a version on ice as the Christmas attraction at Wembley.

Flashback

SEEING IS NOT BELIEVING

JULES JANIN, the witty feuilletonist, who is now in London to chronicle the wonders of our Exposition, once began an article with this paradoxical and true remark, "I will narrate a circumstance which I believe to be true, although recounted to me by an eye witness". It is a monstrous fallacy to suppose that seeing is believing; seeing is seeing—nothing more, nothing less. Believing is not simple faith in one's own sensations, but also a faith in the *explanation* of the cause of those sensations. Dr Cullen was not so far wrong in asserting that people were never less to be trusted than when relating what they had seen.

It is not so easy to see, as people blandly imagine. Even the commonest facts are reported by eye witnesses with every variety of error. On the opening of the Exposition, for example, the state of the weather was so important as to direct universal attention to it. Yet whoever read the reports of "eye witnesses" in the papers, observed that not a drop of rain fell, that showers were brisk and frequent that an occasional shower brought out the beauty of the day, etc., etc. Between superb weather, and only a single gleam of sunshine, there was every degree of variation, noted by eye witnesses.

Then again as to the Queen's horses, one said they were six cream coloured, another four bays, another two bays. And the *Leader*, with shameless inconsistency, said in one edition that they were six bays, and in another that they were two creams. Yes, even we can err! To make this general confusion more confounding, an eye witness, not a reporter, who saw the carriage pass him, declared when we put the question directly to him, that he did not know whether the horses were bays or creams. To the newspaper reader the doubt, in such variety of assertions, must occur who is right? Is it possible that reporters can report things they have not seen? Or does this contradiction on a thing so open to every eye as the weather, illustrate the effect of prepossession in looking at facts? (The *Leader*—May 10th, 1851.)

EDITOR'S NOTE.—It may interest readers to compare the above observations with my editorial of May 26th, 1967, page 161.

RIGHTS AND DUTIES: II

A. C. Thompson

A Solution

THAT MAN has a need for the society of his fellows was recognised, three centuries before Christ, by the Greek philosopher Aristotle, who remarked that no one would choose to own the whole earth on condition of being alone in it, for man is a social being whose nature is to live with others. The survival of the individual depends upon the survival of the social group of which he is a member. Reciprocally and equally, the survival of a social group depends upon the survival of its individual members. The Social-Survival theory of the ethical principle hence can provide a ready and a logical explanation of the nature, origin and necessity of rights and duties. As a member of society, it is my duty to do nothing which may imperil the security and the survival of others and of the whole. It is the like duty of all members of society to do the same. But if all persons have this duty, then all persons have a duty to me to do nothing which will imperil my security and my survival. My duty, in general, is to sustain my society and everyone in it. Conversely, the duty of all others and of the whole towards me is to assure my security and survival. Others in society have rights against me and I have the same rights against them for the same reason.

Rights and duties of individuals in a society thus depend on a reciprocity which follows as a logical and necessary condition for the survival of society. We all treat one another in such ways that we all survive, and consequently we are all treated in turn by others in such ways that we each survive. One has a right to what everyone else has a right to. One has a right to require from others what he has a duty to accord to others. People in a society may be compared roughly to a party of mountain climbers tied to one another by a rope. While each climber is keeping his grip to save himself, he also helps to assure the safety of the other climbers and, reciprocally, the grips of the other climbers assure his safety. The mutual tie causes each to perform his duty of preserving the others and to enjoy the right of being preserved in return by all the others. The existence of rights of individuals is not a matter of fairness but a matter of logical necessity. It does not depend on one's sense of propriety, but upon one's reason.

Imagine our primitive ancestors of the early Palaeolithic era. If human society did not grow naturally out of mothers' care for their children, keeping their progeny together for a large portion of their lives, it would have grown from the necessity of communal life for survival. Beset by wild animals, poorly equipped either as a defensive or a predacious beast, needing a constant supply of food, men could meet best the requirements of a hostile environment by remaining combined in groups. Living thus in groups, each member refrains from killing another. Each lets others have their share of the food, the skins, the fuel, the fire, and other necessities and comforts of life. For thus refraining from injuring others, and for thus permitting others to possess what they have, each member must expect to be unharmed by the others and to be allowed his subsistence. Moreover, if each member of this little group refrains from killing another, nobody is killed. Hence, each has an expectation of being allowed to live by all the others, both by all the others individually and also by the whole society collectively. Each has a 'right'

to life, a right which he could not claim from any of the others if they did not form a society, and if they instead encountered each other in the wilds competing for the same amenities of life. This right is not so much the result of any compact or agreement among the members of the society as it is a natural or logical necessity—it is simply the way things have to work themselves out.

If, for example, I am a member of that primitive society; if I see that one individual kills another; and if, according to the ethics of this savage band, one individual is permitted to kill another; then I have no reason to expect to live. I may as well kill before I am killed, or else quit the society, and everyone else in the society may well think the same way and do likewise. If the group as a whole decrees the death of one of its members, for any reason except murder or treason, then my own life can be similarly precarious, and so can be the life of every other member of this society. If, for example, a Hitler can exterminate whom he pleases, it is only his favour that permits any of us to live. Every rational human being in any society would seek to establish a law that nobody should kill another. He would seek to enforce this law by enacting that he who does so must forfeit his own life; and he could justify the death penalty on the ground that he who does not accord another the right to live loses thereby his own right to life. Primitive anthropoids not yet endowed even with the power of speech and thus unable to enact laws, would need at least to recognise this principle unverballed, or else they could not remain together as a society. Individual rights are therefore a logical consequence of the necessity for the survival of society.

Are the rights of an individual subordinate to those of society? They cannot be. The rights of individuals must be separate, not additive. It cannot be maintained that the rights of two people are twice, or even greater than, the rights of one person. If we go back to our previous example of the hypothetical first primitive society which may have consisted of, let us say, only three people, it is at once obvious that no two of them may conspire to kill the third. Nor may two of them conspire to deny to one of them, on equal terms, any right which they assert for themselves. If any two may kill the third, then no one of the three can be safe; he may be killed at any time by the conspiracy of the other two. No society could hold together under such a condition. Similarly, if a majority in any society can rightfully decide to kill the members of some class, let us say idiots, or even a single individual, such as some specific idiot, then why would it not be just for that society to decree the killing of, let us say writers against supernaturalism such as I am, or the killing of me specifically? Or the class of which you are a member, or you specifically, whatever you are? Each person has rights in society which are due to him and which are equal both to those of any other individual and of all other individuals collectively, whether such an equation satisfies mathematical requirements or not. No number of people in a society, however great, may conspire together to deprive a single individual of his just right. It matters not how insignificant or inarticulate such individual may be, whether this individual be, let us say, an idiot or a child.

Duty means what is due, usually acts or refrainings from acts. In meaning, the distinguishing character of duty is that it permits no alternative—the person upon whom the

DISGUISED ATHEISTS

Gregory S. Smelters

THE AVERAGE FREETHINKER, particularly of the younger generation, probably rarely, if ever, scans the specialised abstruse works of modern logic and scientific philosophy. But when he does so, he may meet occasionally with very illuminating and entertaining passages by which modern academic logicians, teaching at American and British universities, dominated by orthodox Boards of Administration, argue for scientific atheism against the Christian God-belief, but disguise their "subversive" argument and, instead of attacking the god Yahweh (alias Jehovah) of the Jewish-Christian-Muslim orthodoxy, they hypocritically flog—Cerberus, the multi-headed watchdog of the Greek Hell, or Pegasus, the winged horse that sprang from the blood of Medusa when the Hellenic hero Perseus cut off her head, or Zeus, the Olympian god of the Indo-European daylight sky.

It is extremely rare when a particularly fearless philosopher smites directly at the Christian God, as Prof. W. T. Stace did: "The doctrine of the existence of God, if taken literally, is a myth. God is not a part of natural order, i.e., the space-time order, and therefore is not existent or objective" (*Religion and the Modern Mind*, pp. 232, 253, London, 1953). The rest of the timid academic mob prefer to hide smugly from the eventual wrath (and dismissal!) of their Administration behind a typographical disguise.

So entertain yourselves with these delightful samples from the works of a Yankee professor at Harvard University, W. van O. Quine and the late Prof. Susan Stebbing, an Englishwoman, erstwhile at London University. Quine unctuously demolishes the existence of real Cerberus and Pegasus, while Stebbing expertly overthrows Zeus from his Olympus. But to make their argument honest and relevant, I have substituted accordingly the god Yahweh of the American and British official Christianity.

(1) "There need be no mystery about attributing non-existence, where there is nothing to attribute it to, and there need be no misgivings over the meaningfulness of words which purport to name and fail. To purport to name and fail is already proof of a full share of meaning. Some meaningful words which are proper names from a grammatical point of view, notably 'Yahweh' (Jehovah), do not name anything" (Quine, *Methods of Logic*, p. 202).—"To try to assure there being such a thing as Yahweh by identifying it with the Yahweh-idea is to make a similar (i.e., name-referent) confusion" (op. c., p. 199).—"There is really only one world, and there is not, never was, and never will be any such thing as Yahweh" (p. 201).—"The philosopher) McX cannot, indeed, quite persuade himself that any region of space-time, near or remote, contains a floating West Semitic god of flesh and blood. Pressed for further details on Yahweh, then, he says that Yahweh is an idea in men's minds. Here, however, a confusion begins to be apparent. We may for the sake of argument concede that there is an entity, and even a unique entity (though this is rather implausible), which is the mental Yahweh-idea; but this mental entity is not what people are talking about when they deny Yahweh" (Quine, *From the Logical Point of View*, p. 2).—"The structure of this confusion is as follows: He confused the alleged named object Yahweh with the meaning of the word 'Yahweh', therefore concluding that

Yahweh must exist in order that the word have meaning. Therefore Yahweh, initially confused with a meaning, ends up as an idea in the mind" (op. cit., p. 9).

(2) "If there were any gods, they would be individual objects of precisely the same type as *men*. Now, it is clear that it does not follow from *I am thinking of a god* that there is an individual object with regard to which it can be said '*This is a god*'; hence, we can think of gods although there are none. It is important to observe that however many different senses '*There are G's*' may have, corresponding to different logical types expressed by '*G*', all of them are such that ' $(\exists x) Gx$ ' cannot be true unless *G* belongs to something" (Stebbing, *Modern Introd. to Logic*, p. 162. Stebbing's own examples are 'unicorn' and 'horse'. '*G*' is any property attributed to an object *x*).—"Expressions containing such words as 'exists', 'is a non-entity', 'is not real', and their opposites, are also misleading. They express affirmative or negative existential propositions. '*Yahweh does not exist*' is of the same grammatical form as '*Gandhi does not speak*'; hence, the propositions so expressed have been mistakenly supposed to be of the same form. We can see the difference if we consider what the speaker who uses the sentence is in each case asserting. '*Gandhi does not speak*' denies that an individual has a property; but '*Yahweh does not exist*' denies that certain properties belong to any individual. These denials are quite different in form. It should be clear that an assertion of existence is always equivalent to the assertion that a certain property does not belong to anything. Such expressions as '*Yahweh is an existent*', '*Yahweh is a non-entity*', '*Gods are not real*' are logically inappropriate, since they suggest similarity of form with propositions expressed by '*Dante is a poet*', '*Jack is a non-combattant*', '*Daffodils are not blue*'" (op. cit., p. 80).—"If '*Yahweh*' were an ordinary proper name, then '*Yahweh*' must denote an individual; but '*Yahweh*' is an abbreviated descriptive phrase the significance of which has been determined by the Hebrew prophets. If, then, we say '*Yahweh was jealous*', we are either referring elliptically to descriptions given by Hebrew prophets or we are asserting what is false, since there is no god named Yahweh. When fully stated the reference to a context would be made explicit, and we should say '*The Jews believed that there was a god Yahweh and that he was jealous*'. This is an assertion about the beliefs of actual men, and is true if these men actually entertained these beliefs. Propositions such as '*Yahweh exists*' are propositions asserting existence. They may be called affirmative existential propositions. Propositions such as '*There is no god*' are negatively existential. Affirmative existential propositions are true, if and only if, the descriptive phrase applies to an individual existing in the actual world. There is no other mode of existence. Negative existential propositions are true if there is no individual in the actual world to which the descriptive phrase applies. This is plain commonsense" (op. cit., p. 56).

Yes, of course; when we substitute now 'the Jewish-Christian-Muslim god Yahweh' for her term 'Zeus', we see that nowadays atheism is also a plain commonsense. Only we miss an uncompromising, fearless statement of one's honest conviction in these typical exponents of academic circumlocution.

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 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, Platt Fields, Sunday afternoon, 3 p.m.; Car Park, Victoria Street, Sunday evenings, 8 p.m.

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

Belfast Humanist Group (War Memorial Building, Waring Street), Monday, October 9th, 8 p.m.: Rev. R. I. PRITCHARD, "The Humanism of Dr Albert Schweitzer".

Leicester Secular Society (Secular Hall, 75 Humberstone Gate), Sunday, October 8th, 6.30 p.m.: F. J. CORINA, "The Yo-Yos".

Merseyside Humanist Group (Ethel Wormald College, 70 Mount Pleasant, Liverpool), Friday, October 13th, 7.30 p.m.: "Religion in Schools". A discussion on the ATV documentary "Defenders of the Faith". Teachers and students who appeared in the programme will be present.

South Place Ethical Society (Conway Hall Humanist Centre, Red Lion Square, London, WC1), Sunday, October 8th, 11 a.m.: RICHARD CLEMENTS, "The Humanism of Moncure Conway". Sunday, October 8th, 6.30 p.m.: Concert. The Amici String Quartet; Beethoven and Martinu programme. Admission 4s. Tuesday, October 10th, 6.45 p.m.: "Compulsive Gambling". A speaker from Gamblers Anonymous.

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

THEATRE

David Tribe

Fill the Stage with Happy Hours (Charles Wood), Vaudeville.

Mrs Wilson's Diary (Richard Ingrams and John Wells), Royal, Stratford, E.

THOUGH THE ARTS Council is mentioned and much of the language would not have amused Victoria, *Fill the Stage with Happy Hours* is basically Dickensian. A lot of the poignancy is lost because it is impossible to believe a provincial rep. (certainly not the Nottingham Playhouse, where the production originated) could be quite so tatty in 1967, while there is too much naturalistic detail for the piece to be taken as pure surrealism. Yet there is a touch of pathos about the central characters' *apologia*, "We've not succeeded, but we're not ineffectual". The Harrises are posturing theatre managers, whose show goes on more through her profits in the bar and a grant engineered by a dipsomaniac local councillor than his business acumen or any of the company's his ionic talents. But their absence of fireworks on the stage is more than offset by *grand guignol* performances off it, centred round a 17-year-old son who gains experience with a struggling actress (prepared to stop struggling) and a theatrical *grande dame* looking for kicks, a dwarfish dogsbody and a curvaceous char. It is only in the second act that Harry H. Corbett and Sheila Hancock as the Harrises really live out their hamming as a way of life and not as something put on for the evening. Hylde ("she knows, you know") Baker as the dwarf and Ken Wynne as the councillor give exceptionally fine performances. Director William Gaskill makes full use of Harry Waistnag's adaptable set and blends all his highly individualistic character actors and actresses into a team.

The most successful series in *Private Eye*, which has included the lamentably dreary letters from the House of Commons "skool" by Eric Buttock (Lubbock), is *Mrs Wilson's Diary*. Unaccountably the journal has gained the reputation of a left-wing bastion, though most of its material savours of the swipes of undergraduates who age into Tory cabinet ministers. This "diary" is less of a moralistic protest against admiss technology and humbugging "socialism" than of an upper crust sneer at the grammar school boy who becomes top person and the ex-suburban housewife who still buys Sainsbury's delicious frozen fish fingers instead of fresh salmon from Fortnum and Mason's. Malice is not an ingredient of the greatest satire and for all her provincial gentility, Mrs Wilson shines through as a far nicer person than her lampooners. The published version relies for its humour mostly on echoes of awful advertising jingles; its action is largely repetitious knock-about with snooping George Wigg falling down the chimney and drunken George Brown climbing up the drainpipe. In this stage adaptation by the authors and Joan Littlewood the action is more inventive, the political comment sharper and the overall form shapelier. John Wells has written some clever lyrics, notably "The Terrible Mr Brown" and a "What Would They Say" lament on behalf of the early socialists by press secretary Gerald Hoffman (Kaufman). For the alert there are *Round the Horne* gags. The whole production is much livelier, funnier, more tuneful and apposite than *Macbird* and is probably the best entertainment on in London. Bill Wallis captures almost every facial expression cartoonists have given Mr Wilson, and Myvanwy Jenn as Gladys Mary has a soprano warble and a self-deprecating step that are perfection in gentility. They are hilarious in a song and dance routine, "Harold and Me". Sandra Caron as Audrey Callaghan, Bob Grant as George Brown and Howard Goorney as a Maharishi guru are outstanding among a talented supporting caste. Jeremy Taylor (latterday) has written the music.