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Friday,
November 17, 1967**HUMANIST PROGRESS IN PARLIAMENT**

SIX leaders of the Humanist Movement met with six MPs at the House of Commons on November 7 to inaugurate a Humanist Parliamentary Group. The purpose of this meeting was to discuss issues of concern to Humanists, and how they may best be pressed through Parliamentary processes. The six MPs were all keen to support Humanism in this way.

The Humanist representatives were: for the British Humanist Association—Dr Peter Draper (vice-chairman), Michael Lines (executive officer) and David Pollock (leader of Humanist Lobby); for the National Secular Society—G. N. Deodhekar (member of the Executive Committee), William McIlroy (general secretary) and David Tribe (president).

The meeting was convened and chaired by Mr Peter Jackson, MP, who insisted from the start that no mere list of Humanist sympathisers was required but a vitally active group of MPs who were prepared to act for Humanist interests in the House. It was felt such a group had now been established.

Among the issues considered were the laws relating to divorce, religious instruction in state schools and Sunday observance; broadcasting time for Humanists on TV and radio was also discussed. On each of these the MPs present clearly held Humanist views.

It was agreed the role of the group was to act as a channel enabling Humanist opinions to be heard in Parliament; representatives of the Movement would provide information, research and guidance on the general Humanist feeling relating to various issues, while the MPs would undertake to select appropriate methods and times for acting in the best interests of the Humanist Movement in the House.

This dual venture on behalf of the BHA and NSS may be indicative of future co-operation and combined effort. Quite certainly a merger for activity relating to Parliament seems desirable.

As several members of the House of Lords have declared themselves Humanists, it is hoped a similar liaison group may be set up with these members also.

RIGHTS OF CHILDREN

AS a contribution to Human Rights Year, which starts on December 10, the National Secular Society has called a working party to discuss—and issue a statement upon—the Rights of Children.

The statement will be made available to all NSS members, and copies will be sent to child welfare organisations, the press, and to any group who are concerned with matters of this kind.

It is expected the statement will greatly concern such issues as adoption and illegitimacy.

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HUMANISM IN DUBLIN

THE Catholic curtain of the Irish Republic has at last been penetrated with the formation of a Humanist Group in Dublin. This is a major breakthrough for the British Humanist Association and for the International Humanist Movement. It is hoped this group will act as a nucleus for further groups throughout the Republic.

The formative meeting was arranged and convened by Tony O'Connell at Dublin's Majestic Hotel in October. Senator Owen Skeffington gave a speech welcoming Mr O'Connell's initiative and expressing his view that the time was ripe for Humanism to establish itself in the Republic.

Michael Lines (BHA executive office) offered the new group every support from the BHA and the International Movement. Mr Lines had flown over specially for the formative meeting. Three members of the Belfast Humanist

Group crossed the Border to welcome and encourage the group also.

A provisional committee was elected for the purpose of organising further meetings. Mr O'Connell was elected as chairman, Mrs T. Healy as Secretary and Mr F. Allardyce as treasurer.

The room was filled to capacity, mostly by a hundred or so young people who showed a lively and sympathetic interest in the group's formation. As the only Humanist organisation in the Republic, the group may expect lively support but, if the early experience of Mr O'Connell (as an active Humanist) is to teach anything, they will meet with lively opposition also. The meeting was to have been held at the Powers Royal Hotel but, after the proprietors had read what the meeting was for, they promptly announced themselves 'good Catholics' and cancelled the booking the day before the meeting was due to be held.

* * *

RI IN SCHOOLS

THE National Secular Society has circulated a questionnaire to its members seeking information relating to the problems created by religious instruction in schools and by 'opting out'.

So far, there has been a fair response but greater interest needs to be declared in order for further measures to be taken. If, as a parent of a child at school, you have any points of information which may assist in this enquiry, it would be appreciated if you would telephone the General Secretary (NSS) 01-407 2717.

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UHF CONFERENCE

THE University Humanist Federation is to hold its annual conference at Nottingham University over the weekend January 5-7 in 1968. The topic for the conference will be drugs, and the speakers include Steve Abrams and Francis Huxley.

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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, SE1. Telephone HOP 2717. Cheques, etc., should be made payable to the NSS.

Humanist Letter Network (International) and Humanist Postal Book Service (secondhand books bought and sold). 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

The Cambridge Humanists. 27 Portugal Street, Wednesday, November 22nd, 8.30 p.m. Discussion: "Is Marriage Tolerable?" Mill Lane Lecture Rooms, Friday, November 24th, 8.30 p.m.: JOHN WREN-LEWIS, "Man's Need for God".

Leicester Secular Society. Secular Hall, 75 Humberstone Gate, Sunday, November 19th, 6.30 p.m.: Mrs A. J. WALKER, "Christian Opposition in Education".

South Place Ethical Society. Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, WC1, Sunday, November 19th, 11 a.m.: LORD SORENSON, "Humanism and Faith"; Tuesday, November 21st, 6.45 p.m.: "Youth and Sex". Speakers from London University.

South Place Sunday Concerts. Conway Hall, London, Sunday, November 19th, 6.30 p.m.: Kantrovitch Piano Trio. Beethoven, Stevens, Brahms. Admission 4/-.

University of London Humanist Society. Canterbury Hall, Cartwright Gardens, London, WC1, Sunday, November 19th, 3.30 p.m.: DAVID TRIBE, "The Police and Civil Liberty".

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

IN an article headed *The Opposition* (*Guardian*, October 19, 1967) Geoffrey Moorhouse wrote:

"Almost as divided into sects as the Christians they, the British Humanist Association, National Secular Society, Progressive League, Rationalist Press Association and South Place Ethical Society, distinguish themselves by hair-splitting differences."

and a little further on:

"They are all so much on the same side of almost every issue you care to name that the wonder is they don't form a coalition."

* * *

I found these words acutely embarrassing. It was a perfectly valid observation. The "hair-splitting differences" coupled with the inter-organisational disputes which are publicly aired in papers such as this, and house journals such as the BHA's *Humanist News*, may be guaranteed to expose a lack of solidarity out of all proportion to the true picture, and many potential members of one or another of the Movement's organisations have no doubt been greatly deterred from adding their much-needed support to our number.

If disputes between the various Humanist organisations do arise—and I suppose it is too much to hope that we can end them for ever—they should be settled quietly and internally. It is extraordinary how enlarged these small disputes appear in the eyes of the fringe-member and potential member.

I am daring to write these words here, in a paper which reaches many outside the whole Humanist Movement, because I can go on to add that there are now clear indications of a sincere wish for greater co-operation and harmony throughout the Movement. Real moves for closer collaboration have begun. Perhaps we can take it the folly of past squabbles in public has been recognised. The Movement comprises various organisations who can (and usually do) work with considerable thought for each other. Few issues could do more harm to the Movement as a whole than careless words which give the impression of internal discord; and few better weapons can be given to those who oppose the Movement.

As the first and only individual to have a place on the Executive Committees of both the BHA and the NSS, I now see only more clearly how small but how dangerous these petty squabbles are. I am more aware than before of a sensitivity among committee members which must be overcome before real progress can be made. Committees may have to bend backwards to co-operate with each other; perhaps even turn the other cheek on occasions. **But for the sake of the Movement—for the sake of Humanism—all within the various committees must do their utmost to overcome their differences and, thereby, close the Humanist ranks.**

A NEEDED DICTATORSHIP

F. H. Snow

IN a world in which racial and ideological antagonisms frequently rupture peace, engender devastating wars and foster global unrest, the ideal of an international brotherhood and humanitarian society seems far from realisation. Acrimonies continually erupt, causing oppressive acts and reprisals, and threatening to involve the major forces of destruction; glaring injustices provoke insurrectionary measures. Owing to the many coercive incentives, humanity lives in continuous tension, and, as in other centuries, trouble and disorder feature prominently, despite the great advance of science.

With so many conflicting interests, so little recognition of the legitimate aspirations of those regarded as enemies, so little goodwill towards peoples of other culture, humanity stumbles fractiously on, its pacification no more probable than flight to the sun. There are too many rights to be vindicated, too many wrongs to be righted, too many forces opposed to the rights and the remedying of wrongs, vastly too much license for anti-communal enterprise, too much encouragement, in what we call the Free World, for manipulation of the sources of wealth by the few for the few, far too many examples of 'man's inhumanity to man' to permit the emergence of our planet from the state of upheaval in which, after thousands of years of strife, it finds itself. The long-drawn-out struggle of ideologies in Vietnam; the military seizure of power in Greece; the Nigerian and Congolese insurrections, and the recent war between Egypt and Israel, vividly demonstrate the malaise that agitates the human family, almost without intermission.

We hear much of the blessings of freedom, but no term is more misconceived. It is freedom to pursue a multiplicity of antagonistic aims that is responsible for the world's disorder. The prime need is of a supreme authority—an all-powerful dictatorship. History has seen the rising of numerous aspirants to such puissance, of whom Napoleon and Hitler come readily to mind. Had either succeeded in extending his empire over the whole globe, he could have ensured peace, and, by sagacious rule, maintained it. The great probability, however, is that the seeds of revolt would have germinated within the imposed regime and brought about its disintegration, because of the incapacity of tyrant lords to justly govern.

Christians are wont to claim that if all men had God in their hearts, strife would be impossible. If to 'have God in the heart' is to have love of everyone, nothing is truer, and, could that ideal have been realised, earth would be a paradise, in spite of its discomforts. But belief rarely breeds such love, and worshippers of the One, True God have been responsible for many wars and persecutions. The Catholic Church sought to quell the demon of human unrest by means of a compulsory, standardised faith, but, as history records, she failed, after bloody crusades and centuries of burnings and tortures. The root of the world's troubles is not, as she asserts, lack of belief in God. If he could be universally accepted as fact—this God who evinces no more animation than stone, and for belief in whom there is no sensible excuse—the sharply conflicting definitions of his will, employed in justification of predatory schemes and aggressions, would constitute a stern obstacle to global appeasement.

It is for lack of the Divine Dictator imagined by the ghost of a god to whom, even in this realistic age, many millions pay homage, however artificial, that humanity

flounders in a bog of suicidal feuds. It is because the Almighty Supervisor that could blanch the cheek of the mightiest trouble-maker, galvanise wealth-hoarders into action for relief of the deprived and famishing, send despots scurrying to uplift the downtrodden, spur governments to stop armament production and belligerents to cease fighting—it is because he is a mere figment of primitive mentality, that our cauldron of tribulation bubbles. Detesting the notion of human dictatorship, for fear of the ruthless compulsions historically associated with unbridled power, our great plurality of diverse regimes is without the controlling force essential to harmonious co-existence.

As no mortal can be entrusted with the task of world pacificator, and in default of the omnipotent, wise and compassionate deity who would ideally fill the role, hope of a sane humanity rests on a virile secular gospel. Not unless worship of a myth is replaced by a dynamic rational philosophy; not until the illusion of supernatural sanction ceases to bias politics and inspire tyrannies; not until a God whose ineptitude permits foul deeds in his name, outrageous injustices, and suffering on an appalling scale, is expunged from human credence, can there be world peace.

Whatever our love of freedom, we should, as sceptics, rationalists, humanists, implacably oppose the freedom that is the enemy of freedom—the freedom to pursue oppressive ambition, foment discord, and exploit ignorance and credulity. We must establish an absolute authority, born of the people's choice—an accepted dictatorship of reason, for the just regulation of human affairs. We shall need to surrender the liberty to drag our feet in the Best of all Causes, if that objective is to be attained before civilisation expires in nuclear homicide.

CONWAY HALL, Red Lion Square, London, WC1

SOCIAL AND MORAL EDUCATION

PUBLIC MEETINGS

FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 17th

DIANE MUNDAY

(Member of the BHA Education Committee)

FRIDAY, DECEMBER 1st

MAURICE HILL

(Author "Moral Education in Secondary Schools—
A Suggested Syllabus")

FRIDAY, DECEMBER 15th

DAVID TRIBE

President: National Secular Society
(Author "Religion and Ethics in Schools" and
"100 Years of Freethought")

MEETINGS COMMENCE at 7.30 p.m.

Organised by the NATIONAL SECULAR SOCIETY
103 Borough High Street, London, SE1
Telephone: 01-407 2717

SEX AND COMMUNICATION

Douglas Bramwell

IN current arguments about sexual morality a point which seems to be almost universally ignored is that sexual expression, either conversational or physical, can be a means of personal communication.

In our era, communications technology and mass communications methods are advancing rapidly while the art of significant personal communication is neglected. As a result, increasing numbers of words are being poured out to increasing numbers of people, but with less and less significance. We are left in no doubt of the excellence of the latest detergent, but our knowledge of even our closest friends remains worthlessly shallow.

In such an era, so potentially great a means of personal communication as sexuality is too precious to be ignored. Once a man and a woman acknowledge each others opposite sexualities, and sexual modes of expression are allowed to operate between them, the possibilities of significant communication are vastly increased.

And what are sexual modes of expression? There is, of course, the night in bed; but there are also the smile and the flicker of an eyelid. Most important, there are words—words used as they can only be used between sexually conscious men and women. Words to calm, words to excite, words used beautifully, obscene words; all words, and all ways of using words, have a part to play in communication between the sexually aware.

Unfortunately, in Western civilisation, awareness and expression of sex is far from being, in general, a channel of personal communication; it is usually a barrier. This is the result of centuries of conventional Christian-based morality which, in its efforts to protect society from the unstabilising effects of children being born outside the family unit, declared sex to be sinful outside marriage. Even marital sexual activities, except when used for procreative purposes, have tended to be regarded as an unfortunate, but necessary, outlet for man's fleshly weaknesses.

Although it may be true that in certain Continental countries women still guard their virginity with more resolve than do some of their newly enlightened English contemporaries, it is perhaps in England that the more elementary, yet intensely communicative, forms of sexual expression are regarded with the greatest suspicion and met with the coldest rebuffs. It is one of the pleasures of, say Italy that strangers can be seen, in cafe or train, conversing in a way that clearly shows their mutual enjoyment of each others opposite sexualities. Conversation with a strange

woman in an English train is limited to the kind that one might have with a maiden aunt of Plymouth Brethren persuasion. And how often will an English girl, as an Italian will—even when she has an escort—acknowledge with a grin the interest of a passing male. Our enlightened younger generation still have much to learn about sexual communication; they must learn to talk and grin as well as go to bed.

But let us return from this diversion in comparison to the morality of the issue. Today it is doubtful whether a mere appeal to the stability of society is a generally acceptable moral principle. There is a realisation that 'society' is too abstract an entity to be the basis for morality. What is more, society is becoming, especially in many youthful eyes, equated with the Establishment and all the negative, conservative attitudes that it stands for—or seems to stand for.

And if there is little respect for the abstraction known as society, there is even less for those other abstractions 'the Christian ethic' and 'natural law'. To a growing extent moral obligations are felt, not toward abstractions, but toward people.

All abstract moral principles are negative, restrictive, conservative, authoritarian and destructive of personal communication. Even G. E. Moore failed to avoid the trap for, in *Principia Ethica*, he concludes that because moral decisions in individual cases are so difficult, we should adhere to conventional moral rules because, in the majority of cases, these are morally correct. This attitude would certainly tend to preserve society but, unfortunately, it would also tend to prevent the injection, into society, of moral innovation; there is no need for new moral insights.

A growing number of people—people who want to exercise their powers of thinking and feeling—are no longer prepared to accept the simple decision-free moral codes offered by the abstract moralities of the past. These people choose to plunge into the torturing complexities of action based on moral decisions about personal relationships.

It can be noted in passing that, as far as sexual activities are concerned, techniques are available to make it unnecessary for society to be protected by restrictive rules. When contraception and abortion are fully integrated into our social structure, society will no longer be in danger of being rocked by the possible results of extra-marital sexual expression.

Morality based on personal relationships is surely the only morality that a thoroughgoing humanism can accept. Any other morality, any morality based on abstract principles, will sacrifice humanity to the transcendent, the concrete situation to the mere generality.

Morality, of any sort, is based on the assumption that there is a recognisable difference between good and evil actions, and that the former are preferable to the latter. Abstract morality measures good and evil by means of general rules; a morality based on human relations measures good and evil by the effect that an action has on other people.

This humanistic basis for morality has, of course, been in circulation alongside abstract moral principles for centuries. It is the age old "Do as you would be done by". But even

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this guide can be thought of in too narrow a way and become an abstract rule. The point was made by Shaw: "Do not do unto others as you would that they should do unto you. Their tastes may not be the same".

Every human situation is, to some extent, unique. It is from this uniqueness that the difficulties of moral decision spring. Because there are not stereotyped moral situations there can be no adequate fixed moral rules.

Morality based on personal relationships is no easy morality; it demands the use of thought and feeling, and it generates a great deal of pain when, inevitably, errors are made. But only by the painful decisions of such a morality can behaviour pass beyond a deadening uniformity that inevitably, as times change, becomes a conservative and, ultimately, a regressive force.

All this has been said before. But not often has the factor of communication been mentioned. Yet, if humanistic morality demands that we try not to harm others, surely this is only its negative side. Does it not also demand that we get in touch with one another? The point of this article is that sexual awareness and expression is a way of getting in touch. But if harm is not to be done then they must be used within the limitations of a humanistic morality.

So, it will be seen, that to advocate sexual expression as a means of communication is not to give the green light to promiscuity. Promiscuity is a symptom of psychosexual immaturity. But we can try to use our sexuality to get in touch with others. It is not an easy or danger-free task, especially if, as is so easy, elements of deceit and dishonesty creep in. If you try to communicate with your friend's wife, make sure that your friend appreciates your motive. Otherwise the results might make interesting reading in a certain Sunday newspaper.

GYPSIES

A Report from NCCL General Secretary, Tony Smythe

ON November 1, the National Council for Civil Liberties published *On the Road*, a report on the civil liberties of gypsies and other travellers. The author is Gratton Puxon who has lived and worked amongst travellers in Ireland and in Britain. He is Secretary of the Gypsy Council which is affiliated to the NCCL. In many respects the report supplements the authoritative study by the Ministry of Housing *Gypsies and Other Travellers* (HMSO).

However, it does more to uncover the more shady side of dealings between the settled community and the gypsies (surely the most discriminated against people in Britain today). It alleges that the local authorities often with the aid of the police force have harassed and persecuted gypsy families while ignoring appeals from the Ministry of Housing to find a humane solution. The solution advanced by the NCCL, the Gypsy Council and the Ministry of Housing research team is the establishment of a network of authorised and economically viable sites throughout the country.

With honourable exceptions local authorities have refused to co-operate with the Ministry and the time has now come for a directive to be issued requiring them to set up sites. This must be done now, without further delay, or the Winter of 1967 will take its toll in terms of the health, happiness and even the lives of this defenceless group. The gypsies deserve a place in Britain's society not merely because they are the victims of prejudice now, but because they have something worthwhile to contribute.

On the Road is available (3/6 plus 5d postage) from Tony Smythe, National Council for Civil Liberties, 4 Camden High Street, London, NW1.

ZEUS AND YAHWEH

A. J. Lowry

A CRITICISM often levelled against agnostics is that, to be consistent, they must not only refuse to deny the existence of the Christo-Judaistic God, but must refuse also to deny the existence of all the other multifarious deities which peopled the ancient world. This argument, however, has nothing to support it except the popular fashion to consider as mentally deranged anyone who would dare to seriously consider the existence of these pagan divinities. A moment's cool reflection will surely show that of all the gods man has ever created, it is the Christian one which is by far the most unlikely.

Before going any further, I wish to explicitly state that I am not a Zeus worshipper. My point is simply this—that the Greek pantheon, because it was considered more limited in its wonder-working capabilities, was far easier to believe than the over-ambitious claims advanced on behalf of the Christian God. The Greeks, for example, by having the gods themselves controlled by the mysterious Fates, easily steered round the problem of evil, a paradox which has plagued Christianity for the 1900 years of its existence. If prayers to Zeus failed, it could still be argued that he was doing his best but the Fates were against him, or perhaps Hera, or another of the Olympians, was busy plotting against him.

The Christians, however, have refused to avail themselves of the above strategy. They insist upon one God with whom all things are possible, thus giving themselves absolutely no excuse where their divinity refuses to oblige them.

Also, the Greek gods were at least conceivable. If we are told that there lived gods and goddesses in human form on top of Mount Olympus 2,500 years ago, with powers to send blessings or curses, famine or plenty, defeat or victory, etc., we might not believe it but at least we have a fairly clear idea of what is meant. In fact, the only evidence we have against their existence is circumstantial; induction leads us to believe that natural phenomena is produced by natural causes and not by the will of Olympian supermen.

The Christian God, however, fares much worse than this. We are expected to believe that he is a God of love who sends she-bears to maul children (1 John 4:8, 2 Kings 2:23-25), an omnipotent God who is defeated by chariots of iron (Rev. 19:6, Judges 1:19), and a God who is the author of wisdom yet passes laws against the eating of four-legged birds (Prov. 2:6, Lev. 11:20). In addition, he is one God and three Gods at the same time, and, being omnipresent, forsakes himself (Deut. 6:4, 1 John 5:7, Psalm 145:18, Matt. 27:46). Can anyone, the Christians included, claim that they can envisage such a paradoxical deity?

Thus it is obvious that whilst the existence of the gods of old is only extremely improbable, like the existence of unicorns, the Christian God, like a square circle, is a contradiction in terms, and is thus impossible. To be strictly correct, therefore, we should say that we are not entirely sure that Zeus and his associates do not exist, but we may say with certainty that we are absolutely convinced of the non-existence of Yahweh.

It is time man grew out of his beliefs in the supernatural for good, but if this is asking too much for the present, may I suggest that religion could begin to rationalise itself by a return to the worship of the deities of ancient Greece?

THE ANXIETY MAKERS

Some Curious Preoccupations of the Medical Profession, by Alex Comfort. Thomas Nelson & Sons Ltd. 30/-. (One of a series: *The Natural History of Society*, edited by A. Comfort.)

Some notes by George Foss Westcott

DR COMFORT is engaged in research into the biological process of ageing and is well-known for his books and broadcasts on sex. He is also a writer of novels and poems. So his interests are very wide, and in *The Anxiety Makers* his acute and objective powers of observation of society and his penetrating and illuminating gift of commentary on what he sees are clearly demonstrated.

The dust cover gives an excellent description of the purpose and contents of the book and I quote: "For hundreds of years doctors have manufactured public anxiety in the cause of morals. Anxious themselves, they have tried to frighten us into being good. With this aim they have depicted sex as disastrous and dangerous, birth control as a health hazard, venereal disease and bastardy as safeguards of virtue. Still more eccentric authorities buckled children into chastity belts, castrated youths to cure 'self-abuse', and advised massive operations for the sin of being constipated. It is a frightening story of insightless zeal, and Dr Comfort's exposure of it is a painful piece of surgery on his own profession. Meanwhile the bending of health education to fit the benders' moral code still continues, in propaganda about teenage degeneracy, whispering campaigns against 'the Pill,' pressure to stop abortion-law reform. *The Anxiety Makers* tells a terrible but fascinating story—hardhitting, documented, readable—a warning by the author of *Sex and Society*, *Nature and Human Nature*, and other controversial books, to patient and doctor against the idea that virtue can be safeguarded by fear and justifies falsehood." Including, I would add, that indirect form of lying, namely, the deliberate withholding of the whole truth by censorship.

The book stimulates thought, and its quality may, perhaps, be best brought out by some quotations:—

From the anonymous preface: "The medical profession in its public posture *vis-a-vis* sex has often shown a remarkable tendency to work the oracle not only for conventional morality, but for its most extreme reactionary wing. As the theological moralistic sanction of sin has waned, the equally moralistic medical sanctions of the 'healthy', the 'normal' or the 'mature' have been consciously and unconsciously used to take its place, causing much anxiety to vulnerable people."

Page 2: "At the present time, when seven out of every eight scientists who ever lived are now living, expertise is on the upgrade."

Pp. 3, 4: "Man is historically and mentally prone to confuse expertise in practical and verifiable matters with expertise in conduct and morality. He has come to accept non-moralistic experts in engineering," (etc.) . . . "But since the start of the scientific revolution, there have been no experts upon morality—or rather, the self-appointed experts appealing to revelation, tradition and anxiety have

widely and probably rightly ceased to be taken seriously . . . While large sections of advanced nations still turn to the priest about it . . . , the growth of rationalism and Protestantism (which is abortive rationalism) has gradually over the ages diverted inquirers from the priest to the physician."

P.8: ". . . BMA House, in recent years, has been speaking at times with the voice of Moral Rearmament."

P.8: "The overswing" (i.e., the alleged dangers of masturbation) "was slow to pass [it has not gone yet], leaving the medical man last among the social and biological scientists to admit the diversity of normals and the range of human behaviours, as the psychiatrist with his non-evaluative approach took the burden of sexual counselling off the hands of the physician who had carried it so long."

Pp. 8, 9: "The moralistic movement extended beyond England (it is endemic in Catholic countries . . .), but the English pattern was peculiar. No other country so firmly ranked the doctor with the lawyer and the parson as the admonitory pillars on which the public front against change and anxiety—political, sexual, moral and social—were supported."

Pp. 136 to 138: "Since the sixteenth century, when syphilis appeared in Europe, . . . Venereal disease might well have been invented by the anxious to prove their point: making no distinction between a single lapse and a campaign of vice, communicable through precisely the intimacies on which religious duty was levied, transmitted to the innocent and to the first, if not to the third and fourth, generation, it was and is a biological counterpart of the prohibitive morality. Here was a hazard of sex which really could bring death, humiliation, insanity and disfigurement. . . . The second ally of God was, of course, illegitimate—and even legitimate—pregnancy. . . . At the same time—since sex must obviously be tolerated for procreative purposes, . . .—it made sexual activity a duty which could be distinguished from pleasure. For these reasons attempts to prevent, rather than control, venereal disease, and to separate coitus from the risk of fertility, were deeply disturbing to the anxiety makers. They still are. . . . Until the nineteenth century the means offered for protection against conception and the pox were too shaky to constitute a real reassurance to the ungodly: they only became really reliable in the last few years. Accordingly, . . . the campaign to retain syphilis and unwanted pregnancy as deterrents . . . [is] "a live issue, on which present-day legislation . . . is still based."

P. 154: "a *partial* control over the likelihood of conception is actually an anxiety-increasing achievement; without it one must accept pregnancy with resignation; . . . Anxiety-making can coexist with the 'safe period'—it cannot coexist with an effective barrier method, nor with the pill and the loop."

Pp. 185, 186: "The examples of anxiety-making and its social consequences which I have documented here are typical cases: for the other examples which might have been covered—divorce, abortion, the toleration or punishment of homosexuality, the humane treatment of aggressive criminals—the record is almost verbatim the same. What emerges is, first, a deep division in terms of personality between the liberals and traditionalists, both deeply motivated and both, one can sometimes divine, equally anxious,

with a minority inclining to rational change, whose anxieties are sufficiently under control to enable them to assess the pros and cons, if not impartially, at least with a judgement which stands up to the passing of time and excitement. Second, there is a further and a new division in society between counsellors, who incline to the non-evaluative if not non-moralistic attitudes of the modern analyst, and legislative aboriginals—with the second *ex hypothesi* the more effective in controlling behaviour, because that is what they set out to do. Third, there is a steady and dogged progress of public practice towards a position very like that of the judicially minded—occurring in spite of anxiety-making, advertising, counselling, propaganda and even the expressed attitudes of the *propositi* themselves; circumnavigating the law, unshaken by the confessor, braving the physician—and all without effective militancy to alter the face of things. . . . A sexual ethic based on what is actually done would be a vast advance upon exhortatory or administrative versions—what these lack is contact with real life.”

Pp. 190, 191: “So long as all expressions not passed by Catholic or Protestant censors were perversions, no strain was imposed on the public face of culture: if other cultures tolerated them, that was because they were degenerate. . . . Anthropology and psychiatry have left this edifice in ruins. It is a long way from . . . Krafft-Ebing to the view of a senior psychoanalyst, L. S. Kubie, that ‘any obligatory emphasis on any one mode of sex expression to the exclusion of all others will usually indicate that some underlying neurotic forces are at work . . . [We] cannot accept any form of sexual activity as inherently and inevitably normal or abnormal . . . [We] must always consider the total setting.’”

P. 193: “The battery-henhouse assault, e.g., upon homosexuals by aversion therapy, or upon autistic children by police-dog type training, has exactly the unconscious aggression which our ancestor visited upon the penis or the colon, also with humane intent.”

Pp. 196, 197: “. . . when one sees the rate at which public affairs and human resources have been taken over by projects and attitudes which are frankly paranoid, anxiety is realistic enough, and the obligation not to resort to the frightening of those who ought to be frightened by events produces great personal tension. One can end up wondering if one is anxiety-making over the dangers of expressing sane anxiety. . . . No such doubts trouble the Right—they are still fighting the battles against sodomy, abortion, lack of national fibre from which all but the professionals have long departed: . . . Korea, Vietnam and Dr Teller need not worry us as comments on our psychic state—they would not be there if we would all return to God. . . . They, lucky fellows, have a devil to blame, and they can externalise their own fears and impulses as factitious and laudable anxiety-making: the unfortunate liberal, and the subject with insight, is deprived of this valuable prop.”

Pp. 198, 199: “Provided they are foreseeable, none of the consequences of science are alarming *per se*—what is alarming is their paranoid use. This applies to psychotropic drugs, atomic explosives, birth control, brain surgery, artificial pregnancy, genetic modification—the lot. . . . The question we must ask is: ‘Who will be better for it?’ It is for the bloody-mindedness of common sense, which puts Popes, preachers, politicians and professors in their place,

to see that it . . . is used where and when human happiness and spontaneity can profit, and only there.”

P. 199: “It is, in sum, a fairly safe prediction that in our society any technological interference with the possibilities of human reproductive behaviour, especially if it increases our freedom of choice, (1) will arouse immediate and predictable anxiety and anxiety-making, both from conservatives, and from sensitives, on the ground that it is hubristic; (2) will encounter uncritical enthusiasm and unselective use by the equally but less evidently anxious, for whom it provides a way of mechanising awkward emotions and reactions, in the hope that they will be better able to be managed; (3) in so far as it is eventually adjudged, through a shaking-down process, useful and socially beneficial, will encounter legislative stonewalling years beyond the effectual end of the argument in all other quarters, so that a situation of administrative duplicity will arise; and (4) the public will doggedly make up its own mind, ignoring paternalists and the law, making the noises required (as it now does over abortion or divorce) in accordance with the rule of the game imposed by the anxiety makers, yet, in the main, setting aside their anxieties in the interest of a fuller and unfrightened life. This is the traditional English, and . . . American expedient. We vote with our genitalia, as the Russians did with their feet.”

I hope that many people will read this book because of its valuable analysis of the social condition in this country today. We need to have all the knowledge and understanding we can get if our world is to become a happier place to live in.

I have long felt that doctors (including psychiatrists) were gradually acquiring the powers, to interfere with the private lives and consciences of people, which had formerly been the province of priests. The new Medical Termination of Pregnancy Bill is a further example of this. In view of Dr Comfort's researches it seems clear, that if it should become law, the power given to doctors to refuse a woman the right to have a legal abortion will cause a great amount of unnecessary physical and mental suffering and anxiety. Surely, it is the conscience of the patient (unless she is clearly irresponsible) and not that of the doctor which should be paramount. Even National Health Service patients should have the right to consult doctors with similar conscientious views to their own. If freedom of conscience is accepted as a basic universal human right, then abortion on request by the pregnant woman must become the general rule.*

[*This article was contributed before the Medical Termination of Pregnancy Bill was passed by Parliament.—Ed.]

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EVEN IN DEATH

Peter Kearney

IT must have surprised those who are not sufficiently acquainted with the situation in Scottish hospitals to learn that the Glasgow Presbytery of the Church of Scotland recently decided to ask the Western Regional Hospital Board for a definite assurance that no patient would be given the last rites by a Roman Catholic priest unless the patient or his relatives specifically ask for it, or that he is, unmistakably identifiable as a Roman Catholic.

This news was first broken by the staid *Glasgow Herald* recently in a report in which the Reverend John Crawford, Convenor of the Hospital Chaplains' Committee said: "Quite certainly the overlying doctrinal basis of this practice of administering the last rites is wholly repugnant to reformed thinking. But it is quite certain that many and perhaps most of our members in the Church would be gravely distressed if they thought that, having been taken to hospital after an accident, they would automatically receive this sacrament from a priest".

The fact is it has been known that hospital boards have given permission to Roman Catholic priests to administer the last rites to unconscious and unidentified patients. The Reverend Crawford thought this was according the Church of Rome the status of the national church of Scotland!

Among the many letters which appeared in the press—mainly in the *Glasgow Herald*—was one from a Glasgow church minister who wrote: "It is known that at least one Protestant did receive the last rites at the hands of a priest. But do your correspondents know that in such circumstances what is given in the last rites is 'conditional absolution'. Not the absolution given to a good Catholic. Carried to a logical conclusion, this appears to mean that when *le bon Dieu* discovers that the party concerned is, in fact, a good Roman Catholic, the pains of Purgatory are mitigated and the way open to heavenly places; if on the other hand the party turns out to be a Protestant, the last rites are ineffectual. This is a concept of God which I find extremely repugnant."

So the bickering about the "one and only true religion" goes on even when the human animal is about to depart from the spinning earth. The Church of Scotland may be a wee bit more "democratic" about the procedure than the "revolutionary" RC Church, the priests of which have been "stealing" souls at death's door for centuries. But their members, too, are concerned about the anachronistic last rites.

An interesting side-light about the machinations of organised religion emerged from one letter in the *Glasgow Herald* of 16th October. A minister wrote: "As far back as half a century ago, when a young chaplain at the front, I was requested by Roman Catholic colleague to minister to any of his boys in *extremis* were he unavailable in time. This would be less unnatural in the present ecumenical climate when prayers together are permissible in certain circumstances". The writer then calmly suggests that in the case of unconscious patients there should be a duplication of services (presumably this would be doubly good for the soul).

LETTERS

MR GREENE, the Belfast Humanist Chairman, in stating that he could not agree with my findings upon agnosticism, in the September 15th issue, alleged that I was confused about what is meant by the word 'god', and said that if someone uses it as meaning a First Cause, I should not blame agnosticism. What is it that agnostics claim one can't know doesn't exist, if it is not a First Cause—a supernatural god! The atheist's and agnostic's view, he said, are fundamentally the same. As atheism is solely concerned with a supernatural deity, then so is agnosticism, according to that statement.

Mr Greene says that the word agnostic is less disreputable than atheist, in the average Christian's mind, and suggests that British humanism is more likely to make rapid progress by projecting an agnostic image rather than an atheistic one. Progress towards what—an almost unscceptical philosophy, disguising agnosticism's similarity of view with atheism's, and developing an organisation of virtual fellow-travellers with Christians?

Why not nail your colours to the mast, Mr Greene, if they are as atheism's? Humanism will not make worthwhile progress by presenting a confused image to the world. F. H. SNOW.

MAY I support Mr R. Beardmore's suggestion that all secularists should become World Citizens? If we consider ourselves members of the human race, rather than of hostile religious and political groups, it is our duty to make an attempt to break through present barriers.

Membership of the International Registry of World Citizens costs five shillings; enquiries should be addressed to I.R.W.C., 43 Parliament Street, London, S.W.1.

MAURICE HILL (World Citizen 15395).

Thomas Paine Society

WITH reference to Christopher Brunel's letter in your issue of November 3, the unnamed Society mentioned in it is the Thomas Paine Society. Should any of your readers be interested in obtaining first-day covers of the Paine stamp due out in Philadelphia on January 29, the Society will be happy to help and I invite them to contact me at the address below.

ROBERT W. MORRELL, *Secretary-Treasurer*,
Thomas Paine Society, 443 Meadow Lane, Nottingham.

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