

The Humanist World WeeklyRegistered at the
G.P.O. as a Newspaper

FOUNDED 1881 by G. W. FOOTE

Friday,
December 22, 1967**Belfast Humanist Group****BELFAST SUNDAY FREEDOM CAMPAIGN**

THE Belfast Humanist Group are leading a massive campaign to oppose the decision of the Belfast City Council to close the new Avoniel Playing Fields on Sundays. The Council's decision is considered unjust, unwise and unpopular.

Avoniel was opened on October 19 this year, having cost £68,000 of the ratepayers' money as a result of the desperate need for open space for the thousands of children living in the densely populated area of terraced houses (with no gardens) within a mile of the City Centre. Avoniel takes the place of a previously derelict site surrounded by a possibly dangerous stream where the children used to play. In addition to several accidents, ranging from mild to severe, two children have been killed while playing on the roads in this area in the last two years.

The Northern Ireland Parents Association and the Communist Party wrote letters to the City Council, the Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents made representations, and the Belfast Humanist Group organised a petition and collected 1,392 signatures from local residents—all opposing the Council's decision.

The Council considered the various petitions and deputations at a meeting on December 1. Councillor Quigley is reported to have stated, "Children were missing Sunday School", and that "he did not think the Council's decision would cause any adverse comment", and that "there is not much demand for swings on a Sunday".

Councillor Bannister claimed that "residents were very upset with Sunday opening" and that it was "interfering with their religion". She went on "as a strict Sabbatarian myself I could never support any move which would encourage children to 'mitch' Sunday School". An isolated remark about local residents having complained regarding noise from the Playing Fields was, it seems, the only other point to comprise the case for closing Avoniel on Sundays.

Still the Council upon a vote, decided the Playing Fields should close on Sunday. While 15 opposed such

closure, 26 maintained their support for the decision.

Since the majority of those living in Avoniel Road itself (over 90 per cent) were opposed to Sunday closing, and had no complaints about noise (some maintained the noise was greater before the Playing Fields were opened), it is obvious that the main point for closing is concern with the children's attendance at Church and Sunday School. How many accidents and child-deaths will it take to make them think again? To what notion of 'right' or 'justice' to these bloody bigots point in support of their decision? How dare they permit their personal and reactionary prejudices to decide the limits of safety and harmless freedom which may be allowed the local children? Everyone who wishes to help the BHG fight the Bible-belt-bigots of Ulster should write for directions to Stan Potter, BHG Vice-Chairman, and Mrs Heather Reid (BHG Hon. Secretary) at Flat 9, Henderson Avenue, Belfast, 15.

* * *

BARONESS WOOTTON RESIGNS FROM BHA VICE-PRESIDENCY

THE British Humanist Association's December issue of *Humanist News* announces the resignation of Baroness Wootton from the office of Vice-President. In her letter of resignation, Lady Wootton wrote: 'I have now had opportunity to study the BHA Statement of Policy, and have to say with regret that this is the point at which I must sever my connection with the Association'. The letter goes on: —

'I object to the statement on the following grounds:

(1) It is nothing less than a full-scale political programme. As such it seems to me appropriate only to a political party which is seeking political power. Without the organisation and money of such a party any statement of this kind is simply an empty

gesture. What steps could the BHA take to implement this all-embracing programme?

(2) The statement itself strikes me as superficial and half-baked. Nor can I see that it has any necessary connection with Humanism. (Actually it would do nicely as a Manifesto for the Liberal Party.) But the Humanists that I know range all the way from Communism to Conservatism.

(3) I think this kind of thing is a great waste of our resources, which are badly needed elsewhere. We should stick to our last and develop the Humanist Counselling Service, help the Agnostic Adoption Society (which is in low water), take up the cases of religious victimisation in the professions (notably in teaching, nursing and social work) and campaign for the reform of religious teaching in schools, Church disestablishment, and freedom of humanist broadcasting. These are distinctively humanist activities—unlike pious and meaningless generalities about balancing "new political machinery with the old" and "improving the social and moral education of the young".

Together with this letter, the BHA announced: 'We are sorry that Lady Wootton has taken her disagreement with the policy of the Association to the point of resignation, and would like to put on record our thanks for the many courageous and determined stands which she has taken on matters of humanist concern over the years'.

* * *

R.I. CAMPAIGN MEETING

AT a meeting convened by the National Secular Society, representatives of the British Humanist Association, Humanist Teachers Association, NSS, Progressive League, Rationalist Press Association and South Place Ethical Society met at Conway Hall, London, December 8, to discuss lines of action which may be followed in the 'religion in schools' campaign.

It was decided that a statement would be prepared and issued jointly by the BHA, HTA and NSS and that a list of accredited speakers on the subject would be drawn up. Trade unions and Colleges and Departments of Education would receive more literature and offers of speakers. Those present agreed that we should concentrate on both secular and moral education, particularly the latter. There will be a much closer association between the organisations on this issue in future.

FREETHINKER

Published by G. W. Foote & Co. Ltd.

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

Editor: KARL HYDE

FREETHINKER subscriptions
and orders for literature

... The Freethinker Bookshop
01-407 0029

Editorial matter

... The Editor, The Freethinker
01-407 1251

SUBSCRIPTION RATES

12 months : £1 17s 6d 6 months : 19s 3 months : 9s 6d.

USA AND CANADA

12 months : \$5.25 6 months : \$2.75 3 months : \$1.40

The FREETHINKER can be ordered through any newsagent.

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

Worthing Humanist Group, Morelands Hotel, The Pier, Sunday, December 31st, 5.30 p.m.: New Year Party.

West Kent Branch NSS, Public Library, The Drive, Sevenoaks. Public meeting on the first Wednesday of every month, 8 p.m.

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

FREETHINKER FIGHTING FUND

THE FREETHINKER is the only weekly Secularist-Humanist paper in the country. It is still only 6d. How much do YOU care how many people it reaches? To advertise we need money, and our expenses are ever-increasing. Whose copy are you reading now? Have you got a subscription? Couldn't you contribute something to the Fighting Fund, say 6d or 6s or £6 or £60? How much do you really care about Freethought and helping other people to hear about it? Do, please, help if you can.

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

EDITORIAL

A LETTER recently appeared in the correspondence columns of the *Surrey Comet* headed: 'Christians, meet these enemies with action!' and the writer (whose name and property I shall defend with anonymity) began his letter: 'Having read in recent issues of the *Surrey Comet* about addresses given by Mr Karl Hyde, an executive member of the British Humanist Association, and also some of that association's literature, I am forced to view its secular doctrine with some alarm. In his latest address, to *Surbiton Meeting Point*, he declared rejection of any concept of an after-life'. Mr Anon then went on to criticise a BHA pamphlet and ended with a reference to Humanists: 'I must treat them as enemies of Christianity and any form of religion. With their secular doctrine and denial of God, in the name of humanism, they present a more subtle form of totalitarianism than we have yet encountered. All Christian bodies must meet this movement with positive action rather than a defensive attitude'.

This letter renders me virtually speechless; all I can do is wonder which planet he's from. But then again I wonder what he means by 'positive action'; it boggles the imagination. What weapons would they use? It couldn't be *reason* because they have found—for the Christian—it too often proves self-destructive. I wonder if he had anything more—er, 'traditional'—in mind. Here and now I announce I shall accept no more invitations to speak to Church organisations until I have an asbestos suit. Nasty militant Christians. Ugh.

Next week, there will be no Editorial because I wish to allow maximum space for other material. I don't know to what it may be attributed, but articles and letters have suddenly gushed into this office. Reams of it. Of course, I'm delighted. It's smashing; just what we want. And I'm very, very grateful to all who have written. Our only problem is that nearly every article is longer than we would wish it to be. Some run into several thousand words. If only they were each about 500 to 700 words. (At this length, they are guaranteed immediate and considerable attention.) Then again, where are the news reports? Come on, secretaries, send in reports of your meetings and other news. But we are not really complaining; we are most grateful for this sudden flood of interest. We shall try to publish as many as possible as soon as space allows.

There are signs of this paper being enabled to considerably brighten up in the near future; but what is most needed is an enlarged readership. Each reader could help here. If each of you were to obtain one more subscriber, ... but you have heard all this before.

What do you do with your copy when you have read it? Pass it to friends? Jolly good. Burn it? What a waste. Why not leave it in places where it will be read? On bus seats, in train-compartments, waiting-rooms (it isn't illegal is it?). Well, I leave it to you; there are hundreds of ways of doubling the circulation; test your inventive powers.

A Christian once remarked to me, "I was forgetting you are one of those who has winter but no Christmas". What he forgot was that I have Xmas holidays but no religious humbug. And I hope you do too. A very merry Xmas—or Christmas Yule, Winter Solstice, Commercial Solstice, or whatever, to you all.

THE CHRISTMAS MYTH

Elizabeth Collins

THE ancient Nature festival celebrated on December 25 has no connection with Christianity beyond the name (Mass of Christ) first used in the eleventh century and which is now used to describe an event associated with a medley of rites and customs derived from many pagan sources. From the earliest times this great Nature-cum-Solar festival was hailed as the birth-time of many dying and resurrected gods, the Sabine deity Sol—the Persian Mithras the Unconquered Sun—Egyptian Horus—and Christ. The festival remained the same, only the name was changed according to the god in power; but what's in a name?

Pagan traditions of the rebirth of the Sun-god after the winter solstice proved too strong to be entirely abandoned in the early Christian era. The people had to be placated when there was a question of abolishing or changing the nature of their cult festivals, therefore the name of the birthday of the still powerful Sun-god Mithras was changed to that of Christ's nativity—as simple as that. No date for this latter event having been given in the Gospels, it proved difficult for the early Fathers to fix one, and the matter was hotly disputed over three centuries. January 6 was first favoured, but December 25 was finally decided on by Pope Julius I (A.D. 337-52). According to Sir Isaac Newton, ecclesiastical anniversaries tended to be "fixed at cardinal points of the year without any reference to the events commemorated!"

That the rituals of the old cults, so strongly resembling those of the Church, greatly disturbed Leo the Great (A.D. 440-61), but the Fathers attributed this to the work of the devil seeking to seduce the faithful. Tertullian (A.D. 160-245) described the sacrificial meal partaken of by the Mithraists as "a devilish imitation of the Eucharist" though of course the Mithraic ceremony was much older. Similarly the latter god was said to have ascended into Heaven in a fiery chariot and four horses driven by Helios-Sol.

Of the important pre-Christian Nature festivals, winter, spring, and midsummer, the Mithraic winter one proved for Christians the most formidable competitor, with its accent on moral purity, hope of immortality, and association with the sun's annual re-birth at mid-winter, demonstrated by its increasing power, and the lengthening days bringing renewed life to the world. A splendid Mithraic Temple stood on Vatican Hill where a midnight celebration of the birth of the god took place amidst a blaze of candles and fumes of incense. Just at this period too the Egyptian goddess Isis and her son Horus were popular in Rome, where in mid-winter the birth of Horus was celebrated with tableaux of Isis and a newly-born babe, foreshadowing similar tableaux in Christian Churches today.

Earlier still a ritual of the Sun's birth was performed in Syria and Egypt by celebrants emerging at midnight from shrines or simulated caves (Mithras was reputed to have been born in a cave attended by shepherds) crying out, "The Virgin has brought forth!" "The Light is waxing!", while the image of an infant was publicly exhibited. Some scholars have identified this particular Virgin with the fertility goddess Astarte, whose emblems the crescent moon and star are sometimes seen on statues of the Virgin Mary.

At this time of year the Romans also celebrated their famous Saturnalia, a festival of universal merry-making,

and, it must be admitted, considerable license, when their houses were decked with evergreens, a great display of candles and dolls. Presents were exchanged and the poor received gifts. The dolls were probably emblematic of the earlier child-sacrifice to Saturn. This festival ended on December 24 and gradually the more ethical Sun-cult became the State religion from the reign of Aurelian (A.D. 212-75) using the Mithraic date December 25. Aurelian built a large Temple to the Sun on the Campus Martius Rome (now the Piazza San Silvestro) and decreed celebrations in honour of the god as "the Creator who brings new life to the world", to take place every four years. From this time to the end of Diocletian's reign the Mithraic cult was at its height, but Julian (A.D. 331-363) was its last professing emperor. An edict of A.D. 391 forbade all pagan worship in Rome and the various cults began to decline, but the customs lived on, such as allegiance to Druidic mistletoe, which never died out.

With the Teutonic penetration into Gaul, Britain, and Central Europe, the old Norse Yuletide practices became popular—the Yule oak-log—Yule cakes—and later wasailing—a festival of fires and lights, and fir trees which in the eighth century St Boniface dedicated to the "Holy Child" to replace the sacred oak of Odin. Because of their pagan origin the Puritans tried to suppress most of these Christmas festivities, but they never really succeeded. The nineteenth century saw the Dickensian popularising of Christmas as a family good-cheer feasting time, and for the rich a conscience-salving occasion for pious acts of charity made all the more necessary in a century of child-slavery and Mayhew's "London Labour and the London Poor".

There is some criticism that this great secular festival is too commercialised, which accusation is quite unwarranted, as this has always been a season of enormous fairs, markets, and trading generally and today there are more people hence more trade; then too the travel brochures drop through the doors urging the Sun's claim to our attention once more in the near future. So we are back again to the one and only credible source of this ancient winter festival. *Natalis Solis Invicta!*

EUTHANASIA

THERE was a good attendance of members at the Annual General Meeting of the Euthanasia Society recently held in the House of Lords. Lord Listowel, the Society's president, informed the meeting that a petition would be presented to the United Nations next year urging that people should have the right to die peacefully and with dignity.

The meeting approved in principle a Draft Bill for parliament. Messages of support were received from the Duke of Wellington, Dr Leslie Weatherhead, and the former Dean of St Pauls, Dr W. P. Matthews. Details of the Euthanasia Society may be obtained from 13 Prince of Wales Terrace, London, W8.

HUMANISM — *Four Personal Views*

Harold J. Blackham

Director: British Humanist Association

PERMANENT HUMANISM

HUMANISM is one side of an age-old deep-going division in men's response to the human situation, the religious or metaphysical, on the one hand, and the empirical on the other. In two senses humanism is more than atheism: it is a rejection of the religious **categories**—the absolute, the holy, the sacred, 'ultimate reality'; and it is an undertaking of responsibility for improving the conditions of the human lot for the sake of **personal** self-dependence and self-fulfilment.

The negative is linked inseparably with the positive. Refusal to put anything beyond question and above criticism is part of the enterprise of inquiry into the way things are and of practical acquaintance with things as they are in detailed familiarity and appreciation. In this way responsibility and idealism are rooted in materialism or naturalism, the dependability of the actual and the measurable. Instead of interpreting away 'appearances' in favour of a hidden 'reality', the humanist becomes a partisan of this world taken at its face value and is concerned only with its better and worse possibilities.

The strategic end in view is the establishment of conditions for all in which each can achieve self-dependence and choose his own ends and values. This requires an abundance of alternatives provided by a co-operative and productive society and culture. Religion survives as one of the alternatives, but without institutional privilege.

This humanism provides an educational perspective, the education of the race by experience. It is universal and permanent also in the sense that it is the empirical element found immanent in every culture, however primitive. The gods are always 'gods of the gaps'. Humanism can expect to enjoy the future in so far as human beings can learn to cope with their problems, socially and personally, and to endure and enjoy, and make sense of, the human lot. Again, the negative is linked inseparably with the positive.

Turning from the nature and historical status of humanism to the organisations of humanists in this country at the present time, the main question is whether or not there is a clear division of functions. If the RPA were mainly concerned with publications and the NSS with critical opposition to the religious establishment, the BHA would be left with spreading and applying humanist ideas and ideals for personal living and social action, and would recruit members and form local groups for this purpose. Of course it lies with the RPA and the NSS to determine their own aims and functions. But it is in the interest of all parties to diminish direct rivalry and competition for members. Main functions, anyhow, would not preclude interest and activity in subsidiary courses. But action here would properly have to be in consultation and co-operation with the body mainly responsible. Thus publications for the whole movement or addressed to the outside world would normally be in the hands of the RPA, although internal communications would be managed independently. Parliamentary briefing and lobbying and the campaign for moral education would

(Continued on page 406)

Hector Hawton

Editor: The Rationalist Press Association's Humanist

A PERSONAL VIEW OF HUMANISM

WHEN the RPA was founded in 1889, the question of whether to use the name 'Rationalism' or 'Humanism' was seriously discussed. On balance, 'Rationalism' was favoured on the grounds—and in the context of that period—that 'Humanism' was too vague. We know today that words do not possess a 'true meaning'; the way they come to be used tells us what they stand for. In the minds of the BBC and our religious opponents, Humanism and/or Rationalism stand for a secular outlook based on the best scientific knowledge available.

It seems almost eccentric, if not downright perverse, to retain a model of the universe (including ourselves) which was devised in the pre-scientific age, now that science has revolutionised our ideas and transformed our lives. Educated Christians mostly realise this, hence the flurry to demonstrate that what can no longer be believed in a straightforward sense is nevertheless true in some new-fangled sense. On the sophisticated fringe we find the Bishop of Woolwich preaching 'non-theistic Christianity' and a group of radical Protestants in the United States starting the 'God is dead' movement.

The majority of Christians accept the almost universal belief of all religions that reality is divided into two parts, natural and supernatural. Humanists are not committed to a particular school of philosophy, but they reject this dualism. The only world of which we can speak is perceived by our senses. To find out what nature is like we must use the empirical method of the sciences.

What the RPA, for example, means in its statement of aims by 'rational thinking' is simply scientific methods applied to human problems and affairs. The main conflict with religion today is not so much concerned with doctrines as with the two rival and incompatible ways of searching for truth. One method is to judge strictly in accordance with evidence, the other is to trust to intuition or faith.

However, life is not just a matter of problem-solving. Granted that science has placed instruments of fantastic power into our hands, how are we going to use them? What is our scale of values? How do Humanists get their ideas of right and wrong?

We are often accused of living on Christian capital. We are just as often charged with failing to do so, and corrupting the morals of the young. I do not think we can reject the religious foundations of Christian morals and keep the morals without security. We may find that for other reasons we may agree with some—but surely not all?—of the traditional religious values.

All values are created by man. He may pretend that he has received them from God, but manifestly this is not what happened in history. What man can make, he can unmake, and the progress of civilisation shows how new values were exchanged for old when social needs required it.

(Continued on page 406)

Barbara Smoker

Editor: The South Place Ethical Society's The Ethical Record

HUMANISM—AS I SEE IT

TO ME, Humanism is really common-sense—but common-sense 'plus'. The 'plus' bit is a consideration for other sentient beings, even those that are not near at hand in space and in time, and a tolerance arising from recognition of the value of human individuality

The common-sense factor, which is a rejection of credulity, distinguishes the Humanist from the religious believer who looks to supernatural revelation for explanations of the universe; while the other factor, which includes humanitarianism and tolerance, distinguishes the Humanist from, on the one hand, the merely negative unbeliever who is apathetic or selfish, and, on the other, the authoritarian atheist of the doctrinaire Communist type. The Humanist desires the 'open society', not the imposition of any sort of conformity, except for conformity (such as acceptance of the Highway Code) which is a prerequisite of mutual rights. The Humanist is basically democratic, whatever his political persuasion, and is concerned to give posterity our heritage of beauty and culture and a fair share of the Earth's inexhaustible resources.

Humanism is not a creed, nor merely a lack of creed, but a positive attitude of mind, demanding the right and the effort to think for oneself—as logically as possible, on the basis of all the available evidence—and to act in accordance with one's own honest conclusions.

Our reason may be a poor guide, as religionists are always telling us (usually with reasoned arguments!)—but it is the only guide we have. If there really were some external source of knowledge on which we could rely, then the alleged revelations of different religions and of different times and places would not contradict each other as they do; or, if one of them were reliable, how, except by reason, could we select it from the rest?

The logical political expression of the Humanist must be some form of liberalism or libertarianism—constitutional liberalism for those who are able to retain a degree of faith in governments; libertarianism (or anarchism) for those of us (still in a minority in the Humanist Movement) who have come to the conclusion that virtually only by direct action can we take any action at all. Support for a political party is certainly not inconsistent with Humanism, but unshakable party loyalty—my Party, right or wrong—is contrary to the basic Humanist principle of personal responsibility. To my mind, the anarchist slogan "Freedom with Responsibility" would also make a good Humanist slogan.

The prime concern of Humanism is with morality—a man-centred morality, to replace the old moral codes, which, though partially utilitarian, have been distorted by the notion of immutable god-given laws.

Finally, I should like to say something about "belief in man". Humanism implies some degree of belief in man and a denial of the Christian concept of original sin: no Humanist, surely, could hold that man is doomed by an inborn depravity. On the other hand, I do not subscribe to the optimistic view of many (perhaps most) Humanists who believe that human progress is inevitable and that man is necessarily going to survive such threats as the population explosion or a third world war. My own rejection of belief

*(Continued on page 406)***David Tribe**

President: The National Secular Society

VIEW OF HUMANISM

IN its historical setting "humanism" has meant simply a world-view which starts from the human situation, and this will, I imagine, be the prevailing use of future generations. In this sense it could include that class of religionists who start from the datum of man's needs rather than of god's dictates, though both find sin, salvation, providence and immortality necessary to their overall assessment. These postulates I would deny to be philosophically established or psychologically needful to the healthy individual, and so I would describe my beliefs as "secular humanism", a humanism which begins **and ends** with this world. Most ordinary Christians do not yet call themselves "humanists", and many do not qualify for any definition of the term, so I shall proceed with the word "humanism" alone in the sense of "secular humanism".

Though logical positivists and behavioural psychologists might deride it as unscientific, most individuals feel a need for a philosophy of life which gives overall point and purpose to their lives. If they are not offered a system which combines humanitarianism, social morality, cultural aspirations and the excitement of finding out more about the world as a complex organism and the tools to solve human problems, it is well-nigh certain that they will turn to religion, mysticism, totalitarian politics or "drop out" cults. A demonstration that superstition is contrary to reason will not of itself give people courage to face a godless world if their basic drives and legitimate demands as human beings are thwarted. Neither universal education nor economic-political systems have solved man's psychological problems in the way their founding father prophesied; and intelligent educationists, marxists and the like are now admitting that simple administrative formulae are not enough. The welfare state may not eliminate even physical need, and its mental by-products may be resentment and apathy not much less than those resulting from private charity.

Many functions are served by humanist organisations. In a society which is far from secular and wields indoctrination on all sides, notably in education and broadcasting, there is the intellectual task of exposing the fallacy of religious assertions, for if these were really accurate historically, philosophically and ethically there would be much justification for Christianity's entrenched position. As every age reinterprets religion for its own needs, so we must reinterpret freethought as our own scientific first principle. It is impertinent to make humanist assertions without some knowledge of both science and religion. Such knowledge is not, I believe, the sole province of "intellectuals" but does not come spontaneously and will assuredly atrophy if we opt out of ideological confrontations. This is the task which is uniquely ours, for it is certain no one else will undertake it. But it is important to make it relevant to the social and moral concerns of our own day—such great issues as responsibility, freedom, reform, 'belongingness', toleration, integration, conversation and peace—and not to biblical or theological trivia.

As with the churches, there are other functions organised humanism subserves. There are many gaps in the welfare state that can be filled. People gain reassurance from the knowledge that there are others who share their views, and fellowship from meeting them in various functions. But it

(Continued on page 406)

HUMANISM — *Four Personal Views*

(Continued from page 404)

Harold J. Blackham

require close co-operation, particularly between the NSS and the BHA. Engagement on the theological front involves all parties in some respect, but organisationally would seem to belong to the RPA and the NSS primarily.

In sum, if a main responsibility of each body in certain areas were generally acknowledged, the other bodies would not be thereby excluded from interest and action but would be expected to act in consultation and co-operation with the body bearing main responsibility. This would diminish rivalry whilst not unduly restricting freedom of action. In soliciting membership and support, each body would advertise its special function within the movement. The RPA would attract a readership, the NSS would enlist the battalion eager to fight the ecclesiastical establishment, the BHA would educate the public in humanism (not least through RPA publications) and help people turning from religion to a humanist view of the world. Some understanding on these lines is surely feasible and desirable?

Hector Hawton

I do not expect all Humanists to agree about such questions as nuclear and bacteriological warfare or Vietnam, but I wish we gave more appearance of deeply caring. By comparison, some of the controversies in which we have taken an active part seem to outsiders to be marginal; and this is a fair criticism.

The four main Humanist organisations in this country are the BHA, the NSS, the RPA and SPES. I am often asked why on earth they do not merge? Apart from practical difficulties, which are considerable, I am far from convinced that this would be desirable. Comparison is sometimes made with the ecumenical movement. That is complicated by the fact that there are strong disagreements about dogma and practices. If history has anything to teach us, it is that all organised movements tend to split. It is only when they are in decline—as Christian Churches certainly are today—that self-protection prompts them to close their ranks.

If there were only one Humanist body, the temptation to impose a party line on issues that are not fundamental would be hard to resist. Communists and Christians set a sobering example of how orthodoxy is followed by heresy, with excommunications, resignations and breakaway movements.

I have long advocated the organisation of Humanism on a fundamental basis. The principle functions of the NSS and BHA are almost identical. They want law reform, and they operate mainly by forming groups and running campaigns.

The primary function of the RPA is, however, publishing. That is why it has been generously endowed by Rationalists who had no thought of subsidising other activities, however worthwhile they may be. Its publications express various points of view, because Rationalism is not an answer-book, but a method of inquiry.

As the RPA is registered as an educational charity, it is not able to act as a political pressure group and is therefore ineligible for merger with non-charitable organisations. The cordial relations that exist with the BHA may be judged from the fact that during the past two years all members of the BHA have received *Humanist* and *The Rationalist* Annual free of charge. The important thing is genuine goodwill, so that each body, and each individual member of them, can carry out the tasks for which they are best qualified. I myself belong to all four bodies, and I recommend this solution.

Barbara Smoker

in supernatural aid is not based on any cocksure belief that man will win through without it, but simply that no such aid is available anyway. So we must do the best we can—and that means whole-hearted co-operative effort for social reforms and determined opposition to the insane policies of those in positions of power. Man is on his own, and if he cannot make the grade he will go the way of the dinosaur and the dodo.

David Tribe

is important not to foster, or seem to foster, humanist "sectarianism" or isolationism. Friendly contact should be established with religious and political groups and every effort made to promote community projects without ideological strings. An important way in which this function can be combined with the first, especially for the next few years, is law reform, where reason is combined with humanity and libertarianism. This was the dominant concern in the nineteenth century and it is so again today. There may be reforms and services which society does not recognise which we can effect ourselves, but it is important not to become bungling, do-gooding amateurs.

Legal requirements will of themselves ensure that the humanist bodies do not all amalgamate. Some have traditionally specialised in lecturing or publishing. Some are best known for political action. In certain forms of lobbying (parliamentary) it will be desirable for them to work as one; in other (press statements) separate voices amplify better. In all their activities friendly co-operation is vital.

100 YEARS OF FREETHOUGHT

By DAVID TRIBE

"The book is packed with general historical information about the various societies and personalities who have been active in promoting freethought during the past hundred years or more, all most admirably dated and indexed."—*Plan*.

Price 42/- from bookshops or by post (1/6)

THE FREETHINKER BOOKSHOP
103 Borough High Street, London, S.E.1

OUR FESTIVE STAMPS

George R. Goodman

Part 1

OUR postage stamps, like our policemen, are wonderful. Both do their best to uphold the Establishment with all its outdated illusions.

To cheer us up, or to make us more miserable, depending on our position in the multifarious strata of society—tycoon, bank-clerk, miner, docker or old-age pensioner—seasonal scenes were drawn up and artistically printed in polychrome to please the eyes and the philatelists.

A critical survey should be of interest to readers of the FREETHINKER, because they are not encumbered with anachronistic religious fantasies.

From a correct colour point of view, the Airmail form is by far the best, for the artist must have gone to a great deal of trouble to obtain authentic information on the mythology of the ancients.

Whereas the designs of the fourpenny and eighteen-penny stamps have their origin in ecclesiastical ideas prevailing during the Middle Ages, the nativity scene on the airmail form is definitely pre-Christian.

In fact, if it were possible to resurrect an ancient Egyptian who had lived say 6,000 years ago—and had never heard of such a weird cult as Christianity—he would be highly pleased and be able to explain the meaning of the figures and their symbology. He would also be in a position to point to a number of misconceptions and priestly extravaganzas which Christian zealots had added to his natural and astronomical genesis.

The nativity was the birth of the new solar year, annually celebrated at the winter solstice and had nothing to do with the birth of a person who was later on, by the stroke of a pen, elevated to a so-called "saviour" who was credited to have taken on his shoulders all the sins of humanity and through his death atoned for them.

In Egypt, the "death" of the Sun god was an annual play, a dramatisation of the seasons, a passion-play in which nobody was actually killed. The gospel account is a garbled version of this seasonal play and completely un-historical. To put it concisely: the crucifixion is nothing but cruci-fiction!

It is about time that humanity weaned itself of such nefarious sob-stuff which has been its curse for the last nineteen centuries, resulting in terrible and fiendish persecutions.

We are living now in a New Age, an age of rapid communications, an era in which ignorance and superstition have no place.

In this Age of Reason the more intelligent peoples of the earth should discard the medieval pious frauds and become sane, rational human beings, living an ethical life and promoting the idea of Universal Brotherhood!

But to come back to our "Festival of Light" stamps. The nativity scene on the Airmail form depicts three Kings or Magi (wearing artificial beards and wigs), offering gold,

frankincense and myrrh to the luna-solar gods. Alas for the uninformed orthodox believers, the scene was already 4,000 years old before the year one had dawned.

We see there Osiris, the Egyptian Sun god, with his red mantle, and beside him Isis, the lunar goddess (to denote her rank, she has the Moon's orb, in Egyptian fashion, behind her head) wearing her dark blue mantle, symbolising the night-sky.

The annual event of the new-born year is allegorised by baby Horus, the waxing yellow sunlight.

These three colours are still in use in Church rituals, viz. a dark-red light for the King of Glory (Sun), a dark-blue light for Regina Coeli (Queen of Heaven, the Moon-goddess, Isis) and a pale yellow as a universal colour, denoting general adherence to the orthodox—Roman Church.

The only point where the artist slipped up, was the penis of the little Horus. Perhaps it was considered so very holy as to be "unsuitable for reproduction", . . . and for that very cogent reason, the boy's genitals were axed and his sex changed to that of a girl! Maybe, the artist was a Christian spinster and her aesthetic sense, plus her devotional outlook, were affronted and she could not possibly draw such a delicate piece of sacred anatomy.

The angelic figure with the dislocated wing is, presumably, the paraclete (Holy Ghost) and he looks as if he were really suffering pains and in need of a chiropractor.

The three Kings—which the distorters of the NT turned into Magi—were never, at any time, actual persons, but were the three conspicuous stars in the belt of Orion, the mighty Hunter, a constellation in the sky.

The so-called "Star of Bethlehem" is an ecclesiastical invention.

Thousands of years ago, Sirius—the Dog-star— (Canis Major), stood at the height of the sky and on the horizon of the East rose the constellation of the Virgin (again not a person), bearing in her left arm the new "Child of Light" and in her other the great star Spica—the ear of corn, the heavenly Bread, in the House of Bread—which was later on turned into a village in Judaea, viz., Beth (house), Lechem (bread).

The whole thing is a garbled allegorism to confuse the adherents of a religious denomination.

(To be continued)

KIT'S CAT.

KIT MOUAT'S new catalogue of secondhand Humanist books is now completed. Those who have recently ordered books should soon receive a copy. Others wishing to obtain a copy should send a 6d stamp to Kit Mouat, Mercers, Cuckfield, Sussex.

HUMANIST BROADCASTS

A DEPUTATION from the Humanist Broadcasting Council met Lord Hill, chairman of the Board of Governors of the BBC, at Broadcasting House on Tuesday, December 12. Among their number were Lord Francis Williams (a former Governor of the BBC), Professor A. J. Ayer (President of the British Humanist Association) and H. J. Blackham (BHA Director).

The deputation were asking for a small, but regular, ration of broadcasting time in the name of Humanism, and quoted the Beveridge and Pilkington reports in support of their request.

LETTERS

Snow Again

I SEE that Mr Snow in his letter in the November 17 issue, is still endeavouring to misrepresent Agnosticism and I feel obliged to answer his questions. He asks, "What is it that Agnostics claim one can't know doesn't exist, if it is not a First Cause—a supernatural god?" I reply that Agnostics claim that they do not know anything about how the Universe started, and they most definitely do not believe in a Christian or any other god.

Mr Snow states that atheism is solely concerned with a supernatural deity, but I am happy to know many atheists who do not take this narrow and negative view, and who are very concerned about the responsibility that Secularism in general has to assume as religion ceases more and more to influence our lives.

When I mentioned progress of the British Humanist Association in my letter he asks, "Progress towards what—an almost unsectical philosophy disguising agnosticism's similarity of view with atheisms' and developing an organisation of virtual fellow-travellers with Christians?"

I suggest that the contrary is the case. Very many Christians could now be described as fellow-travellers with agnostics and I consider this to be a very encouraging development and, let me hasten to add, this presents no danger to genuine agnostics.

Mr Snow's last sentence in his letter reads, "Humanism will not make worthwhile progress by presenting a confused image to the world"—I quite agree, but I suggest that those who are militantly anti-religious and those who foster dissension in the ranks of Humanism are mainly responsible for any confusion which exists. Do not let us emulate Christianity with its history of sects and intolerance.

D. C. GREENE.

Adoption

IS Isobel Grahame a Humanist? Before replying to her letter on adoption problems I read and re-read her sweeping generalisations. She asserts that all parents who beget unwanted children in or out of marriage are either mad, criminal or in the case of mothers, prostitutes. She also makes the wild statement about these children and the problems the adoptive parents face when the former reach their teens. Does she suppose that so-called normal children do not rebel against their real parents during adolescence?

In order to be as brief as possible, I refer to her last paragraph, which is merely a repetition of previous paragraphs. Indeed she repeats herself twice in a few short sentences, again assuming that thousands of parents are automatically psychotic morons if unfortunate enough to start a family without planning.

It is surely a reflection on the adoptive parents if something goes wrong with the child. Why? You hear that every day on radio and television during debates on the problems of youth today.

Mrs Grahame writes in cruel and vitriolic outbursts and I suggest is no fit person to adopt anybody's baby.

It is because of and in spite of her attitudes that I and countless members like me disprove her theories, and become just another face in the crowd. Or would she prefer legislation to have us tattooed, as a race apart, so sure is she that all of us, without exception are tarred with the same brush.

(Miss) JOAN CAREY-CASSEL, *Humanist*.

Off-hand Sayings about Humanists

POOR R. Smith. I suggest he takes two Aludrox tablets half an hour after meals next time he feels like that. ISOBEL GRAHAME.

Bullfighting

IN the FREETHINKER of December 8, you describe John D. Stewart as "one of the most notable Humanists in Ireland". *Humanist News* for December, in a report on Humanist Week, states that John D. Stewart of Belfast Humanist Group addressed about 450 people.

You disclose that Mr Stewart in a letter to the *Belfast Newsletter* supports bullfighting. This is a "sport" in which a single bull is forcibly engaged unequally, against about ten adversaries, some on horseback, armed with sharp deadly weapons. A horse involved has its tongue cut out before the engagement so if it is gored by the bull its cries of pain are not heard. Some horses are disembowelled by the pain-maddened bull.

I assume that Mrs Heather J. Reid, the Secretary of Belfast Humanist Group, will, with members, repudiate as their spokesman one whose support of bullfighting is contrary to Humanism.

S. G. KNOTT.

Have a Heart

I HAVE read that Belfast Humanists are organising prospective volunteer donors for the "heart-transplantation" operation. What about London Freethinkers doing something similar?

DAVID E. JONES.

Dr Barnardo's

THIS letter is prompted by the letter to Kit Mouat published in the FREETHINKER of December 8 in regard to the compulsory religion imposed on the children at Dr Barnardo's.

I have before me a letter signed by the General Secretary of Dr Barnardo's, F. J. Potter, FCA, which was sent to Jean Neal of COSMO who had refused to contribute further to this charity on grounds that it was now supporting the National Viewers' and Listeners' Association, an off-shoot of the Mary Whitehouse Clean-Up TV campaign.

The letter, in part, reads:—

"My Council only joined the National Viewers' and Listeners' Association because they feel that some of the programmes on television are not of a sufficiently high standard, and that from time to time some of these programmes are not a good influence on children."

The letterhead states that The Queen is the Patron of Dr Barnardo's, Princess Margaret its President, and Sir Alfred Owen its Chairman. According to *Who's Who* Sir Alfred was formerly President of the National Sunday School Union, and besides being Pro-Chancellor of the University of Keele is Chairman or Director of over eighty companies.

Readers who can turn up my report, *Censorship and the Web of Authority*, of the Freedom of Vision Teach-In at Hampstead, published in the FREETHINKER of April 7, will find a correlation between these facts and what Michael Paul of COSMO said.

JEAN STRAKER.

Any Answers?

MAY I ask Denis Cobell (contributor to the *Freethinker*, November 24) if Father Ronald Knox really did answer Bertrand Russell's *Why I am Not a Christian*? If not, who has?

I ask this because, having once before asked this same question in a debate with the Reverend Penrey-Davies of Broadmead Chapel, Bristol, I was told it had been answered by D. Miall Edwards in *Christianity and Philosophy*. When I eventually got hold of a copy it was, as I expected, no answer at all.

If I remember rightly, it simply referred once to Russell as a philosopher.

J. E. EDWARDS.

THE RIGHTS OF CHILDREN

THE National Secular Society has now issued a statement on 'The Rights of Children' as a contribution to Human Rights Year. It has been commended by the press, and a particularly generous acknowledgement appeared in the *Guardian* (December 5). Copies may be obtained from 103 Borough High Street, London, S.E.1.