

FREETHINKER

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LECTURER HIGH ON 'POT' AT UHF CONFERENCE

A NINETY-MINUTE talk on the 'Social Implications of Drugs' was delivered by Steve Abrams, psychiatrist and campaigner for the legalisation of cannabis, to University Humanist Federation delegates at their ninth Annual Conference at Nottingham University while under the influence of cannabis.

The *Guardian* describes his talk as "a cohesive argument in favour of few restrictions on the use of cannabis in Britain".

Afterwards, Mr Abrams said, "I was high on cannabis during the lecture because I was interested to see what would happen. I took some cannabis extract in solid form in my room at the university half-an-hour before the talk and then I smoked some in a cigarette just at the start".

Mr Abrams has been taking cannabis since 1963 and was now getting supplies on a doctor's prescription. He said in his lecture that cannabis "increased sensibility and enhanced a sense of reality. It was not used for the purpose of escapism because if things were bad they were seen, under cannabis, to be really bad".

In considering the effect of the cannabis upon his lecture, Mr Abrams found it difficult to assess because he was not sure how he would have behaved without it.

A full report on the UHF Annual Conference will appear in a future issue of the FREETHINKER.

CATHOLIC TEACHERS CONFERENCE

DESPITE utterances extolling truth above indoctrination in education, the Catholic Teachers' Federation showed little concern for modern arguments against their educational system.

At their diamond jubilee conference, held recently at St Mary's College, Strawberry Hill, Twickenham, members of other denominations were, for the first time, invited to take part. Humanism entered the conference only insofar as it was quoted by one or two speakers.

Mr Colin Alves (Anglican lecturer at King Alfred's College, Winchester) quoted Lord Willis and a passage from Brigid Prophy's *Religious Education in State Schools* to illustrate the views of

supporters of the secular education campaign, but gave as his own view that the voluntary aided school existed—not to control and manipulate the pupils toward indoctrination—but to facilitate the "Christian approach to the upbringing of children" which, we are to assume, he believes to be a quite different thing.

Mr R. Wake, HMI (Staff Inspector for History, Department of Education and Science) a convert to Roman Catholicism, attempted to support the fairness of the 'dual system' saying: "Any day now there could be, for example, a proposal for an aided humanist school (in Hampstead, perhaps) or an aided Mormon school; and the 'conscience clause' has been and is always there for parents who wish to withdraw their children from religious instruction".

Despite Mr Wake's strong objection to the emphasis on corporal punishment in Catholic schools ("by what right do you clobber anyone else? No one else in our society has the right to hit other people and get away with it") the majority decided that, while they disapproved of the misuse of corporal punishment (whoever approved of the misuse of anything?) they felt it should be retained as a deterrent and applied at the discretion of the head.

Among the announcements and resolutions acceptable to the General Assembly were the usual compliments Catholics like to pay themselves: The "marks of a mature educated Christian" include tolerance of the views of others, Christ-like actions, acceptance and love of other people as persons, the manifestation of joy, cheerfulness, patience and perseverance. One voice from the floor, however, did startle the Assembly

by asking the group if they had ever met such a person.

'It is possible but not very desirable to make schemes deliberately Catholic. It is essential they should be Christian. There is an urgent need for the formulation of a Catholic philosophy of education to clear up existing doubts and confusion'—interesting assumption—'especially among teachers. The Christian contribution to education is a realisation of what Baptism implies—an awareness of what grace is. Catholic education assists the child to become a fully integrated person through the cooperation of parent, teacher and child.'

Perhaps this was a response to the quote from Lord Willis: "We Humanists believe that it is wrong that children should be segregated and kept apart from children who have different religious backgrounds. It is quite wrong that two out of three Catholic children should go to Roman Catholic schools and mix with nobody but Roman Catholics and not rub their brains and intelligences against other ideas and other religions."

The conference went a long way in proving the truth of Lord Willis's words.

* * *

LOCAL HUMANIST SURVEY

THE findings of a survey held last autumn by the Croydon Humanist Society have just been made known. Members interviewed 372 people in the street to learn their feelings about atheism and Humanism.

As might be expected from knowledge of similar surveys, many more women than men believed in God and an after-life. Of the whole sample, 23 per cent called themselves atheist or agnostic; this being higher than the usual percentage may possibly be due to assumptions about the questioners' beliefs. Only 53 per cent had heard of Humanism.

On being asked 'Do you think that morality can be taught in schools independently of religious instruction?' 69 per cent were certain it *could* while many were convinced that it *should*.

FREETHINKER

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ANNOUNCEMENTS

Items for insertion in this column must reach THE FREETHINKER office at least ten days before the date of publication.

National Secular Society. Details of membership and inquiries regarding bequests and secular funeral services may be obtained from the General Secretary, 103 Borough High Street, London, 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

Enfield and Barnet Humanist Group, 52 Freston Gardens, Cockfosters, Saturday, January 27th, 8 p.m.: Social evening and a talk on Art by EDWARD WELCH. Visitors 2/-.

The Cambridge Humanists, Mill Lane Lecture Rooms, Cambridge, Thursday, January 25th, 8.30 p.m.: JOHN ROBINSON, Bishop of Woolwich, "Christian Humanism".

Leicester Secular Society, The Secular Hall, 75 Humberstone Gate, Sunday, January 21st, 6.30 p.m.: RICHARD CLEMENTS, "Humanism and Social Work".

University of Sussex Humanist Group, The University, Falmer, Thursday, January 25th, 6.30 p.m.: DAVID TRIBE, "Freethought".

South Place Ethical Society, Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London, WC1, Sunday, January 21st, 11 a.m.: Dr JOHN LEWIS, "Power Politics and the Moral Laws"; Tuesday, January 23rd, 6.45 p.m.: PETER JACKSON, MP, "The Future World Society".

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

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

OTTAVIANI RESIGNS

THE resignation of 77-year-old Cardinal Ottaviani as head of the Holy Office will be an encouraging sign for humanists throughout the world and nowhere will the cheer be greater than in the secularist wing. He was the bulwark of extreme conservatism, the personification of old guard reaction, commander-in-chief of obstructive power blocks to all liberalising influences within the Roman Catholic world.

His resignation, like the recent death of Cardinal Spellman in the USA, brings to an end a hateful era, making the way easier for humanistic influences.

His place has been taken by Cardinal Seper of Yugoslavia, Archbishop of Zagreb. It is a sinister thought that he was once secretary to Cardinal Stepinac, responsible for so much horror in Yugoslavia before the rise of Tito (is that phase in the Roman Catholic Church's history forgotten already?).

It is encouraging to remember (and perhaps depicts a difference from his former master) that Cardinal Seper, at the Ecumenical Council, opposed a simple condemnation of atheism, remarking that many believed atheism was a mark of true progress and true humanism, though adding that atheism was, in fact, sterile and that faith in God fostered progress.

We may cheer at Ottaviani's resignation, but to cheer at his replacement by Seper may well prove incautious and unwarranted.

* * *

GLAMOUR AND THE VATICAN

A RECENT spate in the sale of 'glamour magazines' in Italy has the Vatican very disturbed; a disturbance marked, not so much by expressions of distress, but by the Pope's announcement of his pleasure at the 'honest and vigorous action' being taken to stamp out such literature.

One honest and vigorous action was the arrest and imprisonment, pending trial, of both the publisher and editor of the Italian magazine *King*. Honest and vigorous action has also been taken against the Italian edition of *The New London Spy* and the American *Playboy*.

Milan's State Prosecutor has earned quick praise for several arrests from the Catholic Action Group, and the Christian Democrats, in view of both the Pope's public denunciation of these magazines and the forthcoming general elections, have been hounding down the sale of any magazines which may be objected to by Catholic voters.

* * *

CUT-PRICE CHURCH WEDDINGS

AS a gesture of support of the 'I'm Backing Britain' campaign, the Reverend David Platt of St Katherine's in North Hammersmith, London, has announced that any couple wearing a Union Jack badge can be married at his church at a 10 per cent discount.

His organist has agreed to a 10 per cent discount in his wedding fees also. Mr Platt intends to ask his church council and choir if all wedding fees can be cut.

* * *

HUMANISM IN HOLLAND

THE Dutch Humanist League have been re-allotted a weekly 15 minutes on the air, after a recent broadcasting Act had put their programmes in jeopardy.

The Humanist Counselling Service in the Dutch Army has achieved equal status with the representatives of the churches.

HUMANISM AND INTERNATIONAL DISORDER

E. Hughes-Jones

WHAT can Humanists do to help avert the catastrophe of nuclear war? The nub of international troubles is a *problem of disorder*; unless we soon make headway towards solving it the prospect for mankind is a lurch to disaster. The Sphinx of Fate, "the strangling one", puts this riddle of disorder to mankind; not to answer, or to answer incorrectly, is to be destroyed. Time is running out as nuclear powers increase in number and capacity; in the offing are engines and other devices of appalling destructive power. The present dangers in world affairs, and propensities for war, must be surveyed and controlled by some sufficiently co-operative world society. Clearly a great leap forward is needed in the attitudes of sovereign states if holocaust is to be avoided. Smaller scale conflicts already threaten to escalate—Judaism and Islam, Hindu and Moslem, China and the West, Vietnam, the Congo, South Africa, Rhodesia, and the Cold War—any of these troubles might flame and flare into the appalling horrors of global war. There are ever-present dangers of mistakes, inadvertence, intransigence, human fallibility, folly and failure zooming to disaster. Man has prostituted his talents by creating environment threatening his own destruction; he must now adapt world society so as to be able to control it, *to condition the conditions*. He cannot safely shirk this task of adaptation; it is weak and futile to call on imaginary gods to save him from his own savagery; he must be his own saviour, finding salvation for mankind by restraining his savage heritage, and by a better use for world-society, co-operative ends of the same inventive and productive powers and abilities that has brought Man to his present peril at the edge of the abyss. The Sphinx of Fate confronts mankind. Either we adapt or we perish!

How Best Can Mankind Adapt?

There seems to be an urgent need for a *special* institution avowedly set up to promote and maintain world peace with clear powers, finances and police forces *under its own sole authority* to deter aggressors and to command the peaceful settlement of international disputes; *and* to this institution existing national sovereign powers with goodwill for mankind should pledge unstinted support. Therefore any sufficient step towards world government to keep peace inevitably calls for a limitation of national sovereignties in international affairs. If even the Great Powers alone at the start would agree on this they could themselves sufficiently endow an embryonic World Government Police Force to keep order. I see little hope of this, and men of vision are weary of power politics, the shufflings, trimmings, escape clauses, secret alliances and so forth that disgrace and bedevil national foreign policies. A new lead seems essential. Some altogether unprecedented action is called for to focus attention on the problem. On grounds of sanity, morality and the salvation of mankind, some nation should act, *unilaterally if necessary*, to vouch its full support for such a World Power. Cannot Britain lead the way, have the prescience and wisdom to guide the world from looming catastrophe towards Order and real peace? It would mean: (a) the sincere and permanent renunciation of war by our own right and decision; (b) cessation of armaments for national war; (c) the pledging of men and supplies for World Police purposes. Such a bold step towards peace would probably arouse resistances and resentments from varied interests. Also the economic repercussions would be

very great and call for a radical re-orientation of our scientific researches and of industries sub-serving armaments, a run-down of armed commitments and a switching of war-potential industries to products for peace. The dislocations and probable initial distresses would be severe and re-orientation and reconstruction formidable; but these should not daunt nor deter us; the alternative, unless some other great nation sets the pace and leads the way towards peace in the world, is much more frightening, and someday, if the world is to have peace, nations must beat their swords into ploughshares; better sooner than later, the transition easier and benefits earlier. Balancing the risks, unilateral moves to set up the beginnings of real powers in World Government seem abundantly justified. A Ministry of Reconstruction with conviction and verve over a few years could work wonders of true economy for this country and towards the welfare of mankind. This nation has put up with all sorts of dislocations and privations for wars; cannot it gird its loins for peace? Nations no less than individuals must learn "self-transcendence, getting out of the prison of the ego" (J. Huxley) for the benefit of humanity. Our present 'Great Power' policy complex with squandered millions on foolish illusions of grandeur also entails economic lunacy.

Vision and Evolution

Surely it is now evident that mankind must evolve urgently further away from his savage tribal past; the shrunken world of speed and power requires it. We need Vision and Imagination to help us evolve: "Imagination is the beginning of creation. You imagine what you desire, you *will* what you imagine, and at last you create what you will" (G. B. Shaw). The *Will*, and the drive that should flow from it, must manifest itself if we are to give the correct answer to the Sphinx of Fate. Humanists have surely the intellectual and moral duty to try to evoke a popular Will for peace, to suppress and sublimate the savage propensities we inherit so as to establish at long last a real and broad-based *civilisation*, which has never yet been obtained in a sufficiently wide and full sense. Embryo civilisations have over the ages girdled the earth; *attempts*, beginnings that only began, giving only flickers of light and warmth for mankind. But the glimmerings faltered and failed, spluttered and guttered out like candles in the wind raised by the Princes and Priests of the world lusting with greed for sovereign power and conquest, which brought the horrors of wars, want, disease, death, and the Dark Ages upon mankind. Whatever may be said about the monasteries preserving learning during the dark ages, the dark ages themselves were very much the products of the intolerance and aggressive fanaticism of theistic revealed religions which have retarded human progress, hamstringing and generally bedevilled mankind. When the balance is struck I am convinced that this is the historical truth, the irrefragable fact. Though the sands of time for the present latest attempt at civilisation seem almost all run down the hour-glass, we yet perhaps have a small though rapidly dwindling chance to do better this time if we truly understand and act upon the implications of our shrunken, speedy, world. Mankind is, for worthy civilisation, indivisible! A widespread uplifting of human standards is essential, with compassion, kindness, sympathy, tolerance, suffusing intellectual and moral *integrity*. If the term 'civilisa-

tion' in its fullest and best sense did not mean *that* it would be a fraud; as indeed, so far as the masses of men were concerned, so-called civilisations of the past have been frauds. The purpose of history is not only to help us understand the past but also to analyse the present and to aid our making wiser decisions, now in the light of the lessons and mistakes of the past. Let us, therefore, rid our minds as Humanists not only of the complex bosh of primitive imaginings, but also of all the jargon and flummery associated with tribal sovereignties that prostitute the minds of men and waste time and resources. True Humanism cannot be divisible by national boundaries; surely we who insist

on, and try to exalt, human qualities and the highest and best human aspirations, simply must by virtue of our Humanism be citizens of the world. We should firmly say so. This is practical applied Humanism in world affairs. Humanist organisations throughout the earth should make their voices more insistently heard to help lead mankind from the lunacy of disorder to sanity and peace:

"I believe so firmly in this great world of Peace that lies so close to our own, ready to come to being as our wills turn towards it, that I needs must go about this present world of disorder and darkness like an exile, doing such feeble things as I can towards the world of my desire, now hopefully, now bitterly, as the moods may happen until I die" (H. G. Wells).

CONCERNING MR. SMITH

A. J. Lowry

I READ with much amusement Mr R. Smith's recent contribution to the FREETHINKER (December 8). I feel that such articles as these are of considerable value if only because they provide a sufficient stimulus to encourage us to undertake the mental exercise of proving them wrong.

To begin with, if Mr Smith is to convince us that Humanism is a religion and not a philosophy, he must define these terms with considerably more accuracy than he has done at present. He must also, if he is to persuade us of the truth of his assertions, provide more evidence for the ultimate futility of existence than a quotation from the Book of Ecclesiastes. Perhaps Mr Smith is unaware of the fact, but Humanists do not share his obvious reverence for this gloomy and defeatist publication.

But the gentleman's central argument against Humanism appears to be that Humanism fails to produce Hamlets and Macbeths, therefore Humanism has no appreciation of drama, therefore Humanism is wrong. This surely shows an intolerable confusion of ideas. Though we all enjoy drama, I think no one in his right mind is particularly anxious to welcome it into his own life. To appreciate Macbeth on the stage may be a glorious and edifying experience, but to be Macbeth in real life would surely be otherwise. If Mr Smith believes that the only connoisseurs of drama are those individuals who regulate their private lives like rejects from Victorian melodramas, I can only

suggest that this view of life is an extremely peculiar one. By the way, if the gentleman is completely ignorant of the dramatic works of non-believers (as he appears to be), I would suggest that he furthers his education by reading Euripides, Blake, Shelley, Byron and Houseman with all possible speed.

Perhaps if Mr Smith had read Epicurus a little better, we would not have been burdened with his next argument. When this philosopher asserted that death meant nothing to him, he meant simply that the Epicurean, unlike the devotees of Olympian nonsense who flourished during his life and the devotees of Christian nonsense who flourished after it, was completely unafraid of the clap-trap of last judgements and torture pits, wherewith lesser men delighted to populate the post-mortal existence; he most certainly did not mean that family bereavements left him unmoved. Mr Smith must surely be aware that the sentiments to which he refers belong rather to the Cynic and Stoic schools of thought than to the Epicurean.

Neither, as far as I was aware at least, does Humanism believe that the teaching of ethics, unsupported by any more practical considerations, is the way to improve the standard of conduct in this country. Indeed, I recently had the privilege of listening to a Humanist social worker who went to great pains to stress the opposite view, insisting that ethics would only be improved when people were not only educated in the moral standards of their society, but also possessed sufficient comfort and security to allow them to practise them without jeopardising the welfare of their dependants.

I shall treat with the contempt it so richly deserves, Mr Smith's schoolboy puns concerning Humanists and Humourists; but I should like to ask him if it is true, as he says, that Humanists hold the subjects of death and suicide as taboo, why it was that they opposed in the past the law permitting the prosecution of attempted suicides, just as today many of them battle to remove the more asinine restrictions on euthanasia and abortion?

In conclusion, the fact that Mr Smith's article appeared in the FREETHINKER at all surely makes nonsense of his claim that Humanism is opposed to freedom of speech. Such an article as his, by showing precisely how weak and mis-informed their opponents are, has probably been of greater benefit to the Freethought movement than a dozen of the best written eulogies from within its own ranks. I, for one, am anticipating with great mirth the printing of as many future contributions by Mr Smith as space will permit. We thrive on criticism such as this!

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THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 1st, 7.30 p.m.

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THE RIGHT TO DIE

Speakers include

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THE ORIGIN AND END OF LIFE ON EARTH: I

Willard E. Edwards, Litt.D. (USA)

The Interplanetary Theory of the Origin of Life

MAN has been looking for "missing links" for over a hundred years. These are species bridging the gap between earlier ones and those thought to be descended from them. Some scientists are still trying to prove the evolution theory while others have accepted it as fact.

We have had the discovery of *Pithecanthropus erectus* and the Piltdown man. Neither was a satisfactory proof of earlier man, and the latter proved a hoax and disappointment. It was somewhat like so-called "religious relics" reported found or preserved at various times and places. The Dead Sea Scrolls were hopefully thought of as possible proofs of the existence of Jesus. After examination and translation, no such help was indicated.

The Origin of Life on Earth

Human nature clings to ancient theories and myths in the ever-present hope of finding new supporting evidence. But why not rationalise a new theory? In the light of our present scientific knowledge and achievement, I propose the Interplanetary Theory of the Origin of Life on Earth. It is reasonable to assume that there are thousands, perhaps millions, of inhabited planets in our Galaxy. There might even be another one in our Solar System. It is also reasonable to assume that some of their inhabitants may have intelligence, knowledge, and achievement superior to ours. Also, this may have been so several hundred thousand years ago.

It would therefore be possible that their spaceships and crews colonised our Earth and brought its first plant and animal life. Imagine a race of people on any nearby planet with physiques, brains and life spans similar to our own. They could have successfully conquered the problem of space travel as we are now doing. And when they had done this, curiosity would have suggested an Earth visit. Let's assume they solved the problem of safe penetration of our atmosphere.

Many unsuccessful attempts at a safe Earth landing may have been made. These could account for some of what have been thought of as great meteorite strikes. I'd like to see the Arizona Meteor Crater and other meteorite craters dug up and scientifically studied. If metal fragments shaped by human-like intelligence were found in any of them, it could indicate part of a plausible spaceship. Even if early attempts resulted in complete volatilisation or contact explosions, successful landings could finally have occurred. We know that Soviet and USA space capsules are being landed safely.

Suppose a crew of males and females, white, yellow, brown, or black, had landed safely in Europe, Asia or Africa. Possibly they were unable to take off again. Is it too much to imagine their surviving on an Earth previously stocked with plants and animals from other planets?

Several such landings from different planets could account for the fundamental differences of the races now found on Earth. Can intelligent people believe the Genesis myth that all races descended from one pair of humans, of whatever colour? It is far more rational to believe that spaceships from several planets brought different races to

Earth. Caucasians, Mongolians, Negroes, Pygmies, and other types may have made up their crews, in one capacity or another. Thereafter, racial mixtures would develop to account for Eskimos, Indians, Polynesians, and so on. This could also account for the different degrees of native intelligence evident among the races on Earth. As time went on, the origin of these earliest Earth inhabitants were lost to individual memory. Origin stories survived only in racial legend and myth, including the Genesis story.

Observers from Outer Space ?

Reports of fiery happenings in the skies have persisted in the myths, stories and religions of many nations. But it is only since the advent of our rocket and astronautic achievements that plausible reports of bizarre spaceship sightings have been made. Many reports of Unidentified Flying Objects (UFOs) have undoubtedly been the result of an hallucination, a delusion, or a plain hoax. But not *all* can be attributed to such causes.

Too many intelligent aircraft pilots, radar operators, astronomers and other scientists have had a part in UFO sightings. Some of these were probably due to natural phenomena. Perhaps other UFOs were actually observers from other planets, here to see how previous colonisations were getting on.

Let's not be too eager to throw out such a possibility. The Genesis story and the evolution theory of the origin of man are poles apart, and neither is entirely satisfactory. One is a myth, the other a theory. They are not proven scientific fact, as the clergy and some scientists would have us believe. Visitations to or from nearby planets now seem plausible and within the range of physical achievement. Owing to human and physical limitations, travel to the stars seems impossible. But travel to some other planets in our Solar System is within the range of eventual human possibility.

When this is achieved, who knows what we'll find? We might encounter limited environments like our own, and intelligent beings much like ourselves. Or they may be differently constituted in order to suit a different environment. We are familiar with the intelligence exhibited by some tamed animals. Perhaps inhabitants of other planets have an intelligence as superior to ours as that of ours over Earth's tamed mammals. If we do find intelligent human-like inhabitants on other planets, the evolution theory and the Genesis myth may both be exploded.

(To be continued)

100 YEARS OF FREETHOUGHT

By DAVID TRIBE

"Mr Tribe is to be congratulated on this book. It fills a big gap in freethought literature."—*Humanist*.

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ONE MAN'S HUMANISM

Peter Crommelin

HUMANISM is not a name and title of which can be protected by Law. Humanism is not the monopoly of any one individual or group. Any human being who has the mind and will to do so may call himself or herself a humanist without incurring any legal penalties. It may be truly said that there are as many humanisms as there are human individuals.*

As a general rule, however, in 1968, people call themselves humanists because they have no further desire to conceal their opposition to orthodox or conventional religion and morality, and because of their willingness to support some or all of the activities of such bodies as the National Secular Society or the British Humanist Association. As I have been permitted to say more than once in this journal, I am not a professed Atheist, but I am entirely on the side of the atheists in their efforts to rid the world of those restrictions to human happiness that are so frequently involved in a religious belief.

My humanism excludes theology, theosophy and all attempts at theocracy, but does not exclude metaphysical speculation as a pleasant exercise for the human intellect. I do not believe that metaphysical speculation can ever provide a satisfactory guide to human conduct. I do not believe that the Christian hope of Heaven or fear of Hell can ever again greatly influence human behaviour for the generality of mankind. In that sense anyhow, the Christian Faith is not only dying; it is virtually dead.

Humanism is, however, more than a vague desire to consign the Church and the Bible to oblivion. Humanism is a very positive attempt to remove all those obstacles to human happiness that are removable by human action. The first obstacle to human happiness is unquestionably poverty. Even in the 'Affluent Society', private and personal poverty is the first obstacle to happiness. But in the affluent society poverty is not due to "lack of money" but to "waste of money". The money that is wasted in and by and through the affluent society would provide each and every human being with a perfectly reasonable standard of living. Hence the first target for humanist attack should be that waste of money that is the first cause of world poverty. Away finally and for ever with the religious cant that poverty is good for the soul, a holy state, an imitation of Jesus Christ. A secular humanist cure for poverty would be a much greater "break-through" than a medical discovery for the prevention of cancer, or the surgical ability to transplant the heart from a dead body to a living one. Any project that makes no contribution to the relief of poverty must, from the humanist point of view be condemned as a wasted effort.* So long as they are not being directed towards the relief of poverty, science and technology have no rational foundation and are for this very reason constantly in peril, whether the prevailing state is described as peace or war.

That once famous humanitarian, the late Dr Albert Schweitzer, advocated "reverence for life" as the basic foundation of his personal philosophy of life. But to a rational humanist "reverence for life" is devoid of meaning unless life can be sufficiently enriched to make it worth living. The humanist completely rejects the notion that life is a preparation for something beyond itself. Intrinsically, animated matter is no more an object for reverence than

the inanimate matter within which it appears as such a totally inexplicable happening.

Humanism is an attempt to encourage the human individual to think freely and to be free through independence of mind. It is certainly impossible for the human individual, whether male or female, to define itself without some reference to the species from which it comes. But in the full knowledge that as a matter of fact, I am *not* an isolated individual totally divisible from the rest of the species, I have done all that is humanly possible to liberate myself from all external pressures social, political, religious, scientific in order to discover the world for myself. Even so, I imagine, did the first man who decided to break away from the tribe in order to become an individual observer of the cosmos. It is this individual and personal discovery of the world that constitutes the worth or value of life for a rational humanist. The world can be observed by a human only from a human point of view. However much we may occupy ourselves with cosmic or astronomical matters we must always return to the simple fact that the "proper study of mankind is Man". The human mind is still the only known centre from which the universe can be observed.

Finally the rational control of life must surely in due course, when the time is ripe, come to make adequate provision for the rational termination of life by voluntary euthanasia. There is no reason why dying should be any more painful than being born.

*[*Further proofs of the Editor's willingness to publish views in complete opposition to his own.—Ed.]*

BADGES HAVE THEIR USES

Margaret Green

SOME people think it's childish to wear badges. But I put my Humanist badge on and went shopping the other day. As I came to the checkout desk of a small supermarket, the assistant stared hard at the badge. "What's that?" she asked. So I started to explain, first in fairly broad statements. Then gradually we were discussing the merits of Humanism, as customers checked out and the assistant rang up the cash till.

The assistant went to Chapel regularly, but was having grave doubts about its sincerity. She was told that God only had room for a certain number of people, so he would naturally take those who loved him. This, as she said, was contrary to what the Bible says and what is said of God in other Churches.

She asked me what I would say if I met God when I died, and I wanted to answer, "Hi, God," but fortunately I restrained and said that I felt, if there was a God, he would know why I feel as I do, and why I believe that it is the life we lead here and *now* that counts, and not the promise of a better life to come.

Some people may think badges are childish, but they do have their uses in putting Humanism in the public eye and bringing it into everyday life.

WHY DID CHRISTIANITY CONQUER EUROPE?

Otto Wolfgang

YES, really, why did people accept the Creed of Woe? To this pertinent question brainwashed people invariably reply: Because of the lofty beauty of its religious doctrine, the teaching of Peace and Love.

Peace and Love in Europe? It's all a clumsy lie which has been fostered by vested interests. Round about the zero point of our traditional calendar the most popular religion was that of Mithras, with some inroads made by Jahweh, both very virile gods of a militant nature. Regarding the latter:

"Jewish missionary propaganda was immensely successful . . . The Jewish religion with its bright hopes of future glory . . . became particularly popular among the Semitic peoples conquered by Roman armies. The rapid spread of Jewish communities all over the known world . . . would have been inexplicable but for the conversion of numerous individual Gentiles. Women, in particular, who were not subject to circumcision . . . were attracted to Judaism which, under Pharisaic influence, had raised the legal and social status of women far beyond that prevailing in the Graeco-Roman world. So great was the attraction of Judaism on women that even aristocratic Roman ladies were in the habit of practising Jewish as well as other oriental rites. The Empress Poppea Sabina seems to have been a semi-convert to the basic tenets of Judaism . . ."

(M. ABERACH: *The Roman-Jewish War*, London 1966.)

People could hardly be brought to entrust their fate to a god, who, far from protecting himself, cried out on the cross in despair: "My God, why hast thou forsaken me?" when he must have known that his father required this blood sacrifice to forgive that crime of early days when man had aspired for greater knowledge! No, there is no moral foundation in Christianity; the Indian Karma doctrine which makes everyone individually responsible for his fate ranks miles above that petty creed of moral restraint for the sake of reward or fear of eternal punishment. And among idealistic philosophies Christianity cannot compare with genuine Buddhism or its derivatives (Jainism, Vedanta). As the old adage has it: What is good in Christianity is not new, and what is new (e.g. Hell and Devil) is not good.

The Economic Reasons for Conversion

In the Dark Ages, Europe accepted Christianity not for its superior ethical contents but out of economic necessity.

When after the third century the marauding Germanic tribes were joined by the Huns—whose most successful war leader the Goths nicknamed 'Attila' ('Little Father')—as were later the Russian Czars, the Roman Empire crumbled politically, culturally and economically. Roman culture had been essentially town-bred; the re-peopling of Europa with semi-barbaric newcomers led to what is termed the 'Dark Ages'; the torch of learning and mundane knowledge was preserved in the clergy. In particular, the monasteries were model farms and centres of culture in a rising tide of barbarism, decaying craftsmanship and illiteracy. The clerics were able to read and write, therefore they were required as civil servants, ministers and advisers of the rulers. They served as doctors, teachers, architects, and they instructed the peasants in husbandry. Together with the power of the absolute potentate of the land, the power of the Church was bound to increase since on her the whole secular structure depended. Yet, whilst the former had to spend on war and defence, the Church used her wealth—steadily increased in payment for services rendered or expected—on trade, the arts and crafts and on cheap charity. Nobody else cared for the poor and the sick. In short, there existed

in the Middle Ages no social class that could do without the Church who directed and governed the entire material and intellectual life. Mass conversion was the price that had to be paid in exchange.

Once the Church had attained her monopolistic position in society, it was easy for her to brainwash the rising generation and make posterity believe that, as Christians, they were to share the religion *par excellence*, that the adverb 'christian' was tantamount to being a 'paragon of moral behaviour' and that people without that belief must fall back into barbarity.

And yet, how much moral excellence and culture had existed before Christianity was even dreamt of!

GOD, ATHEISM AND EVOLUTION

Gonzalo Quiogue

THE *Philippines Free Press* was kind enough to reprint a defence of Christianity and a re-interpretation of evolution in the article *Christianity and Evolution* by Bruno de Solages. Fellow Christians were surely comforted by the apparently cogent article. Among other things, the author wrote:

"In order therefore to be assimilated by Christian thought, the theory of evolution had first to be corrected. We must conceive evolution as created and guided by God, and as admitting within its framework a spiritual and free soul."

The author obviously wanted the Adam and Eve story interpreted to mean the Darwinian evolution thereby avoiding conflict between the two. His effort is heroic, and the task Herculean. How many Christians can swallow this?

Evolution divides theologians into two groups. The first group rejects evolution as untrue ("a mistake of Charles Darwin"). The second camp regards the facts of evolution as too glaring to deny. This group, therefore, thinks it is wiser and more practical to join the evolutionists half-way; that is, to admit the facts of evolution, but to postulate that it is a process in nature carried on by God! The author of *Christianity and Evolution* belongs to this group.

We believe our minds were given to us by God to be used for our own good, but when we use our minds and contemplate there being no God we become afraid. God might throw our souls into hell or purgatory. Therefore, we use our minds in all things, except in denying God! And the few of us who are not afraid, keep the fact a secret; for there is odium in atheism. We live by and among God-believers. Atheism is odious to our friends, neighbours, employers, customers, clients and patients. We are practical. We see that it is more comfortable to live as a God-believer than as an atheist. Religious leaders like priests and ministers are practical too. They know they can live better when they keep religion going well.

Question: But why did God create human beings by means of a very slow evolution that took millions of years? He could easily create instant humans like Adam and Eve.

Answer: Mere humans cannot know the inscrutable ways of God. To Him, a million years is but a wink of the eye. Time is relative you know.

I am sure theologians who mastered 'theology' can give 'better answers'.

LETTERS

Dogmatic Atheism ?

THE dispute between Atheist and Agnostic shows NO sign of settlement. Years ago I defended the Atheist position in your columns, and the Agnostics made no reply. Will you allow me to restate the position briefly.

The controversy turns on the meaning attached to the word "proof". Science knows nothing of absolute proof. For the scientist, an assertion is false if the evidence for the improbability is high, in spite of various possibilities. If I am told that Paris is in Russia, I deny it. Now it is remotely possible that Paris has been transported, people, buildings and all, to the banks of the Neva overnight; but this possibility is so highly improbable that I deny it. Your cautious Agnostic reproves me for denying a possibility; but both science and I are unmoved.

Similarly, the evidence of history, geology, biology and plain commonsense renders the Bible story of the existence and acts of God so highly improbable that the Atheist is justified in asserting that the Bible God does not exist, and never has existed. In brief, truth is a matter of probability, not absolute certainty.

In your editorial of November 24, you quote from *Chambers Encyclopaedia* a definition of the Dogmatic Atheist as one who asserts positively that there is no God; and you add that most Atheists would agree that this assertion is out of place (except where a definition of God is logically contradictory). I submit, on the contrary, that the "Dogmatic" Atheist is in a sound position for all who recognise that science offers no absolute proof of either its assertions or its denials. Both rest on a high degree of probability. When this degree of probability is present, either assertion or denial are justified. HENRY MEULEN.

[On the definitions I quoted, the argument here would seem to be between the Dogmatic Atheist on the one hand and the Sceptical and Critical Atheists on the other, not between the Atheist and the Agnostic; the latter being one who simply adopts the stand that it is wrong to have faith in any proposition which he cannot support with reasonable evidence; the Agnostic may not have considered the 'God concept' and, hence, may be quite outside this argument.—Ed.]

'Dropouts' and Violence

A DROPOUT Hippie recently said, "You can't have a society of unaware people!"

The records of history are emphasised with the blood of those who unknowingly, deceptively supported the causes of their own defeats!

Many dropouts from society of the past were highly critical of the minor and major professionals who abused freedoms with inhumane use of deceit, dishonesty and overt greed against common men.

While some critics seemingly overlooked the core of the problems, the author of *Man, The Unknown* had apparently aimed his observation correctly when he said, "Social environment, instead of favouring the growth of intelligence, opposes it with all its might!"

The present rationalists and freethinkers who have become aware of the enormity of deceit, dishonesty and overt greed amid society; who have learned how and why they have been so mythically conditioned rather than intellectually informed, are certainly entitled to dissent—but if that dissent includes revolutions of violence, destruction and murder—their ability to rationally judge and act is reduced to that of moronic and dangerous maniacs!

They must be aware that most of the incongruities so highly resented were also supported, advanced, protected and enlarged, by their own unaware relatives!

Many revolutions are outlined in history where rubble and charred bodies were the remains—but the makers of armaments, war strategists, politicians, bankers and myth purveyors, would usually escape with the remaining loot to begin the cycle anew.

Violence, in other words, has been usually met with violence with extremely few minds improved or contentious issues climinated!

Maybe when deceit is no longer profitable to use or protect; when men have learned that unselfish, trustworthy and genuine goodness is earned and proven through actual knowledge, intelligence, kindness and intellectual honesty, a more matured, free, balanced and peaceful existence may be a possibility!

JOHN H. JONES, Arkansas, USA.

REVIEW

David Tribe

The London Heretics

A FEW YEARS AGO Dean Acheson said that Britain had lost an empire and not yet found a role. The heyday of the empire was also the heyday of her role in other spheres: science, industry, philosophy, theology (for which she has not often been noted) and sociology. With a number of distinguished Continental refugees living and writing here, the period was also rich in radical issues of every sort, and eclectic individuals like Bernard Shaw could plunge into controversy at every corner and wade through isms up to the neck: republicanism, socialism, anarchism, communism, fabianism, secularism, ethicism, rationalism, positivism, spiritualism, militant Nonconformism, Catholic modernism. It was a time when great clerics were also great actors and great politicians were great orators. The box had not cut everyone down to mediocrity, psychologists had not brought in a holy terror of "exhibitionism", opinion polls had not created veneration for the opinion of the putative majority.

In writing about *The London Heretics* (Constable, 45s), Warren Sylvester Smith has wisely selected the golden age of heresy, 1870-1914. Most entertainingly he deals with vintage heretics like Holyoake, Bradlaugh, Foote, Besant, Blavatsky, Headlam, Davidson, Parker, Conway, Tyrrell, and the movements, societies, chapels and churches with which they were associated. What really seem to hold together the earlier heroes in the book are the peregrinations of the Rev. Charles Maurice Davies in his quest of *Heterodox London* (1874). The later ones are linked by Shaw, researches into whose background first led Professor Smith, of the Pennsylvania State University, to this country and period; and by W. T. Stead, though it is much to be doubted whether he was a heretic so much as a "character" who liked other characters and a clever journalist who was among the first to realise that heresy was "news". Another reference frame for the book is a drawing by Holyoake and F. C. Gould in 1883 of "Our National Church" and those who react against it, shown as endpapers.

The period was one where strong beliefs often passed over into strong passions, where the Christian sects and parties within the Church of England attacked one another more than the devil, and where freethinkers were in even greater dispute than today. To understand the movements fully it is necessary to go into the jealousies and personality clashes which existed, as between Holyoake and Bradlaugh, Foote and Besant. But Professor Smith often seems to dwell on oddities for their own sake, and sometimes the book reads like a gossip column in a highbrow Sunday.

Portions have already appeared as articles in *The Christian Century* and *Quaker History*, and this leads to some repetition and lack of continuity. I understand that substantial editorial suggestions were made, as a result of which the selection of non-Christian heretics is as complete as space permits, but there are many gaps among the Christians, the most notable being Conrad Noel. The book has helpful notes, illustrations and selected bibliography, some of it unpublished, so a caveat must be entered for research scholars who might thus think it a reliable source. Though the overall picture and conclusions are sound or, in matters of controversy, at least reasonable, the work positively bristles with minor inaccuracies, speculations where definite information is available, and grammatical lapses (or Americanisms). They are far too numerous to attempt to list. The index is good, though the inclusion or omission of dates is quite arbitrary and, one suspects, in need of more research.

TRADING STAMPS

UNWANTED trading stamps are collected for Humanist projects. Since January 1967 six and a half Green Shield books and one and a half S & H Books have been collected.

Please send to: Minnows, Whitehouse Lane, Wooburn Moor, High Wycombe, Bucks.

BOOK WANTED

J. M. Robertson's *The Historical Jesus*. Contact: D. Murphy, 7 Brighton Avenue, Morley, Nr. Leeds, Yorkshire.