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Friday,
March 22, 1968**A HAECKEL CENTENARY**

Eric Glasgow

A CENTENARY which is likely to be missed in 1968, perhaps because it concerns the work of a German scientist, is that of the publication, in 1868, of the *Naturliche Schöpfungsgeschichte*, or the *Natural History of Creation*, by the Jena zoologist, Ernst Heinrich Haeckel (1834-1919). Yet, his work, conducted with a typical German thoroughness, forms a distinguished part of the development of scientific thought, during the nineteenth century, and in particular, it became very closely linked with the new theories of evolution, which Charles Darwin formulated in England, especially with the publication of *The Origin of Species* (1859). Darwin followed up this pioneer work with, of course, others, which filled in further details in his theories of the progressive and natural basis of the development of life in the world: such books being *The Fertilisation of Orchids* (1862) and *The Descent of Man* (1871).

Haeckel himself, who was born at Potsdam on February 16, 1834, began with the study of medicine, but found his true task, from 1865, as professor of zoology at Jena. There he was to remain, for the rest of his working life, although he spent much time away, on the very necessary field-expeditions. After 1859, he fully accepted the findings of Darwin, which he sought to unite, very effectively, with the new, transcendental philosophy of natural science, which had been advanced earlier in that century by his fellow-countryman Lorenz Oken (1779-1851), who, as a teacher, moved from Jena in 1816, first to Munich, and then, in the freer sanctuary of Switzerland, to Zurich. Oken's ideas involved a complete explanation of the natural world, disregarding the antiquated symbolism of the book of Genesis, and embracing a productive fusion of the four basic elements, earth, air, fire and water. Although, as a theory of origins, it was tentative and rudimentary, it did attempt, for the first time, to find precise scientific explanations of the fundamental problems of natural origins.

These Haeckel had, broadly speaking, accepted himself, by 1866. By that date, he had commenced to formulate, in outline, a plan of the evolution of the animal species, and had also accepted the new knowledge which was offered by the science of embryology. In most of these fields, his investigations were merely initiatory; since he drew heavily on the ideas of others, especially Ernest von Baer (1792-1876) and Johannes Muller (1801-1858), but Haeckel's great and enduring achievement, which so well deserves our remembrance a century later, was his typically Teutonic development of a full system, his elucidation of the meaning and the significance of composite findings. In fact, it was not only from the very prolific crop of German scientists that Haeckel derived the strands in his fabric of ideas:

it was he, almost entirely, who spread, and made acceptable in Germany, the doctrines of evolution which had so lately been initiated, on the other side of the wide "German Ocean" by Charles Darwin.

Such were the ideas which, in their augmented forms, Haeckel set out in his *Natural History of Creation*, which was published a hundred years ago this year (1968). The first English translation, of this large work, was made by E. Ray Lankester, Professor of Anatomy at Oxford, and published in 1892: it sought, as its subtitle indicated, to enunciate "the development of the earth and its inhabitants by the action of natural causes".

Despite its rigidly scientific basis, however, it was prefaced, in this English translation, by some very beautiful, tranquil, mystical verses, from Wordsworth. In its contents, it drew heavily on the thought of Kant, Lamarck, Lyell, Darwin and Linnaeus, fusing the whole into a coherent account of the development of the mammals, and so, ultimately, of man.

The work ends, appropriately enough, with an eloquent, impassioned plea for a philosophy of reason and humanism, free from superstition and "a blind belief in the vague secrets and mythical revelations of a sacerdotal caste". "Future centuries," Haeckel stated, in that first, exuberant heyday of reason, a century ago, "will celebrate our age, which was occupied with laying the foundations of the Doctrine of Evolution, the highest prize of human knowledge, as the new era in which began a period of human development, rich in blessings—a period which was characterised by the victory of free inquiry over the despotism of authority" (*Natural History of Creation*, Vol. 2, pages 498 and 499).

In most ways, therefore, this seminal, integratory work by Haeckel, represents a typically German systematisation of the thorough scientific challenge, to the accepted patterns of Christian orthodoxy, which in Great Britain, at about the same period, was being advanced by Darwin, Wallace, T. H. Huxley, and Edward Tylor. Haeckel later produced other works, notably *Die Weltratsel*, or *The Riddle of the Universe* (1899); but it was the book of 1868, *The Natural History of Creation*, which presented the summation of Haeckel's thought—its defects, such as lack of originality and sometimes hazardous deductions from scientific observations, as well as its merits, an immense capacity for systemisation, and a resolute wish to find and to follow the truth, whithersoever, it might lead.

The book was, of course, devastating to the Mosaic record of creation, at any rate as this was then literally understood; today, in 1968, there is nothing new or arresting in that, but it is still, I think, an instructive enough exercise, if only as an example of one definitive stage in

(Continued on page 94)

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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 01-407 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 and MCRAE.

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

Bristol Humanist Group, Royal Hotel, Bristol, Sunday, March 31, 7.30 p.m.: Mrs. MARGARET KNIGHT, 'Christian and Social Ethics'.

Cardiff Humanist Group, Grand Hotel, Westgate Street, Cardiff, Sunday, March 31, 2.45 p.m.: Mrs. MARGARET KNIGHT.

Gravesend Humanist Group, 38 Pelham Road, Gravesend, Friday, March 29, 7.30 p.m.: Dr PETER DRAPER (BHA Chairman), 'Humanism Explained'.

Leicester Secular Society, 75 Humberstone Gate, Leicester, Sunday, March 24, 6.30 p.m.: ADRIAN WELLS, 'Local Radio'.

Redbridge Humanist Society, Wanstead House (corner The Green and Redbridge Lane West), Wanstead, Monday, March 25, 7.45 p.m.: Dr L. BERNSTEIN, 'C.A.S.E.'.

South Place Ethical Society, Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London, WC1, Sunday, March 24, 11 a.m.: RONALD MASON, 'Ulysses'; Tuesday, March 26, 6.45 p.m.: PREMEN ADDY, 'China in the World Today'.

South Place Sunday Concerts, Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London, WC1, Sunday, March 24, 6.30 p.m.: University Ensemble. Haydn, Ravel, Brahms.

CORRESPONDENCE: HUMANISM AND SECULARISM

WORDS and ideas have an organic life and a natural history. Their meaning has some relation to derivation and more to usage. In both senses, I would say, the secularist family is more precise than the humanist, though both have, it is true, bags of legitimate and illegitimate children. Even in its clerical usages, "secular" implies special interest in the concerns of this world, while "humanist" merely suggests promoting human interests, however they may be defined. With a few psychopathic exceptions everyone is *for* human beings, and to assert this is little more helpful than for the legendary pastor to say he is *against* sin. The important thing is whether human purpose and needs are described as fundamentally naturalistic or supernaturalistic. As Professor Donald Mackay put it in his little tract *Humanism, Positive and Negative* (1966): "The term 'humanism' is used today to cover a wide range of different attitudes and opinions. To some, it stands for a thoroughly Christian emphasis on human dignity over against brute materialism. For others, it is an anti-religious banner in the 'cold war between Christians and the "men without God"'"

This contrast is of course far too stark and emotively loaded. But my point is and was that such a pamphlet, taking "Christian humanism" for granted, would be unlikely to have been written 1955-65 because Christians then were mostly of the opinion that their message was not a form of humanism, or before that, when the word was not in common usage. This is not to say that I always find the need in 1968 to put "secular" before "humanism" any more than I always bother to put "Roman" before "Catholic". Periods in the history of ideas are always arbitrary, and established definitions linger on even though, as other definitions arise, they become less and less valid for the general public. I may say that "Christianity" is in the same dilemma. I am certainly not implying any criticism of the current work of the humanist (i.e. secular humanist) movement, which you rightly say is more flourishing in all sectors today than for a good many years.

In *100 Years of Freethought* I put conflicts within the movement as coolly as possible, but my personal view is that the later Holyoake was a real liability. His colleagues

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complained that he was writing encyclopaedia and magazine articles using definitions which no other secularist used and which were different from his original ones. Some of the clash arose however from confusion between secularism and secularity, as I defined them in what I believe to be *modern* usage. The 1933 edition of the *Oxford English Dictionary* must be read with some caution. You are putting the matter too high, though, in suggesting that in their support of Bradlaugh and Foote most secularists regarded atheism as a "tenet". The word has never appeared on the membership form of the NSS or any other significant secularist body I know of in the world, though most of us use it.

DAVID TRIBE.

I should have liked to have left the last word with you here, but certain points remain to be clarified. I agree with your first two sentences but feel your definitions have been unintentionally given an emotive slant to support your contention that the "secularist family (of terms) is more precise than the humanist". For instance, it would have been

(at least) as accurate to define "secular" as meaning: earthly, temporal, mundane, and to define "humanist" as meaning: pertaining to human as apart from divine concerns. Defined in this way, the latter may be more attractive.

I was interested in your quote from the IVF tract (*Humanism, Positive and Negative*; 1966) which you felt was unlikely to have been written 1955-65 because it recognised "Christian humanism". But it was 1965 when the SPCK published their tract *Questions at Issue: Humanism* which opened: "The word 'Humanism' has a long history and, for the greater part of it, it would have seemed entirely natural to talk about a 'Christian humanist'".

If you read again my last letter, you will see I am not quite 'suggesting that in their support of Bradlaugh and Foote most secularists regarded atheism as a secular "tenet"'. My questions (not suggestions), if *by implication* they suggested anything at all, suggested only that present-day secularists would not have felt as strongly as Holyoake that "Atheism cannot be a Secular tenet". A subtle difference, but not one to be overlooked.

KARL HYDE.

COMMUNISM, HUMANISM AND RUSSIA

R. Stuart Montague

WITH little or no knowledge of the subject, it is understandable that the man in the street accepts from the press that in Russia, China, Cuba, etc., there is 'established communism'; that these are 'communist countries'.

On *THE AVERAGE MAN*, Ethel Mannin wrote (*Rebel's Ride*, 1964):

"The Press and the BBC also have him by the scruff of the neck, though he doesn't know it. He takes his ideas from them as naturally as he takes his morning cup of tea and, without ever having read a word of Marx or Engels, knows what to think about Communism, and his political convictions—if it's not too strong a word—are served up ready-made, like his breakfast cereal, from the paper of his choice."

In Russia, all the means of 'wealth production' are state owned. In Britain so far, only some of the larger industries have been nationalised (coal mines, steel industry, railways, transport, etc.). In Spain the railways are nationalised while a part of the motor-car industry is nationalised in France. Neither the predominantly private-capitalist-economy countries, nor the predominantly state-capitalist-economy of countries such as Russia, with regard to state ownership of the means of 'wealth production', is in any Marxian sense 'communist'.

There is no 'established communism' anywhere in the world. Spain, in fact, despite the softening of the repressive dictatorship, is generally considered to be Fascist—the opposite to communism.

In state-capitalist Russia, the working class is obliged to live by the sale of its labour to the State for a wage or salary. Production of commodities is for sale and profit. Russian Government State Bonds pay a higher rate of interest to those Russians wealthy enough to purchase them than do those of state owned nationalised industries in Great Britain. The economic social system in Russia has nothing whatsoever in common with Marxian scientific socialism-communism. To link Russia with the name of Karl Marx is a great injustice to him, and to everything in

his teaching and philosophy. If Marx could return to witness the falsehoods being committed in his name, he would once again exclaim, as he did originally in French, "One thing is certain, I am not a Marxist".

Socialism-communism will be and must be a world-wide social order. Communist islands, big or small, are impossible in a world capitalist sea. Russia has wage-labour and capital, and also the unholy trinity 'rent, interest and profit' which are common to all private capitalist countries. She has an army, air force, navy and police force; thieves, murder and capital punishment; religion and the priesthood; income tax, purchase tax and a national health service; plenty of poverty and riches (Rouble millionaires) and, of course, the H-bomb—the capitalist lot, common to us all.

The principle of work for the Russian proletariat is the same as for the working class over all the capitalist world; "From each according to his ability; to each according to his work" (capitalist piece-work). In the socialist-communist world of the future, the Marxian principle will be: "From each according to his ability; to each according to his need".

Marx was a humanist and his favourite maxim was: "Nothing human is foreign to me".

If humanism has any exact meaning, it was Marx who showed us why humanism is impractical in our present capitalist world.

Practical humanism is socialism-communism. As Marx stated in his early writings:

"Communism is the return of man himself as a social, i.e. really human being, a complete and conscious return which assimilates all the wealth of previous development. Communism as a fully developed naturalism is humanism and as a fully developed humanism is naturalism. It is the definitive resolution of the antagonism between man and nature, and between man and man. It is the solution of the riddle of history and knows itself to be this solution."

ASTRONOMY AND NATURE

Gonzalo Quiogue

God and Astronomy by Donald A. Danlag (Philippines Free Press, January 6) is the most intriguing article I have ever read about the subject. However, no article is perfect, and Mr Danlag's contribution is no exception. The highlight is the sixth paragraph which runs thus:

"With all these modern facilities and inventions, what do the astronomers say? Does astronomy reveal or prove that there is a God, the omnipotent creator of the mysteries of time and space?"

Modern astronomy neither reveals nor proves that there is a God, the "omnipotent creator" of the "mysteries of time and space". Time has no mysteries, unless we are prone to love "mysteries". Events in time can have mysteries. Unfortunately, we are talking about time. Space, too, has no mysteries. But things in space, like astronomical bodies and gases, can have mysteries. Unfortunately, again, we are talking about space. Let us not mention "mysteries" when we don't have to.

In a part of the universe, there can be order, while in another part, chaos. In a part of the universe at a certain time there can be order; but in the same part of the universe at a different time there can be chaos, too. There is apparent order in the rotation of the earth upon its axis every day, and in its revolution around the sun every year. But where is the order in the terrible eruptions of volcanoes that kill thousands of innocent people? In devastating earthquakes and floods? In pestilence and in other deadly diseases? In poverty and rampant crimes? In a big, strong nation meddling in the affairs of a small nation with guns and bombs? Order and wonder, as well as chaos, are all inherent in nature. Why harp only on the bright side of things? We are after truth and sincerity.

Mr Danlag asks:

"Where did the primal hydrogen come from? From nothing? Did nothing create something?"

This question is empirical. Hence the answer has to be empirical, too. Granting that the Big-Bang Theory really happened, the primal hydrogen must have come from all

directions in space. But why assume that the primal hydrogen was created? Is it scientific to assume this? It is more realistic to suppose that the hydrogen had had no beginning like time, space, quantity, and general existence! The universe is in continuous flux, in continuous evolution, without beginning and without end. Because matter cannot come out of nothing, nor can it be reduced to nothing! This is, as many of us know, is the basic principle of physics.

The last paragraph says:

"As science reveals more and more of the wonders of the greatness of the universe, so it reveals more and more of the greatness of God, the Creator. The Creator is greater than His creation."

As science reveals more and more the wonders of the universe like the facts of evolution, it reveals more and more the wonders of nature, the creator.

It is often said that God created the universe; that the universe must have a cause: God. We are not supposed to ask who created God; but if we do ask the question, dogma stops us; that is, if we believe in dogmas, doctrines, tenets and postulates. We are exhorted to have faith in religious dogmas and doctrines. Otherwise, when we die, our souls will be thrown by God into hell or purgatory.

The scholastic or Thomistic defence: Every effect must have a cause, and each cause is also the effect of another cause preceding it. The series of cause and effect "must regress to the Uncaused Cause", or "the Unmoved Mover"; that is, God. We have to swallow this postulate if we respect our religion. But reason tells us otherwise; that the series of cause and effect has no beginning like time and space, and that all movers move, too. Therefore if there is really a supernatural God, there must have been in the past an infinite series of Gods who had created one another. If you are to follow your 'God-given' reason, how else can you draw your conclusion? 'Theology' must postulate a dogma to stop the theory of causality at the present God, Jehovah! Arguments had to be cut by theologians to fit belief in a God!

A CORRESPONDENCE

A debate on David Tribe's review of Susan Budd's "The Loss of Faith—Reasons for Unbelief among members of the Secular Movement in England, 1850-1950", which appeared under the heading "Freethought 1850-1950" in these pages on February 9.

An objection: The authoress

I WAS interested to read Mr Tribe's comments on my paper in the FREETHINKER (February 9) but I am afraid that his discussion seems to attribute to me views which I neither hold nor expressed. I should welcome an opportunity to reply to his comments, particularly in the light of the warm respect that I have for the secular movement, and in view of the kindness and willing assistance that I have received from many of its members. I shall not comment on all Mr Tribe's points, but confine myself to the most important ones, and hope that interested readers will consult my paper. As far as my main conclusion is concerned—that

conversion to secularism in the 19th century and first half of the 20th was a moral and not an intellectual matter—Mr Tribe is welcome to disagree, and I remain interested in any evidence that he may produce. Much of his argument seems to me to relate to the *leaders* of the movement; as I said in my paper, I was concerned with the members. He seems to regard my article as an attack on the secular movement, and this seems to mean unwarranted reaction. In my account, as I explained, I was merely examining historical evidence and drawing conclusions which seem to me to reflect neither credit nor discredit on the movement. Those disagreeing with the conclusions are free to consult the evidence. If anything, I should think that revulsion from the practices and doctrines of Christianity could both be more amply justified on moral grounds, and was more impressive than revulsion on intellectual grounds, since the latter are now widely regarded (if not by the NSS) as irrelevant.

Mr Tribe's greatest and most surprising objection seems to be to my description of the secular movement as a working-class movement. (I said in fact, 'a mainly working-class movement'.) His haste to deny this suggests that it is he and not myself who is ashamed of the label. I use the expression in a neutral and technical sense, as it is used in, for instance, the census of population, and this would include artisans. (Mr Tribe must realise that if I had used the term in a *Marxist* sense, as he alleges, it would have included all those who do not own the means of production. A working-class movement, by this definition, would include nearly all of the religious, political and social movements in Britain, with the possible exception of the CBI). A list of the more distinguished current members does not alter the general conclusion that the movement's membership has been mainly working-class. That other working-class movement, the Labour Party, includes many academics, journalists, and even hereditary peers, among its current members. My justification for discussing the secularist movement as 'working-class' is rather long, I am afraid, but may be of interest to your readers. During the mid and late 19th century, three great taboo topics were systematically avoided by 'respectable' middle-class society. They were Republicanism, Malthusianism, and Atheism. It is to Charles Bradlaugh's everlasting credit that he spoke out boldly on each of these subjects. He could not have done this had he been the leader of any but a working-class movement, for at this point in history only working-class radicals had the courage to support him. A middle-class woman like Mrs Bessant, who courageously joined him, became, as George Jacob Holyoake pointed out, an outcast from 'respectable' society, and there were few like her. There were of course a few scholarly agnostics of the period, but as the secular movement bitterly came to realise, they avoided contact with it; 'kid-gloved heresy' was G. W. Foote's term for their attitude. Holyoake, the founder of the Secular movement, once his early radicalism had died down, was anxious to placate these 'respectable' middle-class thinkers and get them to join the secular movement by dropping the Malthusian and Republican issues, toning down anti-religious propaganda, and calling the movement 'agnostic', not 'atheist'. Bradlaugh opposed this, and said he wanted a militant, and therefore a working-class, movement. The question was aired in the famous debate in 1870 between Bradlaugh and Holyoake on 'Is Secularism Atheism?', where Bradlaugh stated that only a working-class movement would be a militant movement, and of course his views prevailed. Thus at this juncture at least, the trenchant radicalism of Freethinkers can only be understood if it is realised that they were working-class, as the first waves of most radical protest in Britain have been from the Chartists on. This is the analysis of the situation put forward by J. M. Robertson in his *History of Freethought*, and he knew infinitely more about Freethought than either myself or Mr Tribe, as I am sure Mr Tribe would be the first to admit. Not only do all historians who have discussed the secular movement consider it working-class (and not purely artisan either) but many secularists, both past and present, have taken pride in this very fact. Why should Mr Tribe regard it as regrettable? The assertion that the movement is now recruiting from more middle-class groups may well be true, and this and many other questions could be cleared up if a statistical table of current paid-up members of the society were to be produced, classified by occupation and sex. Only this can establish the truth, and it would be of the greatest interest to me, and I am sure, to many other secularists.

On the specific question of my evidence, I have tried to

use all the obituaries in the main secularist journals. Naturally I could only use those which gave a reason for conversion, and I made that fact clear in my article. I also made clear the fact that, since the movement was so much larger in the 19th century, this meant that most of my evidence dated from that period.

I am particularly distressed lest the friends I have made in the movement should think that Mr Tribe's comment, that I regarded becoming a secularist as being like 'fanatics who skip from one extremist organisation to another', was taken from anything I had said. My article argued that movement between organisations (I was *not* talking about Christianity and Freethought alone) is commonly interpreted as instability, but that I regarded this as an inadequate explanation. The fact that movement between organisations, joining a lot at once, and rarely having more than one generation in the movement, has been characteristic of many humanists, has often been discussed by officials, one of whom (possibly Bradlaugh?) remarked that the secular movement was like a Turkish bath—it did you good, even if you weren't in it for long.

As regards the interpretation of the tendency to anti-Catholicism in the movement, we shall clearly not be able to agree. I merely share the general view that the power of the RC church in Britain has been waning since the Reformation, and that there is no evidence that there was any resurgence in its power at the time of increased anti-Catholic tendencies in the NSS.

Finally, it need hardly be said that I do not regard the working-class as 'unintelligent/unintellectual and probably coarse', and such a view could not possibly be derived from this or anything else I have written.

SUSAN BUDD.

A response: The reviewer

I AM grateful for Susan Budd's observations, which have prompted me to think more carefully than I might otherwise have done about this aspect of Charles Bradlaugh's work, for my forthcoming biography. Like her, I hope that interested readers will consult the original paper so that they can see who is to blame for the misrepresentation she claims has occurred. Though I wasn't reviewing it, I also had in mind a typescript of hers which I think must have appeared in Bryan Wilson's *Patterns of Sectarianism*. (It may have been amended since I saw it. I only hope so.)

Mrs Budd challenges me to produce evidence for my assertions. Some of it lies in unpublished letters and esoteric press cuttings that I am now processing. The rest is accessible to all. It consists of those portions of the secularist journals which are not obituaries. If she wanted the views of "ordinary" members, why not read the correspondence columns? She appears to have created a theory for a movement over 100 years old on the basis of 150 "biographical accounts . . . mainly written as obituaries" with odd details from "nearly two hundred briefer biographies". Would she like to tell us if she has read all the obituaries in all the secularist journals from 1850 to today, and if so how many there were? What is her reason for ignoring the great bulk of them, that were apparently silent on the one question she was concerned with? Is an obituary, necessarily written by somebody else describing an event which may have occurred sixty-odd years before and not subject to challenge by the person involved, a reliable way of estimating the grounds for anyone's "conversion" to anything? The main evidence in the typescript I have referred to seemed to be a couple of visits to public meetings organised by two NSS branches in the centre of Britain's two largest cities. Needless to say there were some cranks there. Did she stop

to ask whether they were typical of NSS membership throughout the country or whether they were even members of the NSS, and did she at the same period ever go to Central London public meetings organised by other bodies that she seems to regard as more genteel? I recall her account of the chairman of one of these branches that made him sound rather like a shop stewards' convener in *I'm All Right, Jack*. He was in fact one of the country's leading physiotherapists. Mrs. Budd's latest piece of evidence is a quip about Turkish baths which she attributes to Bradlaugh. I'm not of course in a position to prove he never said it, but it sounds to me like just another idle piece of Bradlaugh mythology.

The NSS is very proud of all its work and all its members, whatever labels it or they may be given. But I, no less than Susan Budd, am concerned with accuracy. I should be highly delighted if we were making such an impact among immigrant Irish ex-Catholics, Italian and Maltese that they were "proportionally large" in the society. The sad fact is that, outside the assertion of Mrs Budd, I know of no evidence that this is so. Nor do I presume to know the motivation of members. I hope they are all influenced by moral considerations. But their avowed interests and my knowledge of psychology suggest it is as absurd to say their stimulation is entirely moral as it would be to say it is entirely intellectual. The two usually go together. The same goes for the working-class label. Of course there would be nothing "regrettable" if *all* the members had incomes, education and jobs that sociologists are pleased to call "working-class". It would be the more credit to them in the light of their secularist achievement. But it just isn't true. In the nineteenth century most of the members were working-class because most of the population was. But the other classes were fairly represented in what was for many years the *only* national humanist organisation in the country. The main trouble today is that, like other reformist organisations, we are cut off from regular appeal to the whole population (TV and popular dailies having by and large supplanted public meetings) so that we are on the way to becoming disproportionately professional middle-class.

As an Australian (with her remarkable talent for making giant inductive leaps from slender empirical platforms, heaven knows what conclusions Mrs Budd will draw from this fortuitous fact), I wasn't brought up to think about class at all, but I've had to reckon with it a lot in England. It was often said that Bradlaugh was a working-class demagogue who couldn't quite manage his h's. *It may* have been intended as a compliment. Many would no doubt have been proud to claim the title. But Bradlaugh's family and friends were at some pains to correct this picture because it was used to discredit his work as both emotive and unlettered. Whatever may be said to his "rivals" who were eventually to form new national movements—Holyoake, C. A. Watts, Coit—they weren't social snobs in the

true sense, though they welcomed the esteem of bishops more than Bradlaugh and Foote. The 1870 debate was not over whether secularism should be a working-class or middle-class phenomenon, but whether philosophically it led to atheism and tactically an atheist involvement would prejudice the chance of getting "secular" education in the Forster Elementary Education Act. Malthusianism began, by the way, with "middle-class thinkers" like Malthus, Bentham, R. D. Owen, Knowlton, J. S. Mill and G. Drysdale, and there is a paper by D. J. Rowe in the same issue of *Past and Present* asserting that the "first waves" of radical protest were middle-class (which I believe is generally accepted). Mrs Budd's view of marxism wasn't shared by Marx, who considered secularism *petit bourgeois*. I gladly concede that Robertson knew more about free-thought than I (till 1933, when he died), and I refer those interested in his views to his actual volume: *A History of Freethought in the Nineteenth Century* (1929). He said secularism "appealed primarily, by way of Sunday lectures, to working men, yet with no class doctrine", and that its interests were "at once literary, scientific, ethical, historical, scholarly and scientific". There is an instructive paragraph (p. 302) on "the snobberies of English life".

All this is very different from what most people mean by a working-class "movement". It is true that because of the hiatus between the decline of Chartism and the rise of the Labour movement, and the great political talents of Bradlaugh, secularism was for some thirty years the authentic focus of the radical working-class movement in addition to its other, and continuing, functions. As I suggested in my review, history is ultimately a matter of interpretation, but that is worthless if the supposed facts are dubious. If secularism "is" mainly a working-class "movement" instead of the freethought-humanist organisation and specialist lobby that I imagine it to be, it might well be asked what is the NSS doing today and where does it think it's going. Is it a household name at the TUC, and if not, why not? Should it not affiliate to, or be absorbed by, the Labour Party or perhaps the Communist Party? This would be logical if Mrs Budd has correctly assessed its function. No wonder she proclaims to the academic world that the movement "has dwindled to the present day", comparing, no doubt, the number of NSS outdoor speaking sites, instead of our impact on humanist legislation, today relative to say, 10 or 20 years ago. But I shouldn't worry. So esoteric is her view of history that she actually tells us that "the power of the RC Church in Britain has been waning since the Reformation". I only hope the NSS continues to "dwindle" as fast as the Catholic Church proceeds to "wane".

DAVID TRIBE.

HAECKEL CENTENARY

(Continued from front page)

the theories of evolution of the last century, to read, or to re-read *The Natural History of Creation*, even after the passage of so many years, and the occurrence of so many changes in human knowledge and ideas.

Haeckel's books, with all their implications of change and development, conflicted with the absolutism of the Prussian State, and so their author must still stand for one persistent voice in the liberal protest against Bismarck and the German cult of authority: that, too, should be no dissuasion against a centennial re-examination of Haeckel's writings today.

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A RETREAT INTO SYMBOLISM

A. J. Lowry

TWENTIETH-CENTURY Christianity lies securely transfixed upon the horns of a gargantuan dilemma. This dilemma, ironically enough, is nothing but its own holy book, in whose defence wars have been waged, heretics burnt and dissenters persecuted in sufficient numbers to delight even the most sanguinary of tastes. For despite all the churches could do, facts have been established and theorems proved in complete contradiction to the parochial and erroneous views of nature offered in holy writ. The Bible has committed itself on questions of science, has been investigated and has been found mistaken: one might therefore naïvely expect the churches to do the decent thing, admit that Christianity is wrong, and disband.

Instead, however, two solutions, both completely unsatisfactory, have been advanced to meet the crisis. The Fundamentalist school insists that the Bible is always right, and that scientists who oppose it are either foolish or wicked, or both. Thus, if we are told that the sun moved ten degrees backwards in the sky (Isaiah 38:8) that is what it did, and all appeals to reason are invalid, as it is the work of fallible men, who are totally incapable of comprehending the all-wise and glorious purpose of an infinite God.

Those whose intelligence carries them a little further realise the absurdity of such a position, and instead attempt to escape the consequences of Biblical nonsense by 're-interpretation'. Thus, for example, the Bishop of Woolwich, one of the great spokesmen of the modernist movement, informs us in his book *But That I Can't Believe!* that he fully accepts the story of Virgin Birth—symbolically! This, apparently, means that he thinks it's a nice story and very little else. Since we are quite unequivocally informed in the scriptures that it is not meant to be read as a nice story, but as historical fact, it becomes extremely difficult to understand what Dr Robinson means by stating that he believes the tale at all.

In the course of a discussion I once had with a vicar, I asked him to explain the astronomical difficulties involved in the assertion, 'the stars shall fall from heaven' (Matt. 24:29). Being a modernist, he ignored the lame theory of meteorites, and gaily informed me that it referred to symbolic stars symbolically falling from a symbolic heaven! Further probing revealed that it was really a prophecy concerning the moral degeneracy of the churches in the last days, though I confess that to my untutored mind it would appear to apply with more validity to the popularity of parachute jumping amongst prominent actors.

Whilst this rejection of first century science is all to the good, one wonders by what stretch of the imagination such people as these continue to call themselves 'Christians'. Indeed, it seems that the only difference between many modernists and atheists is that the former are paid wages to defend a religion from which they have (in all but name) defected. Today we even have the Christian Atheist—such people presumably believing that Jesus was the son of a God who doesn't exist!

Christianity has thus performed a complete *volte face*. After (quite rightly) staking its integrity on the geocentric theory and the principle of divine creation, and being incontrovertibly defeated, it has now decided that it *really* meant the complete opposite of what it said, thus hoping

to escape unscathed to wreak further havoc on scientific thought for centuries to come. Whilst many modernists are no doubt extremely sincere, one wonders how long it will be before they realise that the advanced views that they hold have nothing at all to do with first century Hebrew mysticism, and unashamedly declare that they are without obligation to find tortured and ludicrous explanations for scriptures for which the world has no further use.

THE MONASTIC LIFE

Radio 4: Sunday, March 24

SEVERAL questions are posed by people curious about the monastic life—does it make sense, does it take account of basic human needs or do them violence, and what is its effect, if any, on the outside world?

These are questions which the programme "Monasticism 1968" in Radio 4 on Sunday, March 24, seeks to answer. These and others are put to nuns and monks of Roman Catholic and Anglican Communities by Elly Jansen, a Dutch psychiatric social worker who is Director of the Richmond Fellowship—an organisation concerned with the care and rehabilitation of mentally handicapped people—and who is also a state registered nurse.

Miss Jansen and Harold Rogers, producer of the programme, visited various communities, including the Community of the Resurrection at Mirfield in Yorkshire, the Deaconess Community of St Andrew in West London, and the Benedictine Priory of Christ the King at Cockfosters. Among those taking part in the programme will be Archbishop Anthony Bloom who is a monk in the Russian Orthodox Church.

Jean Straker.

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Letters to the Editor

NOTE: Letters exceeding 200 words may be cut, abbreviated, digested or rewritten.

Freethinkers needed in Africa

MAY I make the suggestion that Freethinkers who feel inclined to work overseas as teachers or in other occupations, apply for posts through the Ministry of Overseas Development.

Far more Freethinking teachers could do a great deal to help in Africa, where the influence of the missionaries is still very strong.

DON BAKER (Botswana).

Catholic corridors of power

THE letters of Peter Kane and J. Doherty (February 23) are examples of confused thinking and, I suspect, early indoctrination, as well as of some ignorance of the role played in human affairs by the Christian religion both Catholic and Protestant. This blinkered attitude towards political Christianity is typical of certain elements in the humanist movement. I don't know anything about Joe Naseby's evidence—I only know from my own researches over many years that the Church is not so concerned with numbers as with seats in the 'corridors of power' and with the accumulation of wealth. And of course she will play the ecumenical game with humanists so long as it suits her.

For humanists to accomplish any vital permanent influence towards human happiness in a secular—in contrast to a supernaturally-based world, they will need to take a long, hard look at the frustrating role played in world affairs by organised religion, particularly in the political field, and not least by that expert the Catholic Church. As Edward Hyams so rightly said (*Statesman*, February 3) "How they poison the well of life, the holy men, whatever gods they serve or pretend to serve".

Of course it is playing the Catholic-Christian game to refer to humanists as "cranks" and the "lunatic fringe", but a careful objective study of history affords ample evidence that the rise and rule of Christianity has been disastrous in its divisive effect upon the human race and led to untold misery. That divisiveness is one strong argument for abolishing religious teaching in all schools.

As for repeating the parrot-cry that Catholicism acts as a counter-balance to Communism, that no doubt is what the USA thought when it backed Diem in Vietnam, and see what that has led to. All dictatorships are to be deplored, but it seems that those of Franco, Salazar and Vorster, who were astute enough to retain God as a prop to their regimes, are safe from napalm and pellet bombs, and consider themselves part of the 'free world'. The "dispassionate enquiry" that Peter Kane advocates might be profitably indulged in by your two correspondents, and the results might surprise them.

ELIZABETH COLLINS.

Cannabis

IN discussing drugs in general, and cannabis in particular, I think we must be watchful that 'evidence' one way or the other is not put forward by commercial interests. (I have in mind the publicity given to 'evidence' about the harmful effects of oral contraceptives until it was found that this was being put about by a rubber-goods company.)

There are no doubt commercial interests who would delight in legislation making cannabis legal, so we must watch the evidence carefully. I read one day Don Aitken's report of the SHF's conference and the next I read the following in a professional journal:

"One 'junkie' I met, a woman of about 20, was 'hooked' entirely on 'hash'. (She started on methedrine but later abandoned it.) When I saw her, her movements lacked co-ordination, and this gave a gorilla-like appearance to her gait. Malnutrition had left her all 'skin and bones', with very little flesh. The cannabis was still affecting her diaphragm and hence her appetite. This was after five weeks without drugs.

She told me she was just beginning to know which day of the week it was, and also that her 'junkie' pal had just died. This addict, too, had only partaken of hashish."

Let us by all means have freedom of the individual—to do himself harm if he wishes, but that freedom should be based on a knowledge of the true facts. I consider the evidence is too conflicting for immediate legalising of cannabis. Let us ask for more and independent research.

DEREK MARCUS.

Delicate points

I WOULD like to reply to A. Douglas's remarks on my reference to God's posterior, in a recent article. I had already answered a similar criticism by Michael Cregan, but Mr. Douglas's attribution to me of sneering articles demands a response.

I am with him in congratulating our editor, Mr Karl Hyde, on the improved quality of the FREETHINKER, and the general tone of his policy. I objected to the coarseness in some of the late Harry Lamont's articles, and am strongly opposed to vulgarity. In the case raised by Mr. Douglas, reference to the divine backside was legitimate criticism. He fears that such references may offend Christian readers of the FREETHINKER. What is our journal for, if not to get believers to face their absurd credal realities, to dissipate their sensitiveness to them and end their superstitious faith?

Mr Douglas asserts that no Christian believes literally in the images which I deride. Those images are not inventions of mine, and if Christians do not believe in the truth of Holy Writ, or interpret it so as to destroy its literality, what need have they to be offended? If we are to soften our criticisms to the extent of Mr Douglas's desire, because he terms them sneering and in bad taste, we may as well throw down our pens and join the Young Men's Christian Association.

F. H. SNOW.

Vegetarianism and Christianity

MR WALTON, in his March 1 article (*Vegetarianism and Christianity*), omits to mention that our leaflet clearly states we do not try to justify vegetarianism by recourse to the Bible, but to show that when Christians shake off their blinkers they will be able to find equally secure crutches for vegetarianism in their scriptures—if they need such crutches. And I still maintain "more so" as the pieces to justify flesheating are obviously later interpolations to allow the weaker brethren to join the flock.

I am as far from being a Christian as it is possible to get, but there is a very real problem in the fact that many millions of people cling to the archaic magic of the New Testament, and the tribal history of the Jews in the Old.

I take the view that is better to lead people gently out of their darkness, than to jeer at them and throw stones into the cave.

Should any of your readers like a nice leaflet on slaughtering animals and eating decently I shall be glad to send a free packet to match their thinking.

GEOFFREY L. RUDD, *Secretary, The Vegetarian Society.*

Some questions

I THINK Otto Wolfgang's letter (March 1) belies its title. I also think it is ambiguous and nonsensical—especially the latter where he writes "the idea of 'God' is itself politics"! Perhaps if I were to put some questions the situation could be made clearer.

(1) Does he agree that we cannot disestablish the churches throughout the world unless we instal a political party which has a popular mandate for this among its purposes?

(2) Does he agree that we cannot remove the religious provisions of the 1944 Education Act—or remove religious privilege on TV, etc.—unless we instal politicians who *purpose* these things?

(3) Does he recognise that it isn't only agnostics, atheists and Humanists who want to see these things done; and we can therefore hope for political help from other sources in the interests of opposition to censorship, racialism, class-friction, jingoism, etc.?

(4) Has he rejected the proposal to form a *world national party* (to oppose Communism, Fascism and all forms of local nationalisms)—and, if so, will he give us reasons for rejecting it—apart from the phony one he gives in his letter: that the churches are too strong to tackle?

E. G. MACFARLANE.

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