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RI: BISHOP v HEADMASTER

A BISHOP'S complaint about a letter circulated to parents by a headmaster has resulted in the latter becoming the subject of an enquiry set up by the county educational authority. Mr Brian Shaw, the headmaster, has been accused by the bishop of using bribery to tempt parents to withdraw their children from "religious education" and "assembly".

This accusation was made in the Leicester Diocesan Leaflet by the Bishop of Leicester, Dr Ronald Williams. Together with the wide press coverage which followed, it has brought the headmaster into some disrepute while gaining for the bishop considerable support. An objective view of the facts made known, however, may cause wonder that their position are not completely reversed.

In accordance with the Plowden Report's recommendation that all parents should be made aware of the clause in the 1944 Education Act which provides for parents wishing to withdraw their children from religious instruction and worship, Mr Shaw advised all his pupils' parents of the clause and invited those who wished to take advantage of it to notify him.

By making a general invitation to all parents, Mr Shaw facilitated an 'opting out' *en masse*, thereby minimising grounds for the individual parent's fear that their child may be singled out and isolated from all the other children: a frequent obstacle to parents who wish to take advantage of the clause.

Another fear of such parents, that their child may be caused to sit alone in an empty classroom or, worse, stand in a cold and draughty corridor without any care or supervision, Mr Shaw met with an offer of extra tuition in reading and writing under the proper supervision of a teacher.

In short, Mr Shaw had simply notified parents of their legal rights, made it possible for them to exercise them, and made it possible for a usually workable clause to be workable. For this, he is required by the county educational authority to give an account of himself at an official enquiry.

Of what wrong is Mr Shaw guilty? Well, the crux of the matter, said the bishop, is that Mr Shaw offered "extra reading and writing—with a teacher" as an alternative to religious education.

But surely reading and writing are just as acceptable as any other alternative to RI and worship? But "it is difficult not to see in these words a tempting bribe to get parents to sign the form" said the bishop.

It may well appear tempting whether or not intended as a bribe, but surely it is no more wrong than offering prizes and treats to tempt children to interest themselves in the Church's activities which we so frequently witness? Here, Mr Shaw may only be practising methods taught him by the Church. But where is the wrong? "Christian England expects every Christian to do his duty; to refuse to sign any form which will destine his children to an atheist schooling and to support all efforts to maintain and improve the standards on which our schooling has been based from time immemorial."

But that is a purely internal, Christian concern. Mr. Shaw's only concern was that non-Christians should recognise—and be able to exercise—their legal rights. If the appeal of Christianity pales in comparison with education in reading and writing, that is the Church's tough luck; it isn't a defect in educational methods. What we still need to be shown is the legal objection to Mr Shaw's action which may justify the slur on his name and the trouble he will experience in being brought to an enquiry. What, precisely, is the legal objection? The bishop admits "so far, no objection could be taken to his action".

Yet still Mr Shaw is required to account for his action at an official enquiry? Why? Because this sort of action "will mark a change in the general situation if schoolmasters are going to take the initiative in building up withdrawal groups by sending parents letters and forms to be returned" according to the Bishop.

Exactly. Given their rights, and the means to exercise them in a way not detrimental to their children, many more parents will withdraw their children from "religious education" and "assembly" (indoctrination and the compulsory daily act of worship). And while (in defying the status quo and opposing reform of the legislation on RI) the Church points to this 'opting out' clause as a measure which ensures fairness to all (which it doesn't), they raise merry hell when practical steps are taken to implement the clause.

The National Secular Society has not been slow in reacting to this matter: David Tribe, the NSS President, has issued a press release in which he states:

"Mr Shaw is surely doing no more than his duty in advising parents that under the 1944 Education Act they have the right to remove their children from the religious rituals and tendentious teachings that are provided compulsorily in every school."

* * *

VATICAN PAPER IN ENGLISH

L'Osservatore Romano, the official publication of the Vatican, is to be printed also in English for British readers. The Roman Catholics of this country are thus now enabled to read a full and direct translation of any bull the Pope may issue.

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 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

Belfast Humanist Group, NI War Memorial Building, Waring Street, Belfast, Monday, April 8, 8 p.m.: BERT MASON, 'The Humanist Position in a Modern Society'.

Brighton and Hove Humanist Group, Regency House, Oriental Place, Brighton, Sunday, April 7, 5.30 p.m.: Professor T. H. PEAR, 'Humanists and Psychologists'.

Leicester Secular Society, 75 Humberstone Gate, Leicester, Sunday, April 7, 6.30 p.m.: T. HOSE, 'Some Progressive Fallacies'.

Luton Humanist Group, Carnegie Hall, Central Library, Luton, Thursday, April 11, 8 p.m.: RUPERT TOWNSHEND-ROSE (Barrister), 'Divorce Law Reform'.

NSS: Birmingham Branch, Midland Institute, Margaret Street, Birmingham, Sunday, April 7, 6.45 p.m.: F. J. CORINA, 'In Search of God'.

Sexual Freedom Society, Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London, WC1, Tuesday, April 9, 7.30: DAVID TRIBE, 'Sex in a Free Society'.

South Place Ethical Society, Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London, WC1, Sunday, April 7, 11 a.m.: H. J. BLACKHAM, 'Issues of World Order'; Tuesday, April 9, 6.45 p.m.: N. TURKATENKO, 'Soviet Education and Art'.

South Place Sunday Concerts, Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London, WC1, Sunday, April 7, 6.30 p.m.: MARTIN STRING QUARTET, GWYNNE EDWARDS. Webern, Mozart, Brahms.

RI: CHALLENGE TO SURVEY

AN appreciable stir has been created by the National Secular Society's publication of Maurice Hill's *RI Surveys*, a criticism of the survey organised by Mr P. R. May and Mr O R Johnstone of the Department of Education in the Universities of Durham and Newcastle.

This survey, which set out to investigate parents' attitudes to compulsory religious instruction and worship in schools, was met by quiet mummings and grumblings from several notable educationists, statisticians and sociologists, but Maurice Hill's booklet is the first outspoken challenge to the validity of the methods of the survey.

At its publication, the NSS held a press conference comprising Lionel Elvin, a Director of the Institute of Education at the University of London, Brigid Brophy, writer and author of *Religious Education in State Schools*, Maurice Hill and the NSS President, David Tribe. As a result, the publication of this booklet was given coverage by both local and national press, and sales of the work are rapidly increasing.

Again, in this connection, Mr Tribe took part in a discussion with Mr May which was broadcast on the Northern Region, March 22.

Readers will remember a review of Mr Hill's *RI Surveys*, by Margaret Knight, which appeared in the March 15 issue of the FREETHINKER. Despite the importance Mrs Knight attached to this publication, it was not then fully realised just how significant it was, and humanists and secularists may well rejoice that this exposure of Christian-biased surveys is gaining with wide attention.

YOU MUSTN'T SEE IT

Because of Eve, a film made in Canada in 1948, was to have received an A (London) certificate, with special conditions, had a recommendation of the Greater London Council's Licensing Committee been approved by the GLC last week.

The film comprises three short sex-education films dealing with venereal disease, the human reproduction process and the birth of a baby. The three stories are linked through a family doctor.

The Licensing Committee judged the film on the criterion whether it would tend to deprave or corrupt anyone likely to see it and were satisfied it would not. Their decision, with certain qualifications, was imparted to the GLC.

After consideration, the GLC refused the film a certificate. 25 men and 2 women thought you should be allowed to it, with 34 men and 7 women (including Lady Dartmouth)—obviously with keener concern for your well-being—decided you should not. Thus we have all been protected from heaven alone knows what dangers.

100 YEARS OF FREETHOUGHT

By DAVID TRIBE

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FAITH

FAITH. For many years this word and its meanings have intrigued me. It seems that it has two distinct overall meanings and that each meaning is opposed directly to the other. The first meaning is "confidence without proof" while the second can only be, "confidence with proof". That there may be qualifications giving shades of differences to both I do not doubt but, meantime, I can only allow myself to think in terms of the positive and negative. To commit myself to the first meaning entails my acceptance of ideas which were evolved in men's minds long ago, minds which were primitive, minds which could only cover their fears with an umbrella, the handle of which was a witch-doctor-hood, the ribs, a skeleton of superstitions and the gores, webs of mythologies. For centuries the handle concealed the catch of science which would allow the ribs and the gores to fold up so that the light of knowledge could penetrate the shade. To commit myself to the second meaning must kindle the knowledge that the umbrella is gradually being folded and rolled up ready to be put away in the storage of history only to be brought out by those who desire to study the fallacies of previous generations. It also means that I can only accept ideas which have become and are becoming apparent through the developed and educated senses which I realise I possess, in an average way, along with others of the variety of animal life which we can call *homo sapiens* and becoming, in course of time it is hoped, *homines sapientiores*, but possibly never *homines sapientissimi*. Rationally I must commit myself to the second meaning but at the same time must admit that there are certain inbred emotional instincts for which I cannot rationally account. The religionist seems to translate the meanings of those instincts into part of his unproven proof of the truth of his faith. The rationalist, on the other hand, must make himself quite sure that those instincts commenced to build up in his nature while Man was yet in the more bestial part of his evolution. Part proof of this can be seen in the instincts which all the other animals so obviously have; their instincts are a steady and ever present part of their lives and have developed each according to individual needs in individual surroundings. Animal instincts are, however, different from emotional ones. Nevertheless it is clear that domesticated animals have themselves acquired emotional instincts in addition to their animal ones. The finer points of Man's animal instincts are being gradually blunted as civilisation proceeds. Emotional instincts, because of the same civilisation seem to increase. If this is so it becomes quite evident that they are not based on religion but rather on the scientific improvement of conditions which Man himself is bringing about. In other words, animal instincts plus ignorance breed superstition and religion, while fading animal instincts, growing emotional instincts plus knowledge breed realistic truth. Both lead to faith but faith of two different and very opposite kinds; the first blinded by fables founded on animalism, the second with its sights on truth founded on scientific proof; the first on instincts necessary for animal life, the second on instincts which realise the necessity of finding out what is really true and separating it from all the falsehoods which have been bothering Man for centuries.

So faith according to the gospel of the religionist becomes less and less realistic to the rationalist as science is allowed

to go on unhampered. This leaves Man in the position that he must have faith in himself alone. Emotional doubts must be abandoned for emotional certainties; that is, facts which have emerged as truths because of Man's emotional necessity to find out the truth. At one time Man in his ignorance looked at the high mountain range and tried to comfort himself by saying that God existed there and beyond. In his emotional curiosity Man has now climbed the range and found naught but nature there and beyond.

I must expel the instinctive idea that "something must have caused it all". That is animal instinct at work. I can no longer have faith in that idea. I must substitute an idea emotioned by reason that there is "an everlasting cause existing in a limitless time-space; a cause which is blind, deaf, dumb, without a sense of smell or one of taste, indeed without any sense of feeling"; I cannot conceive of any sense beyond the ones I know and until someone or something proves to me that there is still another one I cannot, like the religionist, content myself that I will find one after I am dead; for me that is but mere wishful thinking and is something in which I could not have any faith at all. I can only take the proofs which nature itself provides on and around this planet. None of these proofs can postulate a superhuman being of sensitivity. Nature itself goes on without caring one way or another and it, nature, is obviously not a god or a goddess but remains an 'it'. In many directions Man can control 'its' efforts. Without Man's intervention nature would never release enough energy to send a man-made capsule to the moon, although, accidentally, 'it' could hurl another chunk of the Earth itself into space to form a second moon. But how could 'it' be aware of such an event except through the medium of Man's educated mind? Such an event in an unscientific age would be a miracle; in a scientific age it would be an explainable natural phenomenon. In the first age it would lead to faith in a supernatural being; in the second to faith in Man's own knowledge of his abilities to discover reasons.

ESSAY COMPETITION

PRIZES consisting of grants made from the F. C. C. Watts Memorial Fund (administered by the Rationalist Press Association) are offered for the three best essays on THE KNOWLEDGE EXPLOSION.

The grants will cover free attendance (including travelling expenses) at the 16th Annual Conference of the RPA at Churchhill College, Cambridge, September 6—8. In addition the first prize winner will receive a cash award of £10.

Entries of not more than 2,000 words should be typed or legibly written on one side of the paper only, stating the author's age, and should be sent to the Secretary, RPA Ltd., 88 Islington High Street, London, N.1.

Age limit: 30 years. Closing date: 30 June, 1968.

WEEK DAY NIGHTS

Isobel Grahame

IT may be bad theology to believe that God actually laboured six days to make the world and rested the seventh day, but it is good sense to follow periods of work with adequate rest and 're-creation' while remembering that a Sun/day is the period between revolutions of Earth's shadow so, as in biblical times, every day is somebody's night and somebody's Sun/day somewhere.

How many people in your neighbourhood are trying to sleep during your day and how much success do you think they have? Whether God slept on that memorable Sabbath is not recorded, but nobody would deny that a good night's sleep is one of our most basic needs and should, therefore, rank as a fundamental human right. Bad nights are debilitating enough to limit the efficiency of day workers from wife-mothers downwards, but a bad day's sleep is sheer torture for night worker's biological clocks which are apt to sound off false alarms at the least provocation.

In addition to the traditional nocturnal labours of watchmen, police, fire, ambulance, medical, transport, press, postal and similar services, more and more workers with expensive education, long training and higher incomes are being employed on continuous critical processes in manufacturing. They are programming, informing, recording and controlling costly installations which must keep going 24 hours a day to be economic and serve a community which demands electricity, gas, water, weather forecasts, news bulletins and music round the clock at the bidding of switch and tap.

Any one or more of these people may live in your street and mine, not forgetting the odd astronomer or two looking for supernovae or The Prime Cause.

During the past two years my household has included three adult males, one working permanent days with periods away from home at night, one on permanent nights of four 10-hour and one 5-hour shifts per week, and the third works one week from 7 till 15 hours, one 15 till 23 hours, one 23 to 7 hours and so on in winter with three summer months of alternate 12-hour nights and 12-hour days. The fourth male is a baby needing regular periods of undisturbed sleep both day and night.

Leaving aside the domestic difficulties of running such a household (baby needs to yell as well as sleep) consider the daily noises which assail my sleepers. The general background noise of traffic, etc., in our residential neighbourhood is not high enough to mask the sudden sharp intrusiveness of many external sounds, so we hear those maddening off-key ice cream jingles, whining jets and heehawing emergency vehicles long approaching and as long retreating.

Cheerfully whistling milkmen exchange badinage while the supply-vehicles re-stock their vans, clanking and rattling the crates. Panting diesel waggons come—one to clear gullies with an elephantine proboscis, another busily brushes stones and grit into its maw, and flicks as many more on to the footpaths in the process; every Thursday the dustmen's freighter up-ends itself like a gargantuan Devil's Coach Horse in order to operate its digestive organs with a grinding, crushing roar, just outside the bedroom windows.

There are loud-speaker vans urging us to support the Church fete or the Conservative jumble sale, to vote for this or that, or ominously threaten 'water off in one hour for three hours'. Children who learn to shout before they can speak make school holidays horrible with persistent bicycle bells, cap pistols, Injun war whoops and Machine-gun Charlies, all to the tune of power tools in garden and shed, accompanied by the lingering blue fungoid stink of motor mowers when the air is hot and still. Local Highway Cowboys test out and adjust their high rev. motorbikes, minis and pop-pops in our 'nice quiet road with no traffic'.

The thump-bang-twang of a Beat Group, apparently incapable of closing the windows on practice days, is nearly as bad as the team of tree-fellers cutting up timber with a buzz-saw. Not even ear-plugs or double windows are proof against vibrations which penetrate from foundations to the roof.

In due season our air is loud with yapping small breeds who cannot jump garden gates and the baying of large breeds who can and come to skirmish and compete for the favours of next door's bitch. Their day- and night-long vigils persist—it seems—over more weeks than nature's need should justify.

Deranged biological clocks artificially advanced and retarded to synchronise with technological time are a main cause of nervous disease. The increasing incidence of shift-working at all income levels will be reflected in the national neurosis-statistics very soon, if it is not showing already. This human right to sleep must be taken into consideration seriously by planners, architects, engineers, manufacturers-builders and neighbours, who make or mar our urban environments; we must goad them and ourselves to greater efforts at improving the material and spatial insulation of our homes and the way we live and reducing the noise and vibration made by the heavy hardware which delivers coal and fuel oil, empties dustbins and services our streets during the daytime.

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REMEMBERING SWINBURNE

Elizabeth Collins

THAT rather eccentric Bohemian poet Algernon Swinburne was a man born out of his time. Genius such as his could hardly be expected to flourish in the narrow-minded Puritanical moral atmosphere of Victorian England. Nevertheless the rare spirit which inspired his work during the first thirty-five years of his life—the years of his masterpieces—established him as one of the great English poets. Born in 1837 into an aristocratic High Church family, Swinburne was educated at Eton and Oxford. Always an avid reader and possessed of a remarkable memory he early became immersed in the works of Keats and Shelley, cast off his religious allegiance, and developed republican sentiments. At Oxford he was suspected of harbouring dangerous ideas, and left without a degree.

The publication in 1865 of his *Atalanta in Calydon* met with instantaneous and assured success, but with the later work *Chastelard* although the critics were reasonably favourable, there began to be heard accusations of sensuality and atheism. When *Poems and Ballads* appeared in 1866 the critics showed poor judgment and indeed prejudiced blindness, not recognising that, in spite of his eccentricities, this young poet was indeed a genius.

Mazzini, one of the leaders of the Italian *Risorgimento*, urged Swinburne to devote his glorious powers to the service of Republican Italy, and it was under this influence that the immortal *Songs before Sunrise* was written, inspired by the imminent overthrow of Papal temporal power. In 1868 was written the *Hymn of Man* for which Swinburne is most notable in freethought literature. Being of a highly nervous temperament, the unfortunate press criticisms and stories of his eccentricity in dress and behaviour, affected him badly, resulting in dissipations and extravagances that proved injurious to his health and led to a complete breakdown. Alarmed by his condition, Swinburne's mother wrote to his solicitor Theodore Watts urging him to do something about it. Having lived in the same street and managed Swinburne's affairs for two years or more—being as it were on the spot—one wonders why Watts left it until the poet was almost dying of alcoholic poisoning before taking steps to act in the matter.

It is probable that with the exhaustive illness and with his affairs in disorder, this was the precise moment to more easily tame the rebel poet, and to remove him from the temptations of Bohemian life to Watt's house at Putney. The captive genius could be quietly and gradually conditioned to respectability in accordance with accepted standards of Victorian 'decency'. Financial pressure was used to 'persuade' the poet; money was to be allowed him from his father's estate conditional upon his going to live with Watts. He was then forty-three, and for the next thirty-years he lived under the propriety guardianship of his suburban solicitor. Certainly his health was restored and his financial affairs benefited, but alas, the flame was extinguished—the fire had gone out! The genius that was Algernon Swinburne, the glory of the man who wrote *Atalanta*, *Poems and Ballads* and *Songs before Sunrise* had vanished! And there the veil had better be drawn.

The rebel of Mazzini days now became submissive to the dominant influence exercised over the delicately nervous temperament of the poet. He was encouraged to write nature poems, which had little affinity with his genius, and

to produce patriotic jingle, while great care was taken that he should not upset the public 'sense of decency'! One wonders what his *real* thoughts were as he strode over Putney Heath on his daily walk and drank his glass of beer at the "Rose and Crown"? His mother, Lady Jane Swinburne had hoped that with the removal to Putney her son's health would be restored, and that he would recover his faith. In the first objective Watts was successful—in the latter never. Swinburne kept his atheistic principles to the last, and desired that no religious service should be held at his burial. As however, his request was verbal only, convention and the Christian Church triumphed, and he was interred with a religious service, while a symbol of that faith now rests upon his tomb! But the magic words of the *Hymn of Man* written just 100 years ago in 1868 remain, of which we give the concluding verse in memory of the poet who died on April 10, 1909.

"By thy name that in hellfire is written and burned at the point of thy sword.

Thou art smitten, thou God, thou art smitten; thy death is upon thee O Lord!

And the lovesong of earth as thou diest resounds through the wind of her wings—

Glory to Man in the highest! For Man is the master of things."

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THURSDAY, APRIL 18th, 1968, 7.30 p.m.

RI AND SURVEYS

Opinion Polls on Religious Education in State Schools

By MAURICE HILL

Price 1/- (plus 4d postage)

Published by the

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103 Borough High Street, London, SE1

THE PIPE DREAM OF A HUMANIST PARTY

Otto Wolfgang

IN the correspondence columns of this paper, the idea was recently put forward of founding our own political party. The writer was angry with me when I pointed out that in the prevailing conditions, such a party would be a still-birth, and later, when conditions may be favourable, there would no longer be a need for such a party. The idea of God, I said, is in itself a political weapon: it is the scarecrow in the field of private property and vested interests in order to maintain the *status quo*. To assail it in a frontal attack by organising all unbelievers into a political party would necessitate that we first become as strong as the churches. Finances and numbers alone wield influence.

However, we have not been able to organise all the unbelievers in one body; most of them think it is enough to stand apart and remain apathetic. This enables the churches to pose as representatives of the majority of the population, even if most people are in fact nominal Christians only. Our task to make such as these see that their active co-operation is necessary is made even more difficult by the fact that all the means of propaganda and opinion forming are in the hands of the powers that be; i.e. those who use the scarecrow.

When Wedgwood Benn was Postmaster General, I wrote to him to the effect that in a proper democracy non-believers should have a right to be heard on the BBC; if this right is denied us, would he eliminate from the BBC programmes all religious propaganda since the Corporation is not allowed to make propaganda of any sort. His short and gruffy rejection showed that he—who considers himself to have left-wing leanings—treated me as a crank.

I am not so pessimistic as to say that it is not possible to get small improvements by continuously clamouring for our rights. A Turkish proverb says that only the infant who cries is taken to the breast, and cry out we must without respite. This is what our organisation is for. But at the same time we must impress on the mass of unbelieving bystanders that we need their assistance so as to give more power to our elbow.

Rather than a Dialogue with Church leaders we need one with the nominal Christians. Many of them are like Napoleon who, for himself, was an agnostic but believed that, if God did not exist, he must be invented to keep the masses under control. Men lived long before there was any religion and, if it were true that—without religion—there could be no ethical co-existence, we would no longer be here.

Statistics from Germany

Eight years ago, the churches in Germany commissioned an institute of public opinion to investigate the religious climate of the country. The result has since been kept as a guarded secret. However, *Spiegel* has now commissioned the same institution to find out what the position is today. Here are some of the findings:

- 68 per cent still believe in God;
- 48 per cent believe in an after-life;
- 38 per cent accept that Jesus was resurrected; only
- 25 per cent accept that a pope is infallible, but
- 97 per cent are baptised;

although only 9.4 per cent go the whole hog as required by scripture. Nearly two-thirds think the Church exerts too

much influence in life, particularly in politics (85 per cent), legislation (64 per cent), films and TV (52 per cent); and 69 per cent maintained one can be a Christian 'without Church', meaning that the term 'Christian' is another way of saying "a well-behaved moral human being". Three per cent assert that Jesus is not an historical person, and another 15 per cent consider him irrelevant to modern conditions. And who believes in Hell?

	Yes	No	Don't know
Roman Catholics ...	52%	47%	1%
Protestants ...	22%	78%	—
Non-believers ...	—	100%	—

Our apathetic friends do not see that they have no right to complain of too much religious influence so long as they themselves keep out of the fray.

MR LOWRY AND THE MYTH OF EVOLUTION

The Rev. Christopher Strother

A few further comments

A. J. LOWRY betrays a very poor memory for, in criticising my lack of a definition for the term 'life' (March 1), he fails completely to call to mind his own lack of definition in his original article; his omission did not stop him discussing the origin of life though.

I am sure that Mr Lowry's public library will be able to supply him with a standard manual on palaeontology in which he will find the *Archaeopteryx*, the *Cephalaspis* and the *Seymouria* fully classified. I suspect though that this is not what he had in mind when putting his point, rather was he asserting the assumed transitional roles of these groups. If such be the case, then I must beg to differ. At no point do any of these groups give a transitional form which is adequate. We know nothing certain of the morphology of the first for example, yet this is essential to the evolutionary case. The second is so surrounded by dispute that the situation is too confused to allow for absolute statements from Mr Lowry or anybody else while the third group is too late to be a transitional type.

The Phylum Chordata appears suddenly in the Middle Cambrian (whatever Mr Lowry might think to the contrary) with *Callograptus antiquus*.

I note the subtle change in the point about industrial melanism; evolution at present is dropped, and variation within the species adopted in its place; in short, Mr Lowry concedes with bad grace.

It is Mr Lowry who makes "a very silly mistake" in assuming that I was concluding *Homo* (sic) *habilis* among the "earliest known fossil men"; Mr Lowry and Dr Leaky may; I most certainly do not by any stretch of the imagination. It seems as though my critic has no clue about the being I refer to, so in order to stop him getting into a greater muddle than he is in at present, I suggest he consult the late Sir Arthur Keith's *The Antiquity of Man*, and, in particular, page 473 (Vol. 2).

THE IDEALISM OF WILLIAM MORRIS

Eric Glasgow

PERHAPS because the movements of revolt against the crude mechanisation, and the mass organisation, of the nineteenth century, are now less surprising or relevant than once they were, we hear less praise of William Morris (1834-1896) than was once the case. Too often, nowadays, he is dismissed as, at best, an amiable crank, or at worst, a futile reactionary, against the needs, and the destinies, of his age. Thus, his work, as poet, artist, manufacturer, and idealist, is seldom fully appreciated, just as the work of all idealists tends to be injudiciously set aside, in the current practice, as being merely irrelevant, perhaps even perilous and misleading, in the conduct of hard, encumbering realities. Now that, in Great Britain at least, Socialism, in its politically-apparent form, has acquired rather a bad reputation, it is even more important, I think, not to despise its often distinguished intellectual ancestry in these islands, nor to ignore the value, even in the intensely practical concerns of government and social organisation, of the more radical or individualistic thinkers of our past.

William Morris was not alone, of course, in his protest against the basic roots of Victorian society. His was a voice which formed part of the strident chorus of rather abrasive protest, which included also Thomas Carlyle, John Ruskin, and Charles Kingsley. And, in comparison with the work of such thinkers, William Morris does appear to be almost too sedate, docile, and literary. We may, at the least, credit him with the gentility of scholarship and culture, whatever may have been the revolutionary implications of so many of his ideas. He realised that there was something wrong with the society he knew, and he proposed to attempt to change it, by reverting, past the Industrial Revolution, to the Middle Ages, which he viewed in terms which were exaggerated in their praise.

So he represents another aspect of that same general movement for a return to a glorified Middle Ages, which we also encounter in the Oxford Movement in theology, in the Gothic Revival in architecture and art, and in historical romanticism in literature: William Morris, was, thus, akin to Rossetti, Burne-Jones, Madox-Brown, and others of the "Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood", although his retrogressive enthusiasms expressed themselves in imaginative literature, rather than religion, as such, or in the visual arts.

He should be remembered, especially and pre-eminently, as a poet, skilled in the language of ideas and the imagination, and it is valuable not to overlook the fact that we now, in 1968, celebrate the centenary of the publication of the first part of one of his most exciting and durable works, the *Earthly Paradise*, which came out, in three volumes, between 1868 and 1870. The full work contains 25 narrative poems, written with great care and beauty, and obviously owing a great deal to the style of Chaucer.

The *Earthly Paradise*, taken as a whole, reveals, in a very eloquent and memorable form the real, essential literary genius of William Morris, and it establishes for him a permanent place in the records of English literature, which his often more devious excursions into social reform and radical philosophy have sometimes tended to obscure or to disguise. There is, of course, a close and unavoidable connection, between the literary grace, and the imaginative skill of William Morris, and his complementary, if also more controversial activities, as a student of life and society; for, ultimately, all great literature is and must be rooted and grounded in the needs and the demands of life,

as these are expressed in the ethics and the assumptions of a living community. Nevertheless, it is important, I think, that the reputation of William Morris, as a postulant social reformer, should never be allowed to overshadow the extent of his undoubted genius as a writer, his sheer literary artistry, his unique vision of a whole new world of literary experience; for it is the possession of these qualities which gives him a rarer claim to our remembrance, which he could never have, if we were to recollect him solely as the source of a rather futile protest in social criticism.

Indeed, it must be, primarily, as a writer, and only secondarily, as a social reformer, that we should now, a century or more later, remember William Morris: his contribution, especially if it is to be measured by the ample yardstick of the *Earthly Paradise*, must be in the field of literature rather than that of politics, and so we should not be surprised that, like most men of letters, he was a failure, almost a ludicrous one, in the areas of what was practical, mundane, or realistic. In such realms, the very imaginative vigour, which made him so great as a writer, betrayed him, and led him into the familiar, primrose paths of an ethereal idealism, and an effervescent public futility.

If such remarks represent criticisms of him as a protagonist of the practical, a representative of theories which could be acceptable for the masses, they do not, by any means, nullify the permanent value of his work, as a contribution to what is great, evocative, and appealing, in our literature. Based on the Greeks, and Medieval in its methods, the *Earthly Paradise* is, unquestionably, great creative literature, and it may still, even a century later, be usefully read. It constitutes a brilliantly imaginative work, which should not today be neglected, and it first gave William Morris a wide popularity and acclaim, and to a large extent, it set the pattern for almost all his subsequent literary, artistic, or social ventures.

In one sense, too, it still embodies the man: sensitive, eloquent, delicate, and responsive. Yet, in addition, it remains still tantalizingly remote from what could become the actual or the acceptable, for any modern, massive, and progressive society. The *Earthly Paradise* is, fundamentally, the residual product of a deeply imaginative and sensitive poet, engrossed in a beautiful, edifying dream of his own: its social relevance will always remain only indirect, diffused, and recreative.

My own first acquaintance with the work of William Morris was through his reputation as a trenchant critic of the social and economic underlay of nineteenth-century English society. Then, I turned to read his more purely literary works, and often I found them to be a good deal more rewarding, and productive, than his various essays in social criticism. The *Earthly Paradise* I first read, as I remember, as a result of finding the long and engaging comments about it, by J. W. Mackail, in his *Life of William Morris* (Oxford WORLD'S CLASSICS edition, No. 521, Vol. 1, pp. 182-212). This is an excellent biography, standard for its subject, and the present centenary year, for the first public appearance of the *Earthly Paradise*, may well encourage some renewed interest in it. Certainly, it would scarcely be possible to show too much interest in the ideas and writings of William Morris, who so well deserves our respect and veneration, alike as a writer and as a man. Not all the Victorians had feet of clay.

Letters to the Editor

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

The Pelican on Humanism

THERE is only one comment I should like to be allowed to make on the Editor's review of my book. (First, however, I will mention that I just *did* devote the first pages to defining humanism, in the only way in which I think it can be broadly though unequivocally defined, assigning the limits within which I have consistently used the term throughout the book.)

The point I wish to make is an explanation of my neglect of the National Secular Society. The book was written two years ago and until comparatively recently the NSS, with few personal exceptions, repudiated and ridiculed the term "humanism". It was because the World Union of Freethinkers was essentially out of sympathy with the kind of humanism about which I have written that Dr van Praag and I decided to form an independent humanism international.

All the same, I am sorry if I have squinted, all the more so because your last paragraph makes allowances for "Blackham at his Blackhamst", with a warm response to the kind of humanism in which I believe and in which I am glad to believe members of the NSS now wish to share.

H. J. BLACKHAM.

World Order, not Global State

I DO not wish to enter a prolonged verbal battle with Mr Macfarlane, but I feel obliged to reply to his letter of March 8.

Mr Macfarlane claims that, as I am a Scottish Nationalist, I must be more concerned with Scotland than the world. If this is so, then clearly, as a Municipal Candidate, I must be more concerned with my city, Aberdeen, than with Scotland. While this may be true, it is obviously not necessarily the case.

Though a nationalist, I am concerned with the world. Like Mr Macfarlane, I hope for an eventual World Order. However, I do not consider his idea of a Global State is practical; certainly not at this point in history. I see the best hope for mankind in the United Nations, for all its present shortcomings. (The SNP, by the way, is strongly in favour of UN—our spokesmen are fond of pointing out that a free Scotland would sit between Saudi Arabia and Senegal in the General Assembly!)

I see more hope in a "World Civilisation" of self-governing, free-trading Nation-states, than in the faceless uniformity which Mr Macfarlane's Global State suggests. Even in the large States today, Government is dangerously impersonal, and remote from the people.

Mr Macfarlane accuses Mr Fairhurst of megalomania; he should be wary of falling into the same trap.

GEORGE R. RODGER.

Discretion

I WONDER if Mr Macfarlane (March 15) is prepared to provide the funds to cope with all the troubles which would descend on your own, your publishers' and your contributors' heads, if you, Mr Editor, did not exercise controls in articles and letters. As freethinkers we all wish to be outspoken and fearless; today, however, discretion is really the better half of valour. We must use the freedoms we have already gained in order to obtain reforms which, in turn, will add to those freedoms. There is no need to add further pages to the history of *Penalties upon Opinion*. To consolidate, to convince and to convert by means of rationally scientific statements, whenever and wherever possible within the terms of the law as it is and will be, is surely the most sane position to adopt. The media for this service on behalf of the community are no longer confined to conversational, written or printed words. It would be a lost battle if any of us deliberately ran our heads against existing laws, ridiculous as many of them are. We must not alienate public opinion even temporarily. We must rather persuade it through channels of recognised means and gradually erode the position which the nebulous establishment is holding.

Myself, I am convinced that the writing is already on the wall, but quite prepared to admit that Mr Macfarlane has the right to

put his own head into any noose of his own choosing (in his own publication, of course); I am equally prepared to learn that his exercise in so doing would have proved to have been futile.

D. MOLYNEUX.

Nationalism, Internationalism and World Government

BISHOP (?) Willard E. Edwards (March 15) does a good job of confusing the issue with his unfrank reply to my question of February 16.

May I explain that we are dealing with at least three distinct theories of world organisation when we use the terms (1) Nationalism, (2) Internationalism, and (3) World Government.

(1) At the present the world contains over 70 recognised nation-states each exhibiting the necessary sign of national sovereignty—the possession of armed forces which may be used for selfish nationalist purposes.

(2) There are several "internationalist" arrangements, UN, NATO, etc., which are not all-inclusive and are moves in a game in which the dominant motives are those of "selfish nationalisms".

(3) World Government does not exist in any sense (Bishop Edwards please note!). It is, at present, only a political ideal.

Bishop Edwards offers us a choice of Catholic or Communist officials. I believe both those bodies are anti-freethought and anti-democratic. I think Marxists will lead us into dictatorship of the "Communist Party" and Roman Catholicism will try to lead us into dictatorship from the Vatican. Surely we can rustle up enough freethinkers—eventually—to dish both lots.

E. G. MACFARLANE.

[We will let correspondence on this subject rest for a while now.—Ed.]

Montague's Communism

WITHOUT wasting words, Mr R. Stuart Montague (March 22) defines true communism.

Capitalist collectivism is not the real thing, and no society which sanctions usury (i.e. interest on money regardless of per centage) can be called communal. Money should be the means of distribution of goods as the roads are the means of their transportation, and neither should be a source of gain, or power, to any part of a community. We long since passed the toll-bar system of the latter, but we haven't progressed in the former.

COLLIN COATES.

Communist-baiting?

I REFUSE to read the communist-baiting FREETHINKER any longer; kindly cease sending it to me. Lenin and the Bolsheviks did more to liberate humanity from superstition than the NSS will ever do.

JOHN ILLINGWORTH.

Communist-supporting?

IT was a great pleasure to read Mr R. Stuart Montague's article COMMUNISM, HUMANISM AND RUSSIA, March 22.

The *Socialist Standard*, the official organ of the Socialist Party of Great Britain, has been voicing these views for years, so that to see them uttered in the 'Humanist World Weekly' proves its freethinking ancestry, and is of great value in the present state of apathy and search.

J. E. FLOWERS.

Established communism

RE COMMUNISM, HUMANISM AND RUSSIA (March 22) by R. Stuart Montague, with all respect, the author of this article provides no rational reason for rejecting the common opinion that in Russia, China, Cuba, etc., there is "established communism" and that these are communist countries.

It seems to me a matter of small importance whether Karl Marx himself was a true prophet of the way in which communism has evolved and is evolving. What is important is to recognise the fact that communism is by far the most effective form of secular humanism operating in the world today; that it provides the only effective defence against the theocracy and plutocracy that dominate the "free" world, and is in fact the only hope for the future of secular humanism anywhere.

Although I am not a member of any political party, my great hope is that the philosophy of communism will gradually penetrate the minds and hearts of all free thinking people.

PETER CROMMELIN.