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PROGRESSIVE LEAGUE ON RI

THE Progressive League have compiled a memorandum on "Religious Instruction in Schools". This is yet another, yet one of the best, of the several statements issued by the various organisations in the movement.

The Introduction is straight forward: "This memorandum prepared by the Progressive League, deals with the question of religious instruction and acts of worship in County Schools in England and Wales. It does not consider the position of Voluntary Schools ("Church Schools"), Independent Schools and Direct Grant Schools."

The text has four main headings: **THE LEGAL BACKGROUND, THE ACT OF WORSHIP, RELIGIOUS INSTRUCTION and THE BASIS OF MORALITY.** The third part, **RELIGIOUS INSTRUCTION**, has the sub-headings: (i) The present position, belief and unbelief; (ii) Provisions for withdrawal of pupils; (iii) Suggestions for change in Secondary Schools, and (iv) Suggestions for change in Primary Schools.

The document comprises a cohesive and forceful argument against the present arrangement based on the 1944 Education Act, and is an informative reference for humanist speakers and campaigners.

Copies of *Religious Instruction in Schools* may be obtained from the Hon. Secretary, The Progressive League, 13 Prince of Wales Terrace, London, W8. A large stamped, and self-addressed envelope would be appreciated.

NSS FORUM ON THE AIR

THE National Secular Society's Forum 'The Right to Die' (held at the Conway Hall, London, February 1), which discussed voluntary euthanasia, was featured in the BBC's 'Woman's Hour' on Tuesday, May 13.

This was an impartial investigation into the cases for and against voluntary euthanasia, and a fair comparison was drawn from arguments put forward by each side of the debate. Long recorded extracts from the addresses of Baroness Stocks, Dr Cicely Saunders, David Tribe and Norman St John Stevas were

heard together with questions and comments between platform and floor.

The feature ended with a generous tribute to the National Secular Society for organising a valuable 'open' forum.

CONFRONTATION

BEFORE setting in motion the confrontation between believers and non-believers which was described in the **FREETHINKER** on May 3, it has been felt desirable first to marshall more 'believers' willing to participate. For this reason, the opening of the confrontation may be delayed a few weeks.

Readers are invited to give details of this series to religious associates (particularly clergymen) together with an invitation to participate. During the early stages, we should like contributions from fundamentalist schools (e.g., Jehovah's Witnesses, Christadelphians, etc.) and from all who tend towards a literal interpretation of the Bible. The Editor would also like to hear from any reader who believes the Bible to be the inspired word of God, whether or not he closely identifies with any particular church.

As said in the May 3 article, the general direction will be from fundamentalism, on through the more sophisticated theologies to end—finally with metaphysical and philosophical arguments. To begin, we need the case for the Bible's authenticity. Do you know anyone who still believes it is authentic? If you do, we should be very pleased to hear from them.

TWO RECENT QUOTES

"I believe the important thing is concern for this world as it is, and not concern for another world about which we know nothing. The thing I want to get rid of is religion—that our role here is to prepare for an after life. We have only one life and it's up to us to do as

much as we can with it. A concept of God is meaningless. I don't believe in divine intervention. Man is the one who can make or break the earth and we've got to acknowledge our responsibility for this."

Rev. David Pope (Melbourne, Australia).

"...when I say I am an agnostic, I mean I cannot claim to know, and that for me to say 'there is a God' seems to me as impertinent as to say 'there is no God' and to give an air of finality to the statement.

"I cannot visualise or understand the conception of a personal God, some omnipotent, omniscient, all-loving power which created the universe and set it going . . ."

"I am quite satisfied when such a man as Bertrand Russell declares: '...I'm not contending in a dogmatic way there is no God; what I'm contending is that we don't know there is . . .'

"I have to put my agnosticism in the framework of the vast universe, seen and not yet seen, and while I admit that the trend of my thinking is towards complete unbelief, I don't yet know enough to enable me to make a final, dogmatic statement. I cannot but marvel at the theist who says with superb self-confidence 'I know there is a God'. I wonder too, but with greater understanding, at the declaration of the atheist 'I know there is no God'. I understand the atheist's viewpoint because I realise that, along with him, I too have rebelled against the too facile view that there must be a first cause, a designer and planner of it all.

"... I am in no way concerned about, or interested in, childish conceptions of God, but, if it is believed by some that there is an initial process by which stars came into being, it is then that I have to say 'I don't know', but to posit a personal God, an anthropomorphic being or power, some Supreme Intelligence, some Divine Creator or Planner, then, with reference to such an idea of God, I am as atheistic as the veriest atheist."

Rev. Victor James (Melbourne, Australia).

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ANNOUNCEMENTS

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, Kelmescott, 4 Portland Street, Clifton, Sunday, May 26, 7.30 p.m.: Dr R. V. SAMPSON, "My View of Humanism".

Lincolnshire Humanist Group, Eastgate Hotel, Lincoln, Thursday, May 30, 7.30 p.m.: Annual General Meeting.

Redbridge Humanist Society, Wanstead House, Corner of The Green and Redbridge Lane West, Wanstead, Monday, May 27, 7.45 p.m.: R. W. HALL (Chief Welfare Officer), or deputy, "Welfare in Redbridge".

South Place Ethical Society, Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London, WC1, Sunday, May 26, 11 a.m.: AMPHLETT MICKLEWRIGHT, "Secularism?"

The Trade Union, Labour, Co-operative Democratic History Society. Exhibition "The People's History", Central Library, Bancroft Road, London, E1. Open daily 9 a.m.—8 p.m., May 13—26 inclusive.

Worthing Humanist Group, Morelands Hotel, opposite pier, Worthing, Sunday, May 26, 5.30 p.m.: Tea Party and Annual General Meeting.

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By DAVID TRIBE

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THE PHYSICAL THEORY OF MIND

Douglas Bramwell

ACCORDING to this theory, mental states are identical with certain states of the brain, or of the body as a whole. The seeing of colour, for instance, is identical with a body state; so is the hearing of a sound, and so is the feeling of pain, anger or pity.

The most recent, and perhaps the most adequate, version of theory is that of Professor D. M. Armstrong; his views are outlined in an article entitled *THE NATURE OF MIND* in the first issue of the RPA's *Question*.

In his article, Armstrong reaches the position that a mental state is "a state of the person apt for producing certain ranges of behaviour". In other words, a mental state is a person's body in a certain condition, and each such mental state, or bodily condition, is apt for causing a certain pattern of behaviour on the part of the person.

To explain consciousness, Armstrong adds a second tier to his theory. Consciousness is the perception of our own mental states and, like those mental states, is itself interpreted as a bodily condition apt for causing a range of behaviour.

Armstrong is led to his special treatment of consciousness by the fact of our awareness of our sensations, feelings and mental states generally. Yet, by interpreting consciousness, like other mental states, in terms of bodily states, he seems effectively to shut out the very awareness that led him to the second tier of his theory.

It is a serious criticism of any purely physical theory of mind that it cannot account for private subjective awareness.

In discussing such theories, Professor Ayer says*:

"Certainly, in one's own case, it seems necessary to distinguish the sensations, or images, or feelings that one has from the physical states or actions by which they are manifested. However intimate the relation may be between an 'inner' experience and its 'outward' expression, it is not necessary that the one should accompany the other. I can behave as if I had thoughts, or sensations, or feelings that I in fact do not have; and I can have thoughts or feelings that I keep entirely to myself. No doubt I could always express them if I chose; perhaps I am always disposed to express them; but this is not to say that my having them consists in nothing more than my being disposed to perform certain actions, or utter certain words."

It is often thought that the admission of such an inadequacy as this in the physical theory of mind implies a similar inadequacy in materialism as a general philosophy. But this would only be the case if, to explain mental states, it was necessary to admit the existence of 'mind' as an entity or substance different from, and independent, of matter. Such an admission does not follow.

Mental and physical states can be thought of as two distinct aspects—an 'inner' and 'outer' aspect, respectively—of a single substance. In such a double-aspect theory, the two aspects can be totally interrelated so that every state of one aspect has a companion state in the other. In this way, materialism can be retained but made more complex to give it greater explanatory power.

* *The Problem of Knowledge*, A. J. Ayer, Penguin Books, 1956.

RELIGION VERSUS SECULAR MORALITY

Peter Crommelin

ONE of the achievements of the secular movement in which we are involved, has been the emancipation of moral or ethical philosophy from the control of dogmatic theology. Secular humanism has not destroyed the Catholic Church, but it certainly has forced the Church to re-examine its own ethical foundations. As a result of this cerebral exercise, a number of clergymen have abandoned their profession, the number of candidates for ordination has considerably diminished, while the Church itself seems to have grown more liberal in its outlook.

But secular morality can and now does operate quite independently of religious dogma, while the preachers of religious dogma rely more and more on a purely fictitious contribution to secular morality. Bishops and priests preach long-winded sermons deploring the moral decline of the nation or the world, but their real fear is that the moral energy that lies concealed behind science, technology—even that of the atom bomb—is bound to render their own jobs increasingly redundant.

The clergy have a professional interest in promoting the fiction that people become better citizens by going to church. This fiction is maintained in complete defiance to the known facts. The virtues of individuals cannot be related to the practice or non-practice of religious observances. Some most unpleasant characters are good churchgoers.

The first principle of secular morality is that there is no objective moral obligation for anyone to believe in Almighty God. And since there is no moral obligation to believe in God, there can be no moral justification for the religious indoctrination of children either by parents or by teachers. Secular moralists would be doing far less than their duty if they fail to do all that is humanly possible to prevent religious indoctrination from forming any part of any human education. It is true that religious indoctrination may not inflict any lasting damage on a child. On the other hand it *may* do so. It is a danger that can and should be avoided in the education of children. The evil of religious instruction is in the presentation as fact of what is in fact only fiction. There is no harm in telling a story. There can be great harm in telling a lie. Parents have no parental rights to tell lies to their children, though there may be nothing wicked in telling them a good fairy tale. It is one of the basic foundations of secular morality that a good morality cannot evolve from an act of intellectual dishonesty. Intellectual dishonesty is one of the basic foundations of all religious belief, when individuals are required to say "I believe" to dogmas that are totally incredible.

By far the most important part of any human education is to acquire the ability to separate fact from fiction, truth from falsehood, and most of all in the field of moral values. It is precisely in this field that religiously indoctrinated parents and teachers are least qualified intellectually or morally to function as the educators of youth. In the matter of education, religious teachers have only one duty left to them, and that is to retire gracefully from the field before they are dismissed by the growing anger of rational secular criticism at the intrusion of religion into secular education.

By all means let children be taught that it is bad to tell lies, bad to steal, bad to kill, bad to have no respect for the life of nature. But there is absolutely no justification for presenting these basic necessities of secular morality, as

the "Commandments" of a *God*, the existence of Which or of Whom, remains eternally unverifiable. It is equally untrue or false to teach that Jesus Christ invented or discovered the rules of a good life as this must be lived by citizens of a secular state some twenty centuries after Jesus Christ is alleged to have lived.

The final extinction of all the religions of mankind may still belong to the far distant and unpredictable future. Atheists are practising wishful thinking when they regard the termination of religion as something that might be "just round the corner". It does seem politically possible, however, that within the present century, religious indoctrination might be totally excluded from secular education. The thing has been done in many countries to their own great advantage, both material and human. There is no real reason why the thing should not be done here in England, even within the framework of our own parliamentary democracy.

Here is a matter on which all atheists and humanists are in complete agreement. Religion should be excluded by law from all schools financed by the State. It is an evil thing that is being done to children, when their inexperienced minds are subjected to an indoctrination that closes the mind to the rich variety of moral philosophies that have throughout the ages provided better nourishment than religion for the growth and development of human understanding. The teaching of religion in schools is, I believe, the main cause of that mental obstruction that prevents from coming to full maturity in adult human beings, a philosophic judgement of real moral values.

Moral education is obviously a matter of vital importance to the future of mankind. It is equally obvious that moral education should begin in school. What is not so obvious but is none the less true is that moral education *cannot* properly begin in school until religion has been expelled.

Our task is not to deplore a decline in the moral quality of human nature. There has been no such decline. The task before secular humanism is to find full employment for the enormous amount of moral energy that is available for any task that is morally worth attempting. There can be no moral objection to any revolution in which the revolutionaries are morally superior to the authorities against which they are rebelling. Any other revolution is bound to fail in its ultimate objective. The ultimate objective for any revolution must be, not to make people better, but to make the world a better place for people. People cannot promote freedom unless they are free. Where religion operates effectively there is no freedom. Only goodness is good.

RI AND SURVEYS

Opinion Polls on Religious Education in State Schools

By MAURICE HILL

Price 1/- (plus 4d postage)

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LESLIE STEPHEN'S AGNOSTICISM

Eric Glasgow

PERHAPS it has become fashionable nowadays to decry as arid intellectualism much of the thought and the ideas, of those English Victorian thinkers who really began the modern movement for the rational re-examination of the traditional religious beliefs. At any rate, I do find that many people at present are liable to set aside, almost as old-fashioned, the results of the first trenchant applications of reason to religion, as one may find them in the ideas of T. H. Huxley, Harriet Martineau, George Eliot, or John Morley, amongst others. We may even dismiss, as a dated relic of Victorian liberalism at its best, the fine clarity and the dignified, well-modulated precision, of Bertrand Russell's writings, for all their remarkable content of moral and spiritual perceptions; yet there can be no better instrument for exposing the perversities and the stupidities of our current civilisation than the workings of Russell's acute and incisive intellect which is valuable, like Shaw's, even when, or perhaps because, it becomes so unreasonably reasonable, so utterly ruthless in its rejection of the masks and the evasions which, for most of us most of the time, do obscure truth and reality.

Another of the thinkers rooted in the habits of a past age, for whom I have always had a deep admiration, is Leslie Stephen (1832-1904). To me, he still appears to be a giant, alike in the intellectual and moral senses. He was fortunate, of course, in that he seems to have known all the right people of his time, such as F. D. Maurice, Henry Fawcett, Carlyle, Foude, and John Morley. But his consummate qualities of mind would have ensured him recognition in any surroundings, and he still stands, as in some sense, the enduring representation of all that was best in the intellectual and moral achievement of Victorian England.

For instance, we may well admire him as an athlete—for, like so many of the best of the Victorians, when he was young, he was an incorrigible walker, and a pioneer of adventure in the Swiss Alps, where he came to know well Monte Rosa, the Bernese Oberland, the Eiger Joch, Mont Blanc, and the Jungfrau. He was deeply appreciative of the engaging, overwhelming beauty of the Swiss Alps, and it is probable that it was his initial reaction to the abiding inspiration of the mountains that first induced him to become an author. Certainly it was he who, in the year 1871, first gave the Swiss Alps their common appellation, as "The Playground of Europe".

On the other hand, Stephens' sensitivity to the beauty of the natural world, at any rate in its scenic and topographical meanings, did not blind him intellectually, and his life, as a Fellow of Trinity Hall, Cambridge, did not obstruct the progress of his thought, which became increasingly sceptical of the historical evidences for Christianity, especially after the summer of 1862. He never lost his faith, he said: merely he discovered that he had never had any. He formally gave up his Holy Orders, on March 25, 1875.

Thereafter, Leslie Stephen became a staunch supporter of reform and advanced ideas, alike in University, national and international affairs. Thus, he supported negro emancipation, during the American Civil War (1861-1865), and, after having left Cambridge for the wider literary fields of London, at the end of 1864, he plunged thoroughly into a spate of literary work, writing for the *Saturday Review* and *Pall Mall Gazette*, and the *Cornhill Magazine*, as well as for the American publication, the *Nation*, from

October, 1866 to August, 1873. Most of his work possessed the deeply literary tinge which was so very characteristic of all the great Victorian intellectuals, and much of it, such as *Hours in a Library* (1874-1879), is still very rewarding to read, even today.

Leslie Stephen's religious and philosophical ideas, as they became crystallised and defined since 1862, he presented especially in *Fraser's Magazine* and the *Fortnightly Review* which were then edited, respectively, by J. A. Froude and John Morley. Stephen took and demanded a thoroughly clear and uncompromising attitude, towards the religious and moral problems of his time, and his first collection of religious writings, published in 1873, was entitled *Essays on Free Thinking and Plain Speaking*. This book, in itself, set Leslie Stephen aside as a leader of agnostic thinking, and as a vigorous critic of much that passed for the Christianity of his day. If we read these writings now, most striking is, I think, their absorbing concern for honesty and sincerity in personal beliefs, and their steadfast refusal to accept any conventional beliefs because they seemed to be socially necessary, or socially useful, as a cement for some established social order. Yet as with so many other writers of his trend of thought, it is also impossible to read Leslie Stephen's ideas without being convinced of the deep spirituality of his nature, his sensitivity towards ideas and atmosphere, and his real concern for all the moral questions, which were involved. That is a feature, of course, of all the great Victorian sceptics: perhaps, indeed, the more they rejected traditional Christian theology, the more, too, they emphasised the need for sound standards of morality, and the more they valued integrity of outlook and purpose. In fact, it is not unfair to say that, often, they became obsessed by the demands of morality, and were too serious and austere in their unmitigated pursuit of truth.

So, at any rate, it could be with Leslie Stephen, whose interest in free thinking expressed itself in his massive *History of English Thought in the Eighteenth Century* (1876, 2 Volumes), as well as in his shorter, better known, and more personal book, *An Agnostic Apology* (1876), which originally appeared in the *Fortnightly Review*. It was Leslie Stephen, in fact, who first put into popular circulation the use of the term "agnostic", as a truer and more precise description of a cautious but not a dogmatic religious outlook than could be implied by the harsher and more excluding word "atheist", which had been current in the eighteenth century. T. H. Huxley had first coined the word "agnostic" in 1870, but it scarcely caught on to the hat-rack of public acceptance and understanding, until this less rarefied and demanding essay by Leslie Stephen which, despite its age, is still one of the minor classics of the literature of English free thinking. In 1876, even those who rejected his conclusions could still admire Leslie Stephen's superb mastery of the English language, no less than his shining, evocative sincerity of purpose and outlook. Reared and nurtured on the classics of Latin and Greek, the Victorian thinkers could not be common or undignified, insensitive or reckless, even as they denied, in what then usually demanded some gesture of courage, the beliefs of convention and a bourgeois respectability. They still remained, in some real sense, gentlemen, who wrote chiefly in order to be read by gentlemen, in a London club, or in the bright detachment of some sunlit country-house, in Hertfordshire, Gloucestershire, Norfolk, or

Northumberland. Such, indeed, was both the strength and the weakness of their usual intellectual attitudes, and their appeal; they were predominantly intellectuals, who ignored the needs and the outlooks of more mundane persons, and the vast economic problems which really determined how society was to tick.

Leslie Stephen, for instance, as was due to his high qualities of mind and character, was never excluded from the best society, in London or even in New York, for all his avowed "agnosticism". Even in his later years, with the placid detachment of Cambridge behind him, he knew Emerson, George Meredith, Charles Darwin, and James Russell Lowell. It was he, too, who, in conjunction with the great publisher, George Smith, initiated the huge project (1882) of the *Dictionary of National Biography*, for which Leslie Stephen wrote a total of 378 articles, up to the end of the first supplement of 1901. Apart from that monumental work—"the best record of a nation's past that any civilisation has produced" (G. M. Trevelyan's *English Social History*, page 568)—Leslie Stephen also produced a copious stream of other literary work, including studies of Pope, Swift, George Eliot, and Hobbes; he was the first Clark Lecturer at Cambridge, in 1883, and in 1900 was published his large work on *The English Utilitarians*, the second of those essentially Victorian tomes, for which Leslie Stephen still demands our appreciative remembrance.

Today, he has already been dead for more than sixty years. He represents attitudes of mind and thought which must, necessarily, now be regarded as being largely out of date, and perhaps even rather irrelevant: certainly, his concern was little with any social or economic problems,

Pope's Letter on Invasion of Ireland

THIS interesting excerpt is from *Henry II* by John P. Appleby:

"... Pope Alexander wrote letters to Henry, to the bishops, and to 'the Kings and princes of Ireland' confirming Henry's title to the island and ordering the Irish, about whom he had been receiving some shocking reports, to obey the king with all due submission. To the bishops he wrote:

"It is known to us from your letters and it has come to the notice of the Apostolic See from the trustworthy accounts of others with what enormities of vices the Irish people are infected and how since they have neglected the fear of God and the religion of the Christian faith those things have followed that bring peril to their souls.

We understand from your letters that our dearest son in Christ, Henry, the illustrious King of the English, moved by the divine inspiration and bringing together his forces, has subjected to his rule those barbarous and uncivilised people, ignorant of the Divine Law, and that they have begun to desist from those things that were being done unlawfully in your land.

Wherefore we are filled with joy and give hearty thanks to Him Who conferred such a victory and triumph upon the aforesaid King, with your careful help, those undisciplined and wild people may learn the service of the Divine Law and the religion of the Christian faith, through all things, and that you and the other men of the Church may enjoy due honour and tranquility."

—W. Moffat

which were not of an austere intellectual nature; and even his decline from the exultant revelations of Christianity was merely an intellectual one, without any accompanying criticism or erosion of most of the accepted moral standpoints.

So, Leslie Stephen can offer us little guidance, in detail, for the many different and daunting social questions, of 1968. On the other hand, he can offer us, as I think, some abiding inspiration, by virtue of his supreme gifts of intellectual clarity, complete and utter sincerity, and real moral earnestness: even his aloof, Victorian bookishness is not without some significant relevance, for a society like ours, which has surely become too much dominated by the easy visual appeal of television, and the inflammatory half-truths of newspaper headlines and advertisements. For my own part, at any rate, I still think, even amidst these heralding storms of 1968, that any evening which is spent in the congenial company of any of the many available writings of Leslie Stephen, is bound to be recreative and stimulating, and probably also fruitful with some clarifying insights for the solution of some of the more pressing public problems of the present. Although about a century has now gone since much of his work was first published, this continuing value and appeal which his books and essays undoubtedly have, cannot be regarded as any small or negligible tribute to the mind, the attainments, and the lucid transparent sincerity of Leslie Stephen. He still helps to fortify that old belief, which must be rather a bogey for progressive thinkers, that our present generations cannot for some mysterious reasons, ever measure up to the stature of the giants of the past.

Translators Needed

EACH month the FREETHINKER receives from the Continent a number of freethought journals in French, German, Russian and other languages. We would like to find members of the movement willing to undertake to read a number of these journals and to translate for this office any news items or quotes that may be useful for this paper.

Accuracy would be essential, and a typed translation would be most desirable. The writing involved for any individual is not expected to much exceed one or two sheets of foolscap each month. Please get in touch with the Editor if you wish to help in this way.

FREETHINKER FUND

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ENSORSHIP IN DENMARK

Jean Straker

I HAVE now received from the Royal Danish Embassy detailed information concerning the liberalisation of the censorship laws in Denmark. This information will explain the position which was illustrated in the Richard Dimbleby programme on Censorship in a recent broadcast of the BBC programme *Panorama*.

In supplying the information, Thomas Rechnagel, First Secretary of the Embassy, wants to underline the fact, that except for films, for a great many years there has been no censorship in Denmark: consequently the new rules deal solely with criminal responsibility for publications, pictures, etc., already published. Also, the relevant rules relating to seditious material and official secrets remain unchanged.

In December 1964 the Danish Minister of Justice asked the Permanent Criminal Law Committee to consider the need of a change in the Criminal Code Section 234 on pornography. The Committee submitted its report in June 1966, and the report was published under the title: *Straffelovsradets betænkning om straf for pornografi (Betænkning No. 435, 1966)*. Three members of the Committee recommended that the criminal offence of producing, publishing or circulating obscene books, magazines, etc., should be removed from the Criminal Code, whereas one member was in favour of retaining a criminal law prohibition in this field. All four members agreed that it was not advisable to give obscene pictures entire freedom.

The Criminal Law Committee found the question a difficult one to solve, and the report gives rather a detailed statement of the arguments. There were perhaps two main arguments for the change which was proposed.

First, it was a fact that under court practice since the 1950s the previous law had already been interpreted so liberally that very few books (and no books of any literary merit) were found punishable. Thus, by maintaining the prohibition against obscene literature it would in any case be impossible to reach more than a very limited part of the total production of 'dirty' books. For prosecutors and judges the task of defining the limits of the law in individual cases was an almost hopeless one. No one had ever succeeded in stating a general definition of pornography on the basis of which the law might be interpreted.

MR LOWRY IN A MUDDLE

A few comments on Mr Lowry's latest "reply"

This article closes the Reverend Strother's contributions to the debate (in article form). Mr A. J. Lowry's next contribution will close the debate.

HAD A. J. Lowry (April 26) been more interested in discussing evolution or creation seriously than in scoring debating points, he would have changed fewer opinions and speculations into facts and have made less mistakes than he did.

He charges me with being in error over the date and number of volumes of Sir Arthur Keith's work *The Antiquity of Man*. The mistake, however, is his. The edition I quoted was published in two volumes by Lippincott in 1925. Little wonder he is all at sea for, despite the fact that I stressed the volume in question, he gets hold

Secondly, practically all the evidence brought forward by psychiatrists, psychologists, sociologists, etc., was to the effect that there was no reason to assume more than a remote risk of harmful effects—even on young persons—from the reading of descriptions of sexual activity, even in its more extreme forms. On the other hand it was admitted by the experts that there was relatively scarce evidence that harmful effects could *not* occur. Apparently the actual situation is that very little systematic research has been carried out, so that conclusions have to be based on the more general clinical experience of psychiatrists and psychologists. On that basis the experts expressed the negative conclusion mentioned. In the course of later public and political discussions people in favour of a statutory prohibition had no possibility of referring to expert opinions.

It was the declared standpoint of the Committee, that the previous rule ought not to be maintained merely on the basis of a moral evaluation of the books in question. The justification of the rule ought as far as possible to be found in considerations of practical usefulness, particularly the question of preventing a risk of harm being done to individuals.

The question of making a distinction between books and pictures caused much discussion. However, the Committee found it advisable to make this distinction, partly because pictures—which had increasingly been distributed in very offensive forms—may have a tendency to produce more direct psychological effects, as compared with books, where the reader will normally have good opportunities to stop reading when he finds that he does not like the book.

As the rules have not entered into force, it is, of course, impossible to say anything definite about the effects of the new rules. Nothing indicates, however, that the considerations of the Permanent Criminal Law Committee have been wrong. On the other hand, there are indications—no statistical evidence being available—that the change in the law has contributed to a decrease in the so-called "porno-wave" before and until 1967, chiefly because the publishing houses have lost the advertising service provided by the machinery of justice.

The Rev. Christopher Strother

of the wrong edition and then condemns me for his mistake. I suggest that before rushing into print, and asserting that the work in question was not published in two volumes, he should have checked.

Mr Lowry asserts that "sub-species variation is always the initial step in evolution by species-differentiation". This, of course, is one of the unproven hypotheses evolutionists make. To establish his case, Mr Lowry must first establish that one of the insects in question is the parent strain. In his original article he opted for the light coloured insect as being the original strain but changed his position when I pointed out that all observational records show both light and dark strains to have coexisted as far back as we can establish. Now he slyly returns to his original idea in the hope, no doubt, that his original thoughts on the matter

will have been forgotten. Unless he can establish his premise, then the only point he can make is one of variation within the species.

F. H. T. Rhodes may be of the opinion that no one knows if the *Seymouria* was a reptile or amphibian. On the other hand two of the world's leading vertebrate palaeontologists think otherwise: A. S. Romer places the *Seymouria* among the amphibians (*Vertebrate Palaeontology*, 2nd. Ed., p. 150) while Britain's leading worker on dinosaurs, W. E. Swinton, also opts for them being amphibians (*Fossil Amphibians and Reptiles*, 4th Ed., p. 27). Both these workers and Professor Rhodes, incidentally, hold that *Seymouria* is not a transitional form (Rhodes' view is presented in a paper published last year in the *Proceedings of the Geologists' Association*).

The article cited by Mr Lowry from *Britannica* does not conceal the difficulties associated with *Archaeopteryx*, and opinions as to just what type of beast the creature was differ; some authorities say it was a bird—see G. Heilmann: *The Origin of Birds*—while others maintain it to have been a reptile—see P. R. Lowe: *The Characters of Archaeopteryx and Archaeornis: Ibis*, 13 series, No. 4, Vol. 86, 1944. The only factor that could decide the point is the soft morphology (I omitted the word 'soft' in my earlier reply through rather hasty typing) and this has not been preserved. On the basis of the present limited evi-

dence (four incomplete fossils) *Archaeopteryx* could as well be a bird becoming a reptile as a reptile being transformed into bird; however, this would never fit in with the evolutionary pipe-dream and so quite arbitrarily it is presented as (by some) a reptile on the way towards 'bird status'.

As to Mr Lowry's claim that the Phylum Chordata appeared at the earliest in the Ordovician and not, as I claim in the Middle Cambrian, then all I can hope is that he will present his evidence. My claim is made on the basis of the latest published material—see Holland, C. H., *et al.* 1967, Chordata, etc. in Harland, W. B. *et al.* (Eds.) *The Fossil Record*, London (Geological Society), p. 601. I do not doubt that, like me, the contributors to this symposium will be extremely interested in Lowry's questioning of the Stratigraphical position of the strata (from which the fossils came) in the geological sequence.

Whatever one makes of the discovery of Dr Leaky, or any other anthropologist for that matter, the evidence bearing on the antiquity of man has first to be fully sorted out, and while there remain fossils that indicate the existence of a fully developed man at the root of the postulated tree of evolution, rather than coming long after the date advanced for creatures such as Leaky has turned up—evidence which is quietly ignored or deliberately hidden—then the case for creation rather than evolution must be fully taken into consideration.

MARGINS OF LIFE

A. J. Lowry

IN previous centuries, men of science have tended to classify all objects as either 'living' or 'inert', imagining there to exist between the two a gap of apparently vast and unbridgeable dimensions. Today it is probably true to say that the majority of laymen still think in such terms as these, which, whilst no doubt convenient for everyday classification, have nevertheless become irrelevant to the more recent advances in biochemical research.

On theoretical grounds alone, a breakdown of the barrier between animate and inanimate substances was becoming increasingly important. The expulsion of the God-hypothesis from science, following the publication of Darwin's works, meant that nature was, so to speak, driven back upon its own resources. If life was not the result of the miraculous intervention of the Almighty, then it must have arisen in a purely naturalistic manner, as a response to the conditions existing at the time of its emergence; and if only these conditions could be correctly deduced, the hypothesis of life's natural development could be tested in the laboratory. If, by simulating the primeval climate, organisms of high complexity could be spontaneously produced, this would lend enormous support to the naturalistic explanation of life, whilst it would be doubtful to see how this view could any longer be maintained if no chemical reactions occurred which could be interpreted as a step in the direction of life.

To say that it was hoped to produce life from inert matter is something of an over-simplification. Proteins, amino-acids, DNA molecules and the like, cannot easily fit into either category, and instead produce a spectrum of complexity from the obviously inert (such as iron, carbon, oxygen, etc.), to the obviously living (such as amoebas). It was therefore hoped instead to discover the method whereby, aeons ago, significant movements along this spectrum had been accomplished by purely natural means.

To discover the composition of the earth's atmosphere at the time it is believed these changes took place, is no easy task by anybody's reckoning. Neither, for that matter, is it a simple job to calculate the atmospheric density, or the level of activity of the sun, which would determine (among other things), the amount of solar radiation to which the simple compounds of 'the primordial soup' would have been exposed. Because of experimental difficulties such as these, therefore, such research as has been done in this field should correspondingly be viewed in a particularly favourable light, as slight mistakes in deducing the pre-Cambrian conditions may easily have seriously hindered the progress of such experiments as have been conducted.

Of considerable importance in this field has been the work of Bahadur, Ranghayaki and Perti (later confirmed by Briggs). Nine solutions of simple compounds were each poured into fourteen flasks, of which two were kept in darkness, whilst the remaining twelve were continuously exposed to the illumination of a 500-watt bulb for a period of four months. At the end of this time the flasks were examined. No significant change was observed in the composition of the solutions in the flasks denied light, but the remainder were observed to contain a wide variety of highly complex molecular substances and microstructures. These bodies, ranging in size from 0.5 to 15 microns (1,000 microns = 1 mm.), were found to include such elaborate structures as urea, phenylacetic acid and glucose. Of even greater import, perhaps, was the identification of synthetically-produced adenine and guanine, two structures which, together with thymine and cytosine, are of paramount importance in the formation of DNA molecules and the operation of the genetic mechanism. Many of the microstructures so formed were found in association with reactions which can only be explained as the work of

enzymes, whilst it has also been suggested that many of them possessed the capabilities to continually reproduce themselves by a process of budding.

Whether or not we conclude from this that scientists have produced life, depends largely upon the arbitrary definition of that term. Certainly, experiments such as the one outlined above have been of enormous importance in demonstrating the continuity between simple and more complex molecular structures and will doubtless be the precursors of further research into the manner in which life as we know it has arisen and developed from the more complicated substances found in inert matter. It is as yet early days, but already the gap between the living and the non-living is being filled by a host of findings, all of which appear to point very strongly indeed in the direction of life being different in degree only, and not in kind, from the structures and reactions commonly associated with substances considered as inert.

Letters to the Editor

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

Blasphemy abolished as a crime

The Times of May 6 contained the following statement in its report on the proceedings of the annual meeting of the National Council for Civil Liberties:

"The meeting passed an emergency resolution deploring prosecutions brought by the state or private individuals "with the intention of curbing freedom of artistic expression which is essentially a matter of taste". It urged the Government to introduce legislation "abolishing the offences of indecency, obscenity and blasphemy in media of arts and communication".

As the original proposal in regard to indecency and obscenity was submitted by me on behalf of Freedom of Vision, Cosmo and the Student Humanist Federation, I shall be glad if you will allow me to inform your readers who may be confused by the amended version that this was proposed and passed on the Sunday when I was in Oxford at the Gynaecography Seminar. Otherwise I would have been able to point out that blasphemy—as many readers know—was abolished as an offence under Part II, section 13 (1) (b) of the Criminal Law Act, 1967.

JEAN STRAKER.

Atheism, secularism and freethought—synonymous

I AM flattered to find that my letter has inspired you or provoked you to comment at equal length (May 3), but I stress that to me atheism (secularism and freethought are synonymous. In saying this I may be revealing my age (nearly 77), and exhibiting some inconsistency, for I am irritated when I read or hear the word 'humanism' used in place of 'atheism'.

In other fields words are similarly appropriated to meet a restricted definition. Take, for instance, 'granite'. It is now a solecism to use it for any except a formation of igneous origin and Charlotte Bronte has been criticised for referring to millstone grit (a sedimentary rock) as granite although by derivation it could be applied to any granular stratum.

I think of myself as an atheist and yet in circumstances where it seems desirable to declare my position I find it gives a better idea of me to say that I have no religion. I do not want to be dynamic or militant. I simply do not accept the hypothesis that there is a supreme, omniscient, omnipresent entity and when asked what I put in place of religion I reply "nothing". What would one put in place of the Loch Ness Monster?

CONSTANCE N. AIREY.

Censorship needed?

WHEN I read your new editorial policy set out in the issue of February 16, I was delighted to think I should no longer need to select the bits which were worth reading; no longer would I be glad that some of my non-secularist friends saw the journal.

Recently however a few paragraphs have appeared which do not fulfil the promise of your own Paragraph 3: "Matter which is . . . of poor quality or irrelevant . . . is rejected"; further, "copy which contains . . . detected error of falsity, gross abuse, racialism . . . has to be rejected". The latest example, A. Blood's letter (April 26), qualifies for rejection on several of these points.

Were I to write that the Irish were renegade Scots who were not Irish at all but Celts and included Scots, would not this be below the standard of scholarship required for our journal? If I suggested that the Irish deserved their past misfortunes due to their diabolical religion which preaches race hatred and practices torture of animals, would you publish this also?

Only a freethinker who cared nothing for the image of the movement would care to have the issue of April 26 left lying around.

GERALD SAMUEL.

Man and Community

R. STUART MONTAGUE'S article MAN AND COMMUNITY (April 10) has all the usual weaknesses contained in Marxist thinking which sees the social mode of production as the key point in determining human activity from time to time in history.

(1) "In emancipating himself in the sphere [of mode of production] he also emancipates himself in the reflected mental sphere in his religious consciousness". I wonder how many modern freethinkers now accept this quite unrealistic statement! The function of a religion is to bring the mind of the individual thinker to terms with the whole of reality as he sees it, and since the "mode of production" is only a part, though an important part of his environment, it naturally has an effect. However the chief element in religion is the totality of experience and no doubt this is why the government of Russia is failing to "stamp out religion"—they have mistaken its nature!

(2) It isn't because "the Russian workers do not understand the economic laws of the society in which they live . . ." that they are willing to "fight and die in their millions in war with their fellow-workers in any part of the world . . ." This is because they have been educated to be Russians first, just as Yanks are taught to be Yanks first, etc., etc.

Mr Montague should re-read my HUMAN SOCIETY AND SECTIONALISMS (May 3).

E. G. MACFARLANE.

The Confusions of the Soul

WITH reference to A. J. Lowry's THE CONFUSIONS OF THE SOUL (May 10), the following extract from *Science and the Soul* by W. Mann is, I believe, relevant to it.

"The brain depends for its working upon the blood supply. If the blood circulates too rapidly, as in the case of drunkenness or fever, the ideas become confused. If a drop of water passes into the cranium, loss of memory follows. If the brain is flooded by the bursting of a blood-vessel, we have an apoplectic fit. Dr Buchner asks: 'If the mind, as spiritualists contend, be a thing independent or self-existing, and controlling or utilising matter, why is it so little able to defend itself against or repel these attacks? Why does it yield or succumb to a blow on the head, the commingling of a few drops of blood with the substance of the brain, a sunstroke, a few inhalations of chloroform, a few glasses of wine, or a few drops of opium, prussic acid, or other poison?'"

Intelligence (soul) does not come from or go to. It grows with and of.

S. C. MERRYFIELD.

OBITUARY

WITH deepest regret we have to announce the recent death of Harold Capernhurst of Leicester, who will be particularly missed by his friends at Leicester Secular Society. His death followed a long and painful illness which he endured courageously. Our sympathy is extended to May Capernhurst, his wife, and to other members of his family. A secular ceremony was conducted by Mr G. A. Kirk at Gilroes Crematorium, Leicester.