

The Humanist World WeeklyRegistered at the
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FOUNDED 1881 by G. W. FOOTE

Friday,
June 21, 1968**LAMP LEAFLETS: A ROMAN CATHOLIC CAMPAIGN**

THE Lamp Society is a Catholic propagandist body which supports a Travelling Mission in Wales, and otherwise strives to maintain and extend Catholic views. The headquarters are at 125 Heath Road, Bebington, Cheshire. One reason for our attention is that they have recently consecrated four leaflets to the inoculation of the public against Humanist infection. Humanism was also the main subject of their Annual Report for 1967. They are very worried, not least by the success of abortion law reform, and the noise and dust on the schools' front. The leaflets are paid for and distributed by members of the Lamp Society: "The person who brought this leaflet to your house is one of hundreds of Lamp Society members—all Catholics—who have adopted a number of homes, who distribute the leaflets to them month by month, and who pray regularly for the people in those homes . . ."

Humanist views are misrepresented in these leaflets, but on the basis of humanist literature and correspondence with humanists. Our professed aims (welfare and happiness of our fellow men) are said to be in contradiction to our practical objectives (easier abortion, divorce, homosexual relations, euthanasia; extirpation of Christian faith and morality, first from the schools; adoption of children to bring them up as atheists) which amount to the nazification of 'our country'. The end? "There will be relentless encroachment on our personal freedom; the number of children will be limited under threat of sterilisation, and we shall become mere pawns, allowed to live, or condemned to die, at the will of a completely materialistic State". In this context it is also stated that Christians are "subjected to all kinds of misrepresentation" at the hands of Humanists.

Readers of the leaflets are urged to counter these horrors by refuting humanist opinions in the local press, and above all by making sure that nobody holding these opinions is elected to Parliament.

Any freethinker into whose hands these leaflets fall—or on to whose doormat they drop—is likely to find them amusing but pathetic. Perhaps, however, we should try to take them more seriously. On their side, the writer of the first leaflet reminds his readers that after all, "in spite of their mistaken ideas Humanists are our neighbours". The conclusion they draw from this is that they should pray for us. If we too recognise them as neighbours, what should we do about it?

I think the right line is to try to assure them that atheists do have well-grounded principles that safeguard the human values Catholics profess to care for. In one leaflet this key statement is made: "Once the principle of the sanctity of human life is abandoned the end of civilisation is in sight". Catholics think of this principle as absolute, and that

contraception, still more abortion and euthanasia, could be entertained only by people to whom the principle means nothing. Theirs is a superstitious adherence to principle, and they cannot believe that anybody who applies his principles with discrimination has any. In arguments in the local papers or in public debate or private discussion, it is worth trying to bring home to the Catholic that God-given absolutes are not the only basis for a good society or the good life, and indeed unless principles are applied with discrimination they are likely to cause unnecessary suffering. I don't think much is to be gained by knocking their theological beliefs, but if we insist in season and out that we are concerned to minimise human suffering in the light of practical experience, they may be induced to think about it. Outside opinion is not without influence upon Catholics, in spite of their dogmatic hide. Moreover, they need to be reminded again and again that the permissive changes in morals which legal reforms allow are for the sake of those who are hurt by traditional restrictions, and are not binding on anybody. They don't touch the Roman Catholic conscience. Which makes their objections exclusive and selfish. They may, if they must, pray for their misguided neighbours. They should not be allowed to think that they can legislate for them, nor that because they are virtuous there shall be no more cakes and ale.

H. J. BLACKHAM.

NSS PRESS RELEASE

THE National Secular Society calls for the fullest Government investigation into the circumstances in which Dr Mary Rayner was dismissed from her post as medical officer to a special school in Birmingham. If, as has been suggested, the action resulted from her recommendation that mentally defective teenage girls be fitted with a contraceptive appliance, we trust that she will be immediately reinstated.

Instead of being penalised Dr Rayner should be applauded for her courage and commonsense. What she suggests shouldn't be regarded as a furtive and dangerous recommendation but should be standard practice at all institutions of this sort throughout the country. It is nonsense to suggest that such a procedure—even if known to the girls involved—would provoke activities they wouldn't otherwise indulge in. The evidence is that neither religious precepts nor rational arguments will preserve the virginity of all girls of full mental faculties. Mentally retarded girls are particularly at risk, more likely to consent to intercourse, less likely to take precautions against unwanted pregnancy. It is the duty of society to protect them in the only way consistent with any measure of freedom.

DAVID TRIBE, *President*.

FREETHINKER

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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

Portsmouth Humanist Society, Portsmouth College of Education, Locksway Road, Milton, Portsmouth, Friday, June 21, 8 p.m.: RAY BOTT and PETER MITCHELL, "Should there be religious education in state schools?"

South Place Ethical Society, Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London, W.C.1, Sunday, June 23, 11 a.m.: H. J. BLACKHAM, "Education for Uncertainty".

NATIONAL SECULAR SOCIETY

CHAPMAN COHEN CENTENARY EVENING

J. G. CARTWRIGHT WILLIAM GRIFFITHS
PETER COTES DAVID TRIBE
Mrs. E. VENTON (*Chair*)

and the recorded voice of CHAPMAN COHEN

Refreshments — Everyone welcome

CONWAY HALL, RED LION SQUARE, LONDON, WC1
SATURDAY, JUNE 29th, 7 p.m.

ON BARRING BLASPHEMY

Correspondence

I AM very pleased to see David Tribe's letter (FREETHINKER, June 7) following mine (May 24) about the addition of the word 'blasphemy' to my proposal, submitted to the AGM of the National Council for Civil Liberties, to eliminate the legal uses of the words 'indecentcy' and 'obscenity' to define crime.

I am glad that David gives further publicity to my Criminal Law Act, 1967, to which I drew attention. But why does he fear that I misread the Act? What he writes only confirms that I *did* read it *with care*.

Furthermore, I have also now re-read what David Collis said (when he was Editor of the FREETHINKER) at the Forum on Censorship organised by the National Secular Society at Conway Hall on Friday, June 23, 1967, and which I reported in the FREETHINKER on August 25, 1967.

I quote:

"David Collis wanted to consider the question of censorship from the standpoint of inconsistency. The existence and the nature of God was a matter of considerable importance, of such importance that many national leaders all over the world invoked the aid of God. Of the four laws that apply to censorship—sedition, obscenity, libel and blasphemy—reasonable arguments could be advanced for the first three. He did not wish to maintain that the fourth was a live issue today; it was extremely unlikely that it would ever be enforced again—although it was still on the Statute Book—but it did illustrate the point that authority could impose penalties on anyone who questions the existence of God in spite of the fact that God never came forward in self-defence. A libel on a real person could be disproved by evidence; the sophistry was that the blasphemous libel—like the obscene libel, now called 'obscenity'—could succeed".

The plain fact is that blasphemy is *not now* on the Statute Book and it therefore seems to me that to assume that it is still a live issue and a legal hazard is not only to assume too much, but also to confuse the 'indecentcy and obscenity' issue. We have a clear possibility to get something done about obscenity in law because of the Danish repudiation of the 1923 Geneva Convention (FREETHINKER, June 7) but—as recent cases have shown—it will be necessary also to couple the use of the word 'indecentcy' to that of 'obscenity' because the words are related in UK law.

The Lord Chief Justice has said:

"There is a recognised standard of propriety: indecentcy is at the lower end of the scale infringing that standard of propriety and obscenity is at the top of the scale".

I do not want to labour the point. I back David Tribe on a whole range of secular causes; I support his right both to disagree with me and also to interpret the Act pessimistically; but I think it unnecessary to pursue the blasphemy duck when the life left in it is no more than a common taunt.

I would like to think that the National Secular Society can look a little optimistically at an Act of Parliament that virtually abolishes blasphemy as a crime. It is to its credit that this has been done.

JEAN STRAKER,

Co-Sponsor, Secular Humanism Promotion Unit.

FROM FOREIGN PAPERS

IN *Le Monde* of April 21/22 a Greek refugee now living in France points out that Greece, the cradle of democracy in antiquity, has never since experienced a true and permanent democracy; the "dictators pass but dictatorship remains under varying forms, with and without mask". In 1830, when Greece was "liberated", Adamantios Coray, the Greek philosopher, declared at Paris: "Poor Greece has not really been resurrected, she merely changed her tomb; from the hands of the Turkish gravediggers she has passed into those of Christian gravediggers".

The same issue carries an article on the state of anti-religious propaganda in the Soviet Union, culled from *Pravda* where the Party Secretary of the Vologodsk region complains that religion has passed to the offensive by pretending that only belief can offer Man a general vision of life and make him distinguish between good and evil. There exists, he states, a proper black market in clandestine cult objects. It is not enough, he writes, to appeal to reason, it is necessary to do something also to satisfy man's craving for emotional values. Holidays must be given a secular and social content.

Science and Religion, the official anti-religious review, published letters denouncing old-fashioned anti-religious fanaticism and official pressure; one reader calls for a change from "Dad's atheism" with its outdated arguments to ways of propaganda that take account of the fact that religion nowadays even claims to support science.

In Vienna, in a dialogue on "Christianity and Marxism", Dr Walter Hollitscher (a refugee in London during World War II) declared that novel conditions have arisen in the world of today where only the co-operation of all men of goodwill can effect changes for general betterment; this is merely possible if opposing opinions are allowed to clash. *Volksstimme*, the paper of the Austrian communists, reported him as saying: "In a Socialist state there must be neither State Religion nor State Atheism but an ideology permeated with Socialist notions". In the end, Marxism as the progressive ideology warranting progress will endure.

A similar trend seems to take shape even in RC circles. As the *Globe and Mail*, Toronto (September 16, 1967) reported, Dr Beryl Orris, executive director of the Divine Word—a catechetical institute in London—in a dialogue with the Toronto area pastors, said:

"A person conceives God as a parental image, either strict or indulgent, as the case may be. Some begin with an indulgent God with rosy cheeks, a big belly, and hearty ho-ho-ho—a kind of heavenly Santa Claus. We Catholics have graduated from this: Our God is a celestial scoutmaster and all you have to do is work on your merit badges".

Most people are dishonest and cling to worn-out prejudices. "The person who thinks he is thinking—all he is doing is reshuffling his prejudices". It's crucial to become mature, he said, and to accept reality and communicate honestly.

Almost throughout the world Catholics have become restive, but nowhere more so than in Holland; the Dutch have experimented with the liturgy, have drafted a new catechism for adults and have criticised some of Pope Paul's utterances.

At Santa Monica, a Trade Union of Clerics (the "Ameri-

can Federation of Priests"), has been founded which aims at improving the working conditions and pay of their brethren.

Modernisation of the old creed doesn't even stop before the motorcar: *Le Novel Observateur* of April 24 reviews a new publication, *L'Automobiliste et la morale chretienne*, in which the writer, Abbe Hubert Renard, states his belief that appeals to Christian charity ought to be more effective than the regulations of the Traffic Code.

However, there still exist dark corners in the world. The Austrian Supreme Court for Constitutional Laws ruled that the requirement of state registration for a marriage to become legal was contrary to the Austrian constitution. Consequently a man having been married at the registry office had the right to marry a second wife in church (*Neue Zite*, Graz, October 24, 1967).

In Abu Gosh, Israel, a Bach choir was formed; when it recently performed the Passion after St Matthew at Jerusalem, some sixty religious fanatics invaded the hall causing a disruption of the concert, because the 'Christian motif' of the Passion run counter to the religious feeling. Police were quickly on the spot and ejected the zealots, after which the concert was enabled to conclude. (*L'Information d'Israel*, May 17).

The same paper reports also that an ultra-orthodox group of the Neturei Karta sect burnt an Israeli flag in the streets of Jerusalem. Claiming that only the Messiah had the right to resurrect the Jewish state, they consider the secular state of Israel a blasphemy!

However, just returned from a stay in Israel, the present writer was glad to notice that the conditions of industrialisation are stronger than religious prejudices (as for bigotry—the unabridged *Fanny Hill*, in English and in translated form, is freely on sale). Most inhabitants are irreligious, although they still conform, superficially, to Jewish habits, people with side curls and skull caps are rare. In Haifa, the bus traffic stops on Friday night, but cars are running freely, and on Saturday there is what we would call Sunday service for public vehicles, and people sit in coffee-houses and bathe in the sea.

DID you hear about the woman who dropped Domestos over a passing clergyman? She was charged with bleach of the priest.

NATIONAL SECULAR SOCIETY

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CONWAY HALL, RED LION SQUARE, LONDON, WC1
SUNDAY, JUNE 30th, 10 a.m.

THE EFFICACY OF PRAYER

F. H. Snow

IT is very long since I prayed. When a young man, I believed there was a stern God above the blue-and-white vault of the sky, who knew all about me, and would send me to hell if I didn't get him to grant my prayer for salvation. At the same time, I believed there was a kind God up there who could hear everything I said to him, and would answer that part of it which was for my spiritual good, and perhaps physical good, or somebody else's spiritual or physical good. Unhappily, one hadn't a clue as to when he would answer a prayer, or anything to tell one that he had answered it. And so I prayed and prayed, and finally lost belief that my prayers were heard by a Being millions and billions and trillions of miles above the ball on which I lived.

Today, as then, those who become perfectly certain of the inability of anything beyond human ken to hear or answer prayer, are far fewer than those who retain belief to the contrary. It is appallingly true that a vast number of otherwise sensible people do, in this late period of the twentieth century, credit that their thought vibrations travel up to the ear of a deity, are considered by that deity, if in the nature of pious supplications, and are somehow, some time, answered. They believe, in fact, that however many of the unthinkable number of articulate or silently uttered petitions go unanswered, a great many elicit response. Sick people whose recovery is prayed for, quite often get better; persons in peril at sea and ashore, not infrequently survive, after supplicating the Almighty; rain comes to the rescue of crops in numerous cases, subsequent to appeals to God; apparently inevitable financial disasters sometimes don't happen, following prayer. What could be better evidence of the power of orisons to the Most Holy?

It would be a great argument for praying if unprayed-for patients didn't get well; those who were saved from sea and land catastrophes were anything like always subjects of pious intercession; if it were only the crops of God-importuners that were salvaged by rain insolvents who prayed that escaped ruin. But praying folk can't afford to look at the reverse side of the disc, and, if they do, have always the resourceful thoughts: 'God moves in mysterious ways', and 'The finite mind cannot understand the infinite'.

Let us examine the second of these propositions, which embraces the first. If, as Christians hold, our merciful principles derive from God, his values are as ours, and the infinity claimed for him contradicts those values, for in what else does the Christian conception of it consist but in his entitlement to contravene them? Were it possible for

humans to transcend their powers in medicine and surgery, and conquer disease at will, would they not do so? Would they not rescue all in peril, cause crops to never fail for rain, avert the sufferings of their fellowmen from whatever blows their cruel world chose to deal them? God, however, has to be exempted from exercising his power to do these things, and his abstentions exonerated by the crediting to him of a mentality vastly other than that of mortals, whose intellectual limitations mar their understanding of his motives, and prevent them—or, rather, those uninhibited from objective reasoning—appreciating that what is barbarously wrong to them, he is justified in regarding as right for himself, to commit or omit. The ascription to God of a contrariety of values and mental complexion beyond finite comprehension is an obvious artifice to justify his acquiescence in so much suffering and extinction. To thinking minds, the infinite must appear infinite nonsense, and its celestial synonym a faith-crazed fancy.

Even assuming the reality of God, the prediction of his inscrutability is unwarranted. In presenting his Word to man, through the medium of the Bible, God authorised him to judge of it with the intellect he deemed efficient for doing so—to read, with finite intelligence, the meanings of infinity. By its appointment for the task, finite judgment was adequate, in the mind of divinity, to define his works and will.

The Christian attitude towards God consistently astounds me. That the good, kind Father in Heaven should need to be pled with, to put out his almighty arm to save those he created, from the ravages of the elements he created—that, indeed, is beyond understanding. That his supposed interventions, with their always supernatural explanations, and the incalculable number of his non-interventions, can fail to impress even believers with his powerlessness to hear and answer prayer, is equally mystifying.

As when Charles Kingsley's gifted mind conceived it, Grace Harvey's supplication, in his *Two Years After*, for the storm-tossed troops bound for the Crimea, illustrates the fanatical unreason of a great proportion of the praying fraternity of our day and age.

"All those gallant ships, dear Lord!" she entreated, "and all those gallant soldiers going to the war—Lord, wilt thou not have mercy? Is not that cruel, man-devouring sea full enough, Lord? Do not call anyone tonight—give them one chance more, poor fellows—they have had so few, and so many temptations. Spare them but one night more."

Such prayers condemn God as a monster. By their pleas, the utterers rebel against their Lord's desires. If it please him to let his creatures drown, burn, suffer agonies unspeakable, what qualms should his avowed servants entertain? "Thy Will be done", they asservate, yet oppose that will. Is it imaginable that their prayers, or any prayer, could avail to procure an act of mercy in favour of some or any of the human ants whose innumerable catastrophes have not stirred God to evidential action throughout the ages?

Humanity will continue to belie its designation of *homo sapiens* whilst haunted by belief in the efficacy of prayer.

FREE COPIES OF CREDO

AS an extra inducement to gain your help in widening sales of the FREETHINKER, a free copy of *Credo: The Faith of a Humanist* (net 3/-), a book of Humanist poetry by A. A. H. Douglas with a foreword by E. M. Forster (generously donated to the FREETHINKER by A. A. H. Douglas), will be sent to each new subscriber and to the reader who introduces the new subscriber. New subscribers will be those who have never before subscribed to this journal. Subscriptions, introductions and all correspondence in connection with *Credo* should be addressed to the Editor, FREETHINKER, 103 Borough High Street, London, SE1.

THE ETHICS OF EAST AND WEST

A. J. Lowry

THE waves of criminality and social maladjustment which are at present threatening to engulf our western societies, have understandably, been the subject of much debate. But the basic problem of man's egocentricity, which underlies all problems such as these, has consistently plagued human society throughout the history of its existence, and the mental endeavours of the greatest of its thinkers have provided us with no more than two possible solutions to this dilemma—namely that the inability of man to establish congenial relations with his fellows is the result of either his sinfulness or his ignorance.

It can hardly be disputed that the concept of sin occupies a position of paramount importance within western, and particularly Christian beliefs. Whether the story of Adam and the apple is accepted as history or parable, the central teaching of man's estrangement from God remains the *raison d'être* of the whole Christian religion, whose self-appointed task it is, to heal the rupture twixt the mortal and divine. But the believer's notion of the actual nature of sin is a very curious one indeed, reminding one more of the magical fetishes and taboos of savagery, than of any serious attempt to evolve a moral system. Sin, it appears, is not the committing of moral outrages—indeed, we sin because we are sinners, and not the other way about. The actions of the literal or symbolic Adam have resulted in all his descendants being congenitally insensitive to the will of God (which represents the only true basis for morality), so that even actions which we consider humane may nevertheless be sins in the eyes of the Lord (e.g. Saul's sparing of Agag's life, 1 Sam. 15). Because Christian conduct is concerned with pleasing the divinity first, and his creatures a very poor second, it therefore becomes doubtful if such doctrines as underlie these actions, are possessed of any social utility whatsoever, or can contribute anything worthwhile to the question of how men may live together in peace.

As opposed to the teachings of the Hebrew-based religions, the faiths of the Far East (noticeably Buddhism) approach the question of man's unethical conduct from quite a different position, believing it to be simply the result of ignorance of the most harmonious and satisfying manner in which life may be conducted. Infants do not come into the world with a mastery of chemistry or Anglo-Saxon literature, and many live the whole of their lives without acquiring such. Why then, should the same not be true of ethics, so that those who wish to attain to proficiency in this discipline, must be guided by those whose experience and wisdom are greater than their own?

The fundamentalist differences in these approaches to the problem is that whilst Christianity is concerned with forgiveness, and the establishment of a personal relationship with a supreme and sentient Being, Buddhism is interested in presenting the student with a course of instruction enabling him to establish a more perfect relationship with his fellows and his self. The greatest advantage of this latter technique is, of course, that it contains far fewer value-judgements. Thus, whilst the Christian would say that man naturally sought his own good only because he was depraved and filled with ungodly selfishness, the Buddhist

would recognise man's instinct for self-gratification as a perfectly healthy motive, but would simply point out that the vast majority of the earth's population were woefully misinstructed as to how such gratification is most effectively to be achieved. Malefactors, therefore, are not so much wicked as wrong headed, which gives the hope that by the acquisition of 'right understanding' much can be done whereby their condition might yet be improved.

Also, the pure teaching of Buddhism (as opposed to the later Mahayana and Theravedic corruptions) is superior to Christianity in that its ethical system is not based upon historical dogmas. Christianity is, by its nature, inextricably bound to the person of Jesus Christ, who lived, and died, and rose again, to free us of sins. Unless such events actually occurred (and it does not appear probable that they did), the whole of Christian teaching is simply so many words, and their books not worth the paper on which they are written. But Buddhism, by concerning itself with what its founder taught, rather than with who he was, escapes these dilemmas, and does not oblige its adherents to believe for their improvement any unverifiable and amazing accounts of the events of the distant past. Zen Buddhists, for example, have attained the excellent position of completely expurgating doctrinal tenets from their beliefs, and explain that their religion would not be changed in any way, could it be demonstrated tomorrow that Gautama Buddha had never lived.

Though the Buddhistic concept of man's ethical defects lacks a certain amount of sophistication, it nevertheless provided, in an earlier age, a reasonable basis for understanding the human personality. Because of its rejection of the multitudinous unspecified and useless propositions to be discovered in other ethical systems, Buddhism came close to speaking, albeit in halting tones, the language of psychology. The Christian analysis of ethics, on the other hand, is not a scientific system at all, but is based upon the magic and superstition of much more primitive lines of thought. If, therefore, man is to make any effective progress in resolving the social difficulties which beset him, it is essential that he abandons the ill-founded ethics of western religion, and turns instead to the solutions which are offered today by sociologists, and in the past by the precepts and teachings of the Compassionate Buddha.

RI AND SURVEYS

Opinion Polls on Religious Education in State Schools

By MAURICE HILL

Price 1/- (plus 4d postage)

Published by the
NATIONAL SECULAR SOCIETY
103 Borough High Street, London, SE1

ADJUSTMENT AND CHURCH-GOING

BURNT NORTON is a privately owned school for maladjusted children, eleven to sixteen plus. It has about 50 boys and a teaching staff of five, with five other child-care staff.

It is housed in a 17th century Cotswold manor house, set in sixteen acres of mixed grounds, including woodland, pasture, gardens and playing areas.

The boys are referred by local authorities who pay the cost of their maintenance. The general aim, as defined by the warden, Derek Brunt, is to give the boys enough 'mind-fibre' to enable them to return to the environments from which they were originally referred.

One of the basic principles of training at Burnt Norton is a belief in the utmost freedom of expression in writing and talking, while physical behaviour is disciplined in a fairly structured environment.

Religious instruction is given in accordance with the requirements of the 1944 Education Act, and Church attendance on Sundays is compulsory. The practice is regarded by the staff as an essential placatory measure towards the authorities and the public in view of the present social and legal attitudes.

In general the boys resent having to go to church—although they converse freely with the Warden and others about religious beliefs and like to relate such concepts as 'God' and 'Jesus Christ' as taught by the church to their own understanding. In such discussion no pressure is applied to impose belief.

There is generally no exemption from church attendance or religious instruction; and there is also an apparent attempt to simplify religious classifications before the boys' arrivals, so that most are listed as either 'C of E' or Roman Catholic.

What I have found interesting, and worth reproducing, are two short essays which have been printed in the School's

Jean Straker

publication *Challenge*, and which illustrate the children's freethinking. I am told that the essays are representative samples of many which reflect a general attitude of the by-and-large inarticulate and intellectually deprived masses.

"The main reason I don't like going to church is because of boring time. The vicar stands up with his book in his box and carries on to the congregation with his glasses shining reflections from the sun, and then comes the horrible part of it—the collection! Round comes the tiny blue bags jingling with money.

Then we sing a hymn! and you can hear the vicar's voice go through one ear and come out the other much worse. Then he explains what the text was about (still yapping on about the church) and then he's looking round to see if all the congregation are listening. He can count me out for a start! Then he's back into his box! Oh I could knock him straight through the organ!

I don't know quite how he manages. He's like a Long Playing Record with only one track (THE CHURCH)! But he's all right on the whole, forgetting the church. I suppose his life is so called devoted to it.

Then we shake hands and he says 'Goodbye' although I feel like saying 'Good Riddance'."

[Boy aged 13 years.]

"I dislike going to church because you have got to put on your best clothes, then when you come back, you take them off, and put on your jeans. Then when you get to church they all look at you, and you'd think they'd never seen you before. Then you sing a lot of old tripe songs for girls, and I think some songs are boring, specially the slow songs, I'd have pop songs any day. Then they read out this sort of list, with all names on and I think there isn't any use for it. Why should it matter if they don't come? What I hate most are these girls looking at you, and sniggering. They look at you the sly way, from the corners of their eyes, and when you turn round they pretend not to be looking at you. Then you have to listen to the vicar telling about God, the apostles and other saints. And when the collection comes round and you haven't any money, or you have but don't want to give it in, they give you a dirty look. And last of all, think of all the things you can be doing instead of church."

[Boy aged 12 years.]

[Jean Straker supplies names of both children.—Ed.]

REVIEW

David Tribe

I OFTEN think that the dark night of the soul should stay that way. It isn't always attractive under the arc lights of publicity. At book length and with the great insight and literary power of a Russell, it may acquire grandeur. A Cook's tour of spiritual journeying can be frightening. The editor of *Journeys in Belief* (George Allen and Unwin, 28s) observes in his Preface: 'There are already enough of those booklets in which twelve Anglicans, Buddhists, Humanists or other-ists explain why they came to join that particular camp'. No one will contradict him. There may not however be other than curiosity value in a mixed bag of ideological revelations.

Bernard Dixon has collected eighteen testaments, one of them his own, covering a goodly number of the more obvious combinations and permutations. There is the path from Christianity to humanism or the reverse or both in turn. A priest becomes a Jew; an Anglican, a Buddhist; another Anglican, a Vedantist; a Communist, a Catholic; a Catholic, a Muslim; a Jew, a Marxist; a Jew, a Christian, a Christian (he needed Frank Buchman and Billy Graham, the demon drink and a saintly doctor before he really came to acknowledge the Blessed Lord Jesus Christ as his own personal Saviour). Mr Dixon himself says: 'I admire J. B. Priestley's brand of "woolly-mindedness" and loathe fanaticism,

I believe that "open-mindedness" is one of the most positive and valuable qualities that one can cultivate'. Needless to say, it is theistic 'open-mindedness' to which he is attracted. He has gathered therefore a preponderance of people who find religious faith at the end of their journey, though it must be admitted that there are more types of supernaturalist than naturalist harbours to put into. Those who believe there must be something somewhere are likely to find anything anywhere.

With an average of about ten pages each, the contributors hardly have time for literary excellences or autobiographical profundity. Some try to concentrate on spiritual as distinct from temporal events and present a rather disembodied faith. Others

NOTE FOR NEW READERS

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try to relate their material to their ideological circumstances and do not have space to develop either properly. The essays are arranged in the alphabet order of writers, and while this mercifully puts the 'Twice Born' Grahamite, Ernest Shippam, near the end, it puts Sir Richard Thomas Dyke Acland, 'Sleep-Walking in the Desert', first. I must say that I find this account of religious and political tacking around buoys of fashionable books, with the writer's own books fluttering at the masthead, singularly off-putting.

But as I progressed I found the book growing on me. I ceased to be an embarrassed voyeur and become a fellow-traveller. Some of the writers are well-known and write well—Monica Furlong, Christmas Humphreys, Christopher Isherwood (a little disappointing), Philip Toynbee—but I happened to like particularly, not only for their views, the pieces by writers familiar to FREETHINKER readers: regular contributor Peter Crommelin; editor of our admirable contemporary, the *Humanist*, Hector Hawton; and very old friend Hyman Levy. From these I shall select two specific points. Mr Crommelin, a courageous ex-priest, impels us to self-examination with:

"And if we ever expected any help from any so-called Humanist organisation, we certainly did not receive any. I have come to the conclusion that Humanists do not wish to convert anyone to their way of thinking. Humanists merely want to attack Religion. If all the clergy abandoned their profession, there would be no Religion left for Humanists or Freethinkers to attack. Hence there is no welcome from Humanists or Freethinkers for ex-clergymen, and no attempt to find them alternative employment."

I like to think that Mr Crommelin is being hardly fair to humanists and freethinkers here. Some may be obsessed by religion, but not so as to make them unfriendly to ex-clergymen. The NSS has publicly offered to help ex-priests who have left the church for ideological reasons, to find alternative employment. This may not be an easy matter in practice, for the church sees to it that most priests are trained to be nothing but priests.

Mr Hawton writes with the clarity and insight we enjoy in his monthly column, 'Personally Speaking'. I am particularly in tune with his suggestion that an atheist society needs poetry. Freethought publications of the past, especially in the nineteenth century, gave much space to verse. Bradlaugh's *National Reformer* discovered James Thomson, Fox, Conway and the Flower sisters attracted some of the greatest Victorian poets to South Place. Today regular verse survives only in the Progressive League's *Plan*. I've tried to revive the tradition in the secular movement, but without much success.

Letters to the Editor

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

Thanks

MAY I use an inch of your valuable space, to thank Mr Peter Crommelin and Mr E. G. Macfarlane for their kindness in answering my call for help through your paper. I am much surer in my mind now.

May I thank also Mrs Lilian Middleton and "Anon"—whose letters you kindly forwarded—for their help and their wholehearted welcome to your ranks. (Mrs) HELEN STEELE (Spain).

Hair! Hair!

MR D. M. Chapman of Canada, who apparently does not know my work, asks (June 14): "I should like to know whether Jean Straker's models shave their armpits".

My answer is "Yes and No".

JEAN STRAKER.

The Sport of Kinks

IT is good to know that the NSS supports Marcus Lipton's Bill to abolish deerhunting. Indeed it is an intolerable disgrace to a supposedly civilised society. I was interested to read in the *Sun* of June 6 an article by Jo Grimmond on growing world violence in which he stated that blood sports should be discouraged because their existence "seems to encourage the growth of that dangerous morality which justifies violence".

GWENDOLINE BARTER.

Posterity assured

PETER CROMMELIN brilliantly illustrated (June 7) the social structure laid down by Karl Marx for mankind to follow.

England had the unique opportunity to lead the world in a socialist revolution and thus pave the way for secular humanism.

Without trying to be sectarian or otherwise I firmly believe that the British people are blessed with the right sort of mental fibre that could have laid the foundation for a world society. It should be made crystal clear to all humanists that, before we can embark on a super society, we have got to remove the barriers and divisions which bar the way to educational, economic and social progress!

Marx, Lenin and Engels were absolutely abreast with human problems—and given the go-ahead at that time the future for posterity would have been assured.

E. CLASPER.

Chapman Cohen and his predecessors

I SEE we are to have a centenary celebration in the evening of June 29 in honour of Chapman Cohen and his work in the secular movement. This is as it should be. To hold the meeting on the eve of the Conference will ensure a better attendance than otherwise.

The Bradlaugh Centenary speeches (1933) appeared afterwards in book form thus acquainting everyone with what transpired. Let us hope the same procedure will be followed on this occasion.

These remarks bring me to G. W. Footc—the founder of this journal—a man to whom we are indebted. It is too late to hold a centenary but our President in his *100 Years of Freethought* quotes twice from Cutner's book unfortunately still in manuscript form. This book, coming from a veteran freethinker and a most interesting writer will assuredly be authoritative. Let us hope it will soon be published to instruct and entertain all of us.

Dipping into the *100 Years* again, I cannot understand why the author included Borrow in the list of avowed freethinkers. Neither Knapp nor Jenkins speak of him as such and Borrow's works provide the best testimony. Borrow was a militant protestant and he firmly believed in the doctrines of the Church of England (*vide* Wild Wales and Lavengro). He was at great pains to vaunt his protestantism wherever possible and readers will remember his fulminations against the Roman Catholic Church. Furthermore, he was a Tory and a Royalist but a most singular man.

HAROLD I. BAYFORD.

Deprave and corrupt

AFTER attending the Arts Council Conference on the working of the Obscenity Laws (June 6), where the artists, authors and publishers who took part in the discussion seemed to be overwhelmingly in favour of the complete abolition of censorship, at least for responsible adults, I came away with the impression that the completely unsatisfactory manner in which our present obscenity laws are working is largely due to the fact that the definition of obscenity was formulated as long ago as 1868, when the Establishment and many influential people strongly supported Christian puritanism and especially teaching that all sexual acts, and even thoughts, though tolerated in marriage, where sins which inevitably depraved and corrupted the sinner.

The difficulty with reform is that definitions of obscenity, depravity or corruption require the services of experts (psychiatrists, etc.) to bring them into line with modern knowledge, thus complicating the procedure and adding to the expense and time required for trial, and this might prove unworkable.

Perhaps the best solution would be to give up the practice of establishing a crime on a subjective moral or religious precept. There are enough laws to protect everybody against harm from others, but in applying them harm done has to be proved to be done and not, as with our obscenity laws, largely presume harm to be done or likely to be done.

G. F. WESTCOTT,

Basic Ideology Research Unit.

John M. Robertson

AS a piece of post-graduate research, I am at present engaged in preparing a thorough and objective, yet sympathetic, study of the life and work of John M. Robertson (1856-1933); and I would be most pleased to receive any relevant information, particularly in the way of personal reminiscences and the loan of unpublished papers.

M. R. PAGE,

73 Cumberland Road, Bromley, Kent.

(LETTERS continued on back page)

NSS Press Release

The NSS Press Release (June 7) was a stupid contribution. Why impute failing sexual powers as the reason for the Lancaster University Controller's reluctance to add a sort of "Abode of Love" to the amenities? Presumably, the students know that we are not in the Middle Ages, largely because of their biological urges.

Who, and how numerous, are the wise parents who have confided in the writer? And what is a reasonable expression of a biological urge? Do the Controllers define this? Presumably not. But presumably they must keep the tally. Are the sexes equal in number and aptitude? What lovely scope for a "Freethought" debate.

And the Sunday Entertainments Bill. I am in favour. But that time should be given this Bill ". . . whatever other pressures on time there may be"—strewhit!

Let us be simple atheists. To the devil with "Freethought". All thought issues from some form of conditioning. There is no thought other than conditioned thought.

A. E. SMITH.

Flaws in Marxism

WITH reference to R. Stuart Montague's letter (May 31), there was no need for him to actually say he is a Marxist—anyone who has lived as long as he has, and seen the flaws in Marxism for as many years as I have, has no need to be told. The jargon is so obviously standardised among Marxists.

The main flaw is of course that there is no necessary connection between membership of an economic class (e.g. 'workers') and voluntary self-identification with the interests of this 'class'. And the tacit assumption, made by Marxists and S.P.G.B.'ers, that persons *ought* to identify themselves with economic 'classes' and the interests of these 'classes', can, and I think *should*, be ignored.

The second great flaw among socialists, Marxists and otherwise, is that they tend to regard national patriotism as a laudable attitude of mind; with 'internationalist ideals' (which are ludicrous from a world peace point of view) as necessary, though unseen by them, fatuously impractical wishful thinking!

Marx was no social psychologist—or he would have warned those thousands of people who were to become his uncritical idolisers that the *first requirement* for social peace in a community is the establishment of a *common general aim*, e.g. *the good of mankind as a whole*. However, class-war theory and socialistic support for cults of local nationalisms are both theory flaws from this point of view.

E. G. MACFARLANE,

Convener, The World National Party.

Deer Bill

THROUGH the courtesy of your columns, may I thank the NSS President for urging the Government to support Mr Marcus Lipton's Protection of Deer Bill.

Deer hunting—or the hunting of any animal with hounds—is designed expressly to prolong the agony of the chase for the benefit of Hunt Members. It is therefore surely deplorable that Mr Edward du Cann, so often a spokesman for the Conservative Party, in a recent letter to the press (*West Somerset Free Press*, May 25) stated: "If, at any time, legislation is introduced in Parliament to abolish stag-hunting in the West Country, and if this appears to stand any chance of becoming law, I shall strongly oppose it, as I did successfully on another occasion some years ago". Mr. du Cann also infers that a majority of his colleagues hold similar views.

Many people of all political parties are opposed to bloodsports—more especially perhaps to deer-hunting. Some statement, then, from Mr Edward Heath would be very welcome.

(Mrs.) VERA SHEPPARD, *Council Member*.

National Society for the Abolition of Cruel Sports.

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