

Freethinker

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A HOLY MESS

IT is often said that religion as a source of violence belongs to an era of history long past. The falsity of this view can be seen by anyone, prepared to scratch the thinnest layer of top soil from the dung heap of international relations. Egypt and Israel, India and Pakistan, Federal Nigeria and the breakaway 'Biafra', are the prime examples at the present time of strife stemming from deep-seated religious differences. The more enlightened apologists will confess that in cases such as these religion plays a part, but they will go no further than to admit that differences of belief tend to aggravate an already tense situation. To resolve the size of the role played by religion in either starting or perpetuating any one of these complex international struggles involves a lot of argument, for which there is no space now.

What is certain, and I defy anyone, apologist or no, to state otherwise, is that the situation in Ireland, spotlighted at the moment by the recent events in Londonderry, stems from a long-standing conflict of ideologies. Northern Ireland is predominantly Protestant, with a Roman Catholic minority. The two are segregated in a manner, not unlike that of the blacks and whites in South Africa. Conditioning starts from the cradle. The children of Protestants go to Protestant schools, while the Catholic children go to Catholic schools. At those schools they are indoctrinated to such an extent that almost invariably Protestants vote Unionist, while Catholics vote Nationalist. Because of the enormous majority of Protestants in the six counties the Unionists have an undisputed power in the Stormont parliament, and the intensity of religious bigotry is such that Catholics are discriminated against in every walk of life.

Londonderry, near the border with Catholic Eire, is one of the few places, and the only large city where there are more Catholics than Protestants. The Catholic civil rights march there on October 5 was organised as a protest against many grievances, the chief of which is the rigging of the electoral wards in such a way that despite the fact that the Catholics outnumber the Protestants two to one, the city council has a Protestant (Unionist) majority. The Catholics were forbidden to march, but they not only disregarded this order but they also marched down a street which is traditionally reserved for Protestant marchers. Thus, they were brought to a halt forcibly by the police, and thus the whole unethical situation is put before the world.

It would perhaps be as well to specify the main grievances harboured by the Catholics. These have been admirably outlined in a letter to *The Guardian* from Mr Humphrey John Hardy. The type of gerrymandering described above with reference to Londonderry is standard almost through out Ulster, wherever it is needed to ensure a Protestant council.

Housing comes next. Mr Hardy gives an example of Enniskillen borough, where "four houses out of about two hundred have been awarded to Roman Catholics since 1948. Enniskillen is about 52 per cent Roman Catholic". This type of discrimination is encouraged by the archaic law that only householders and their spouses can vote in local elections.

Thirdly, there is a heavy discrimination in employment. "Figures of about 25 per cent unemployed are about normal", in Roman Catholic districts. In addition to this Mr Hardy shows that there is often additional bias and gives as an example Lurgan, which is 42 per cent Catholic but whose hospital staff and administration is almost entirely made up of Protestants, even down to hall porters and plumbers. The only field where there is reasonable representation being in the lower grades of nursing, because there are too few nurses.



The fourth grievance is the Special Powers Act, which denies *habeas corpus* and enables the police to search people and houses when they like. The South African Minister of Justice in 1963 expressed jealousy of the Irish on account of this Act!

It is little wonder then that there are strong feelings. But the whole position is made infinitely more shocking by the fact that both sides call themselves Christians. Of what worth is a religion which can cause men to exercise such discrimination? Are they not supposed to love their fellow men?

(Continued on next page)

Freethinker

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Editor: David Reynolds

(Continued from front page)

The Unionist Prime Minister, Mr Terence O'Neill, has been slowly trying to put reforms into effect. He has been baulked all along the line by the right wing of his party, led by the notorious Reverend Paisley, an embarrassment even to Christianity. There seems no bounds to the foolishnesses men can commit, having got into their heads that they alone are right—that they alone have the heavenly answer.

William McIlroy, General Secretary of the NSS, who himself lived the first seventeen years of his life in Northern Ireland made the following comment on the recent events:

"I am not in the least surprised by events in Londonderry. The idea of equality and civil rights has always been anathema to Ulster Unionists, and the disturbances have only drawn attention to a situation which has existed for many years.

"The Ulster Unionists are determined to keep the six counties of Northern Ireland in union with Britain and to maintain the border between them and Eire. They are

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.

INDOORS

Enfield and Barnet Humanist Group: The Council Chamber, Town Hall, Green Lanes, Palmers Green, London, N13, Friday, October 25th, 7.45 p.m.: An "Any Question Panel", Lord BROCKWAY, Dr EUSTACE CHESSER, CLARE RAYNER, Lord SORENSON. Members of the audience will be invited to submit questions.

Aberdeen Humanist Group: Saltire Room, Provost Ross's House, Shiprow, Friday, October 25, 7.30 p.m.: "Nationalism", Mr. P. KENNEDY (Political Scientist, Aberdeen University).

Belfast Humanist Group, NI War Memorial Building, Friday, October 25, 8 p.m.: "Morality without Religion"—a discourse on RI in schools, JOHN D. STEWART and Dr ALAN MILNE.

South London Humanist Groups, 13 Prince of Wales Terrace, London, W8, Saturday, October 26, 8 p.m.: A party for all Humanists wherever they live in London. Admission 5s will include food and one drink. It is hoped that moderate and heavy drinkers will bring their own bottles.

South Place Ethical Society, Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London, WC1, Sunday, October 20, 11 a.m.: "What's Wrong with Politics", RICHARD CLEMENTS, OBE. Admission free; Tuesday, October 22, 6.45 p.m.: Discussion, "Racial Integration", MARTIN ENNALS. Admission 2s (including refreshments). Members free.

Leicester Secular Society, 75 Humberstone Gate, Sunday, October 20, 6.30 p.m.: "Censorship in the Arts", JEAN STRAKER.

largely at the mercy of the Orange Order and even more extreme Protestant elements. Most Unionist leaders are rather insensitive and short-sighted or they would realise that by repression, victimisation and the rigging of electoral boundaries they will in the long run defeat their own ends.

"Londonderry 1968 could be very significant in Ulster's history, and possibly the point at which the Unionists who have ruled the province for over forty years started on the path which will lead to their political annihilation, and the end of Northern Ireland as a separate state."

David Tribe, the president of the NSS, made an additional point in a recent press release: "The situation has not been improved by the Prime Minister of the Republic of Ireland putting in his oar. In a country which bans divorce and family planning, which only a few years ago forced out its liberal Minister of Health for trying to introduce a modest NHS, and whose Ministers are known to take their instructions from the Archbishop of Dublin, this holier-than-thou attitude is unbecoming".

He went on to suggest the best road to a solution: "In Ulster the first move in defusing the situation must come from the Protestant community's willingness to co-operate with their Catholic neighbours in the full enjoyment of civic and social privileges and responsibilities. At the same time the Nationalists should rid themselves of any IRA elements that may be operating among them".

It is too much to hope for but must be reiterated that both sides would benefit if they were to look back in their history and realise what blood shed and suffering their religion has caused them. And to look even deeper and ask themselves whether, if religion can do this, there is not perhaps something a little irrational in their blind faith in what their fathers taught them.

STUDENT RIOTS!

The following extract was published during the 1890s in a newspaper which cannot be identified.

RIOTOUS BUDDING PARSONS Notice to "The Girls"

A serious riot recently occurred at the Exeter Diocesan Training College. Sixty senior students were concerned in discharging fireworks in the dormitories, and they refused to give the names of the ring-leaders in what they regarded as a joke.

As a punishment the Principal confined them in college one week. The students indulged in smoking and singing in the dormitories, executed dances in football boots, and smashed furniture. On Sunday they held a mock service in the college grounds, smoking long pipes. This outbreak was visited by a second week's incarceration. Something like a mutiny ensued. Upon their being directed to proceed to their rooms for study, they flatly refused, and the monitors tendered their resignations.

During this deadlock the collegians posted a notice on the gates of the building to the "girls of Exeter", regretting their inability to keep appointments with them, and intimated that books and magazines would be thankfully received as a solace to them in their lonely hours.

The state of affairs became so serious that the Principal decided upon drastic measures. He issued an ultimatum that, unless the monitors withdrew their resignations and the students proceeded to their rooms, the entire body would be dismissed from the college. This had the desired effect, and order was restored.

FROM THAT ARISING—THIS BECOMES¹

ISOBEL GRAHAME

WESTERN civilisation and its religious ideologies are conducive to a fear of the state of being dead, and also to the fear of having to deal with the consequence of a death in the family and all the absurd social and legal concomitants which assail executors. Ann Roest ('The Fear of Death', FREETHINKER, September 28) makes clear how many people, especially the young, find the fact of inevitable death very frightening.

I believe that what we call character or individual personality dies with the body and I accept this without fear, for I suffer no anxiety whatever about the state of non-personalised existence either before conception or after death.

Quite unintentionally I upset a fellow Humanist, during the conference at Scraptoft College, by saying it would not have mattered a brass button to anybody—least of all me—if I had never been born. No one could have missed a me that didn't exist. I could do no harm in a state of non-being, but I can do harm intentionally or unwittingly in my present state of being. That is only common sense as well as Buddhism.

Life is an existential state of matter, and everything which lives is an expression of life. If pre- or ex-personality could be said to fear, then birth into our troubled world seems to be the greater reason for anxiety than dying out of it.

For those accustomed to our religious environment, the rejection of belief in "life after death" naturally tends to produce thoughts on the lines of "a blank end leading nowhere" or "a black dreamless sleep", but to people accustomed to Eastern religious idiom, no-thingness is neutral and to describe it as black or any other colour infers somethingness. Neither science nor Buddhism knows of blank ends leading nowhere for they would be causes suddenly bereft of effects, matter bereft of energy to change.

I have evidence that once my body is clinically "dead" a whole new phase of change has been initiated leading to the eventual redistribution of its fundamental particles which can't stop the Earth and get off, so they have to stay around and submit to the universal processes of metabolism.

Having spent my earning life on the staff of the Royal Horticultural Society and designed, helped to lay out and work a variety of gardens during the past 30 years, I have confidence in compost—the non-annihilation of all that has been and is my garden and the necessity to return as much as possible back into next season's potential fertility. That's science, and Buddhism too!

All being is in a state of movement and change except at hypothetical zero temperature. My personality and my body have changed imperceptibly since I began to type this article—just having to put the thoughts together has made a difference. Each thought and action becomes cause, the total effects of which are irreversible and incalculable and in their turn become cause.

No, I don't fear being dead. What I *do* fear is the process of dying, particularly if it is painful and lingering, and here I look to active humanism for help, for we are all dying from the moment we are born. I wish I could believe

that there will be adequate and willing services which could provide whatever is necessary to put my sensory system out of action before pain becomes intolerable. I am a coward about pain. It is not true that once pain is over one does not remember it; I remember and can recall the feel of pain much more clearly than pleasure.

I fear terribly the possibility of being forcibly kept alive, trapped in a malfunctioning body or brain. When I can no longer take active mental and physical part in living and growing on, I want to return to the universal compost heap as quickly, hygienically and tidily as possible.

Often I dread that when I am no longer fit for living (according to my own estimation of that fitness), I shall be unable to accomplish my own death without enormous anxiety, trouble and complicated subterfuge. I might leave it too late so that physical capabilities are insufficient for carrying out the enterprise properly—make a mess of it and be "rescued".

This is a haunting nightmare and I can only hope that some down-to-earth humanists will be within reach for advice and help when my time comes, that is if we have not managed to legalise voluntary euthanasia during the next twenty years. Keeping personality alive against its wish, or bodies alive without their personalities seems to me like a kind of inverted murder, it is cruel, pointless and obscene.

My hope is that it will become the policy of humanist groups as well as individuals to aim at lessening the practical problems and harassments which beset the bereaved today. We should provide a kind of public trusteeship available to members and their dependents and friends during the difficult time of change and readjustment when an important personality has been withdrawn from their lives.

¹ Part of Gotama's description of the philosophy of Karma or cause and effect, quoted in *Buddhism and the Buddhist Movement Today*, price one shilling, from The Buddhist Society, 58 Eccleston Square, London, S.W.1.

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ANNIE BESANT AS A BOTANIST

NIGEL H. SINNOTT

IN the archives of the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew,¹ is preserved an interesting letter from Annie Besant (at that time a Vice-President of the National Secular Society) to the then Director of Kew, Sir Joseph Dalton Hooker. This note, on white paper, bears a blue printed monogram and motto: "A.B. 'Be strong'", and has been marked in pencil "card sent" and "82" (this probably stands for 1882, the year it was written).

Oatlands,
Mortimer Crescent, N.W.
October 23rd.

Dear Sir,

I am informed that you are good enough to afford facilities to any who desire to study Botany at Kew. I have passed the 1st B.Sc. and Prel. Sci. Examinations at the University of London (July and August 1881) taking honours in Botany, and am studying Botany as one of the subjects for the 2nd B.Sc. next October. My chief difficulty is in the practical part. I applied to Mr Sowerby, Secretary to the Botanic Gardens, Regent's Park, for permission to visit the Gardens, but he replies in the negative on the ground that he objects to the "opinions attributed to me", presumably on theology and politics. As these questions do not affect the study of Botany, and I am exceedingly anxious to make any study practical, I venture to ask you to allow me to avail myself of the great advantages offered in the Gardens under your control.

Obediently,
Annie Besant.

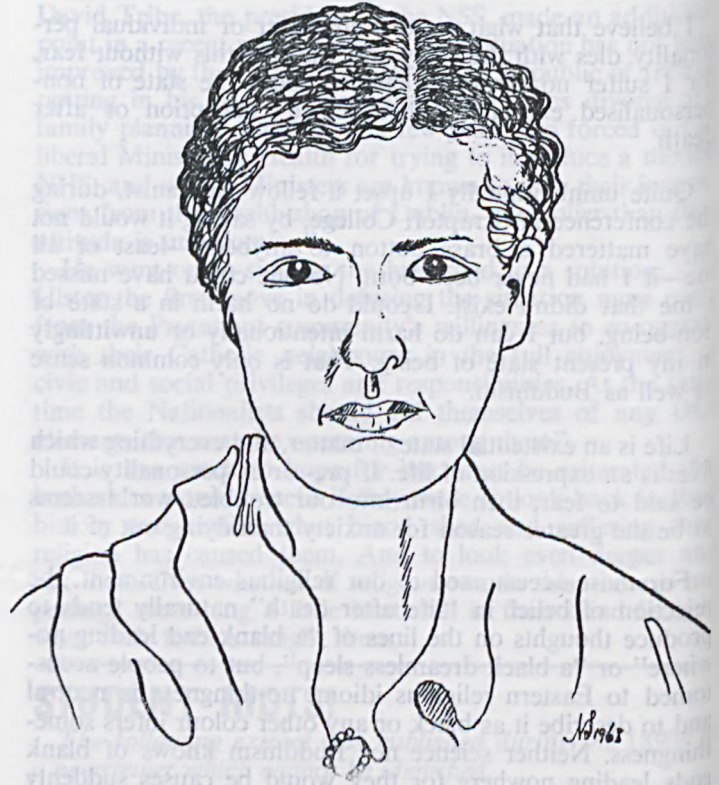
It appears that Mr Sowerby's daughters used to visit the Regent's Park Gardens regularly, and Annie Besant's well-publicised views on birth control, in addition to those stated in the letter, explains his reluctance to afford entry to her. However, Sir Joseph Hooker (who was probably a passive agnostic, like his friend Charles Darwin) was more amenable, and sent Mrs Besant a permit to Kew Gardens "but with the cautious provision that she must use them before the public visiting hours" (Nethercot, 1961).

Annie Besant was in fact the first woman to win an honours award in Botany in this country, but as a result of the bigotry ranged against her never completed the London B.Sc. course. Despite the protests of T. H. Huxley (among others) she and Alice Bradlaugh were in 1883 refused admission to the practical Botany class at University College, and Annie's efforts to graduate from London University were finally frustrated by an examiner in Chemistry who repeatedly failed her papers solely because he disliked her atheist and socialist views. In spite of everything Annie Besant became a gifted teacher of Botany and allied subjects, an outstanding debater on the subject of evolution, and translated into English the works of the German zoologist Büchner. Later on, during the Theosophical phase of her life, she was to found the Hindu University at Benares, which in 1921, when she was seventy-four years of age, awarded her the degree of Doctor of Letters "in recognition of her valued and continuous services to education" (West, 1927). She had the last laugh.

It is ironic that Mrs Besant, who during the 1880s was one of the most successful popular advocates of Darwinism, in the end became a Theosophist and renounced her ad-

herence to evolutionary theories. Also, her inevitable resignation from the NSS was brought about by pressure from G. W. Foote, the founder and editor of this journal.

Whatever we as humanists may think of Annie Besant's conversion to Theosophy the fact remains that during the secularist phase of her life she served the causes, Free-thought, Science, birth control (Neo-Malthusianism) and



Annie Besant aged forty.

political reform with almost unbelievable courage and loyalty, often in the face of disappointment, bitter opposition, and personal tragedy (such as when she was deprived of the custody of her daughter by her estranged husband, the Rev. Frank Besant). Whatever work she did, whether for the NSS, the Fabian Society, women's trade unions, the Theosophical Society or the Indian National Congress, she did with a devotion and rare enthusiasm. She was truly a great woman and a great human being.

¹ The author is indebted to the Director of the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew, for permission to reproduce this letter.

REFERENCES

- Nethercot, A. (1961), *The First Five Lives of Annie Besant*: p. 189. London.
West, G. (1927), *Mrs Annie Besant*: pp. 66-67. London.

TOWARDS HUMAN RIGHTS

Annual report of the
National Secular Society

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ON BLUMPH, SNAGGLE, JABBERWOCKY & GOD

G. L. SIMONS

IN what circumstances can a word be said to "have meaning"? If a word is "used" is this a sufficient criterion? Is it a necessary condition of meaning that a word be explicable *in principle* to anyone who is prepared to listen?

The facts are: that some words are meaningful and some are not; that some words are meaningful to some people and not to others; and that people are often confused in attributing the wrong meanings to words or *in attempting to attribute meanings to words in circumstances where in principle no meanings can be attributed.*

Historical thinkers have in general not been sympathetic to the idea of solving philosophical problems by dismissing as meaningless the language in which they are stated. Idealists, from Parmenides onwards, may have believed that matter was illusory but they were prepared to admit that the language purporting to describe it had significance. Similarly, materialists argued that souls, spirits, gods did not exist, not that the language used to denote them was meaningless.

David Hume (1711-1776) gave the impulse to modern logical positivism to dismiss metaphysical, religious and ethical concepts as meaningless, not simply as untrue or non-existent. I have considerable sympathy with this position, and I believe that it is a very powerful weapon in the hands of the secularist. In a simple form the thesis can be stated as: when the words "god", "soul", "spirit", "heaven", etc., are defined in a 'uniquely religious' way the definitions are without significance and the words are literally nonsensical. If this is true it means that we cannot even debate the existence of God, that the discussion can never commence since the symbol "God" can never denote an entity, existent or non-existent.

A distinction must first be made between everyday language and specialised language. To the layman, the words "cyclohexanol", "isomerization", "prosthesis" and "dicyclopentadiene" will probably be meaningless, but this does not mean that the words can be dismissed as nonsensical. The words have meaning—but in a context, in a definable and consistent scheme. Now it is a possibility that religious language is a specialised language with a meaning that can be understood in the right context. On this view there are many specialised languages: those of physics, sociology, mathematics, cybernetics, philosophy, music, theology, etc.—and that to appreciate the meaning of the symbols may require extensive study and training. However, I reject the view that religious (or theological) language is meaningful in the sense that other specialised languages are. I suggest that what is represented as religious language is different in kind from everyday language and specialised language, and that this difference renders religious symbology literally meaningless. To appreciate this point it is necessary to see how language originates.

For the child, definition is usually ostensive: words are associated with visible objects, and then visible relations are denoted and sentences become possible. The important point is that the growth of language is grounded in sensory impressions, in a purely empirical context. Later, when abstract thought is possible, we can relate the abstract concepts to the empirical soil from which they grew; mathematics and logic can be analysed in such a way. This means that there is an important sense in which all meaningful language is empirical, and moreover that language that claims to be in no sense empirical must be bogus. And it is religious language alone that makes such a claim.

It is said to be of the essence of religious language that it is "non-physical", "non-empirical", "other-worldly", "supernatural" and the like, that it denotes entities that are different in kind from all everyday objects, that it relates to spiritual entities that in no way partake of mundane phenomena. But if this is what religious people really intend then they are literally talking nonsense: they are indulging in meaningless and unimportant word-games. But in fact they are keen that, despite assertions to the contrary, their language should have a strong empirical connotation: thus it is important that God is a *person* (not withstanding the modern trends), heaven a place, and a spirit a part of us all. Such a view has unfortunate consequences: if religious symbols denote empirical entities the entities are limited by natural law—God gets tired, heaven changes with the season, our souls can have lumps chipped off them. Such possibilities are unwelcome to our religious friends and so again they retreat into "otherworldliness". *And this is their eternal contradiction.*

Their language has to be empirical to be meaningful, but if empirical it cannot serve to denote essentially non-empirical entities. In attaining significance the language becomes useless. If we regard God as a struggling chap living in the sky just to the left of Sirius the *religious* requirement is scarcely served: believers demand that God be *more* than a bloke on a planet or in a flying-saucer. But as soon as we try to assign God his godlike qualities our language degenerates into literal nonsense.

I see no way round this persistent dilemma. Our religious brethren have such a lot to contend with these days. It's all very sad.

1868

1968

100th Anniversary of Charles Bradlaugh's first election contest at Northampton

EXHIBITION

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Organised by the National Secular Society and Northampton Public Libraries Committee

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THE GUILDHALL, NORTHAMPTON

Sunday, November 17th, 3 p.m.

Speakers include

MICHAEL FOOT, MP

REGINALD PAGET, MP

The Rev.

LLOYD JENKINS

DAVID TRIBE

Singer:

DEREK WILKES

Organised by the National Secular Society

Sunday, November 17th: Coach leaves Central London at 9.30 a.m. Return fare 15/-. Bookings to the NSS, 103 Borough High Street, London, SE1. Telephone 01-407 2717.

ART

E. FRANKLIN WHITE

The Bauhaus Exhibition: Royal Academy till November 7.

TO visit the Bauhaus Exhibition and see it only as an interesting and progressive movement towards modern art and design would be at the same time both accurate and a limiting and dangerous half-truth. The history of art and design is full of new movements and groups but more often than not they have used their new teachings and knowledge to extend an already entrenched philosophy.

It is of interest to compare the Bauhaus with two of the most widely known and loved movements of the past—French Impressionism and the Italian Renaissance. French Impressionism was part of a social movement and moved away from the show pieces of academic art towards a new realism, showing us interest and beauty in common things, and developing new techniques where the old were found to be wanting: in this they were helped by the scientific exploration of colour by 19th century scientists; although it must be pointed out that there is a fundamental fallacy in their "scientific" use of colour. Their great achievement was (together with painters such as Turner, Constable and Courbet) to begin a break-away from traditional academic subject matter and use of colour. However, now that we can look back over the last 90 years, it can be seen that they remained tied to the single viewpoint perspective approach and thus the main difference between them and 17th century Claude Lorraine is that, whereas he built up an imaginary portrayal of a romantic literary idea, the French Impressionism went to nature and showed us their selection from a world of interest and beauty lying at our back door.

Compared with the Bauhaus the French Impressionism failed to either rethink, or even recognise, first principles and made no attempt to form a link with the wider fields of design and architecture. They can be seen as an interesting but limited group of easel painters whose work now looks tired, lacking in strength, and unrelated to our life. It is in this that the Bauhaus fundamentally differs, for their work is strongly related to architecture, art and design and therefore to a wider group of people in the world around us.

The Italian Renaissance was based on a search for a wider knowledge of science and art (including architecture and design) and a beginning of a realisation of the importance of the individual in society. A typical early Renaissance humanist intellectual such as Leon Battista Alberti was an active architect and painter as well as writing on a wide range of subjects; philosophy, sociology, law, mathematics; of him Sir Anthony Blunt has written "for Alberti the highest good is the public interest. To this princes and individual citizens are equally bound". This practicing artist illustrates clearly the kind of man who no longer worked first and foremost within a continuing (if beautiful) tradition but began to question established beliefs and ideas in the arts, science, commerce and politics.

Surely here, in this spirit of wide ranging enquiry and a thirst for knowledge, is a direct link with the aims and achievements of the Bauhaus.

This Exhibition is arranged to show both the various courses and lines of work at the school and the teaching principles of various members of the staff. The teaching

of the Bauhaus was based on the preliminary course and the sections showing this course under Itten, Klee, Kandinsky, Albers and Schmidt in particular, repay careful study. Not only is the work extremely interesting and beautiful but this work has had a profound effect on the teaching of art and design.

To learn to enquire into and respond to the basic elements of line, mass and plane in both two and three dimensions rather than to learn to execute a particular method, this, together with the integration of art and design with architecture, the use of the materials and technology of the 20th century, plus a concern for the human situation, forms the basis of the Bauhaus philosophy.

This basic approach to problem solving was developed throughout the Bauhaus teaching and led to results that even today, 20 years later, look startlingly modern. The Bauhaus was dedicated to the idea that the teaching of art and design must be subjected to continuous reappraisal and therefore change. If the school had been able to continue and had not lost impetus and become entrenched, it would have continued to change and develop.

During the past few years in England there have been preliminary courses at schools of art and design which have been largely copied from the Bauhaus. Although they have produced some good work they are in many ways a negation of the work of this great school. It is not enough to copy, it is at all times necessary for ideas to develop and change, but this must not be change for its own sake but so that knowledge may advance and so that both staff and students take part in a live programme of learning, where sound technical instruction and knowledge are at all times at the service of the idea, and the unexpected is possible.

Leading away from the preliminary course, mention must be made of the workshop section of the Exhibition where a wide range of furniture can be seen, for example, chairs where the idea of the preliminary course has led to a type of design that has now become accepted and "traditional". There is also a large section relating to architecture.

The section of paintings with the magnificent collection of work by Klee and Kandinsky would alone make this Exhibition well worth a visit. Here, together with the sections on design and architecture, the development away from the preliminary course can be appreciated. In the work of these two geniuses can be seen the effect of really disciplined thinking on a rich romantic mind.

The catalogue is a wealth of information and the Exhibition itself is (in contrast to the De Stijl Exhibition at the Camden Arts Centre earlier this summer) well documented. The well arranged work, comments, and quotations make this Exhibition a joy to visit.

The last word should however, go to the founder and first director of the Bauhaus, Walter Gropius: —

"To find a new approach which would promote a creative state of mind and which would finally lead to a new attitude towards life. The Bauhaus was the first institution in the world to dare embody this principle in a definitive curriculum. To develop and ripen intelligence, feeling and ideas, with the general object of evolving 'the complete being'. The object of the Bauhaus was not to propagate any 'style', system or dogma but to exert a revitalising influence on design."

USSR—RIP

MICHAEL CREGAN

THE word "Czechoslovakia" is now more than a name; it is an obituary.

Since the Soviet revolution of 1917, the eyes of those who longed for an end to injustice and brutality have often turned hopefully to the East. *There*, it was hoped, was the river whose waters would one day flood inequality for ever. Stalin arrived, and his show "trials" and purges of the thirties led to a few uneasy glances among the faithful; somehow, however, that faith survived and the sudden role of the Red Army as the force which chased nazism out of half of Europe relegated the pre-war inter-necine warfare in the Kremlin to a mere blunt sword of the forces of reaction.

With the advent of Krushchev, and official 'de-Stalinisation', we were entering, so we were proudly informed, an even more exciting phase of the construction of socialism. "We are getting richer, and when a person has more to eat he get more democratic", Krushchev told us in 1959. Three years earlier the Hungarians had learned what the Soviet version of democratisation was.

But then, amid the tumult of fighting, the Soviet tape-recorder could be set to play its usual tune of "fascists" and "counter-revolutionaries". And as memories dimmed, the USSR could once more enter the world stage as the supporter of the worker in every country and his cause in every country.

And so came 1968. And a small country—not "satellite" comrades; we've abolished exploitation—declared: "The overwhelming majority of the people of all classes and sectors of our society favour the abolition of censorship and are for freedom of expression".¹ And the Russian reaction to the dangerous idea that perhaps socialism had something to do with *people*? The dreary old response of a sterile oligarchy fearing the erosion of its own power—silence talk with tanks.

Only one consolation emerges; due to the amazing determination and discipline of the Czechs, there was no extensive fighting, consequently no burning buildings which might be hiding those ubiquitous "neo-imperialists" or "revisionary gangs". Coolly, the Czechs, as the occupation proceeded, kept the world informed on every step. This, together with the bravery of the Czechs, with every legitimate body—governmental, trade unionist, or party—unwavering, even under pressure, in their condemnation of the Soviet action left Russia with no excuses, no puppets to dangle as the new government, and the Soviet action is seen for what it is: the cynical bludgeoning of a country whose tentative introductions of liberty was not according to its own personal preference.

In Czechoslovakia the government was "trying to show that it is capable of a different political leadership and management than the discredited bureaucratic police-methods".² It seems that in contemporary Russia these are the only methods that can at present be envisaged.

We have come a long way since Sean O'Casey could cry his welcoming "Red Star, shine on us all!"; now that the star is sinking, perhaps it is time for a funeral oration.

¹ Reply of the Praesidium of the Czechoslovaks to the letter sent by the five Warsaw Pact countries, July 17.

² The same.

BOOK REVIEWS

LUCY DANSIE

MY LIFE, ISADORA DUNCAN (Sphere Books, 5s).

THIS is a truly fascinating book, perhaps most of all because it gives a real insight into the intriguing and all-important question "What makes an artist an artist?" or perhaps more simply "What is Art?" There is absolutely no doubt that Miss Duncan was an artist. Yet she she neither painted, sculpted, wrote, acted, sung nor did anything which is normally taken to be art. Above all she was not a ballet dancer. "I am an enemy to the ballet, which I consider a false and preposterous art—in fact, outside the pale of all art." What made her an artist was an intense and sincere belief in herself and her art, which she refers to throughout the book as "the dance".

It is this sincerity, which brought her from unknown poverty to world-famous wealth, and the fact that she made an art out of something new, something unique, that gives the reader a greater insight into the character and motivations of an artist than perhaps a biography of Van Gogh would.

"The dance" was applauded throughout Europe, the Americas and Russia, in fact virtually everywhere she performed. She was praised by many, from Hacckel, whose writing had had a profound influence on her long before they met, to King Ferdinand of Bulgaria, whose interest she aroused at their encounter by being the only person present not to stand up as he entered the room. Her other admirers included Stanislawski, Pavlowa, The Queen of Naples, Humperdinck, Rodin, Cosima Wagner (Richard's widow), Whistler, Mounet-Sully, d'Annunzio, and a very great friend Eleanora Duse.

Apart from this revealing look at an artist as such, which is really the greatest value of the book in intellectual terms, her life itself, which is described here up till 1921 (she died in 1927 aged 49) makes interesting and colourful reading. On her own confession she was no literary genius, but her sensitivity and her vast range of experiences, which afforded her at times sublime ecstasy and at others the depths of despair make very compelling reading.

She was brought up on the works of Ingersoll by her mother. Speaking of her family, her mother, two brothers and a sister, with all of whom she remained close all her life, she says "not one of us was of a churchy frame of mind, each being completely emancipated through our ideas of modern science and free-thinking".

She loved, in the platonic sense, many men, but at first her time after performances was spent reading *Kant's Critique of Pure Reason*, Nietzsche and similar works. She finally lost her virginity at a fairly late age considering her avowed attitudes. She married Gordon Craig, the genius theatrical designer, for whom she bore a daughter. Paris Singer, the sewing-machine millionaire, then became her lover and a son was born. Her reactions to the subsequent death of both these children, who drowned together in the Seine, is perhaps the most moving part of the book.

Later in life she practised wholeheartedly the doctrine of free love, "a woman who has known but one man is like a person who has heard only one composer".

"After a performance, in my tunic, with my hair crowned with roses, I was so lovely. Why should not this loveliness be enjoyed?" This last is also an example of her deep faith in herself, which taken in context cannot but be sincere. It is this faith which really made her an artist worthy of esteem and this book both enjoyable and valid.

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LETTERS

Dons and Students

LORD WILLIS is dismayed (October 5) that the head of one of our older university colleges should say that he was considering sending down the revolutionary students "and then the dons could really get on with their work".

The older universities were founded by benevolent people in the violent Middle Ages as a haven where men dedicated to the pursuit of knowledge could pursue their studies in peace. In return, these dons were expected to teach their subjects to fresh students. The more grateful among these students repaid the university by legacies in their wills, and the institution pursued its peaceful course—an admirable example of individual initiative.

I did not go to a university; but in my 20th year I became interested in banking and currency, and spent the leisure of the next ten years (whilst earning my own living) in studying this subject in the British Museum. Eventually I published a book "Free Banking", in which I elaborated the thesis that the Socialists were wrong in ascribing the evils of capitalism to free competition: the real cause was unwise state interference with the free development of the medium of exchange—money. In 1937, I took over the editorial chair of *The Individualist*, and have constantly set forth in its pages the case for free banking and the abolition of the gold standard. The journal is maintained by the contributions of grateful readers.

To day I am perfectly willing to listen to any young man who has suggestions or criticisms of my doctrine. But if he should come to me and demand that I give him a voice in directing my propaganda, I should ask him to leave, and if he refused, I should use force. There is an analogy between my efforts and those of university dons. The mistake they made was in accepting government grants. A government that pays the piper will inevitably call the tune, until we reach the point where Lord Willis can be dismayed that the dons demand to run their universities in their own way.

HENRY MEULEN.

The MCC and South Africa

YOUR editorial comments on the cancellation of the South African cricket tour are far too kind to the MCC. Their selection of d'Oliveira only after a public outcry against his omission, on the shaky ground that he, primarily a batsman, was needed to replace an injured bowler, gave Vorster a golden opportunity to denounce his selection as politically motivated; whereas, had the selectors included d'Oliveira in the touring party originally, on his obvious merits as shown just beforehand in the final Test against Australia, when he was in great form and largely responsible for saving the series, Vorster could hardly have alleged with any plausibility that the selection was a political one.

Even if the selectors had genuine cricketing reasons for his original omission, they must have foreseen the political implications that would be read into it, and they could easily have increased the number of men selected from 16 to 17. (After all, the Australian party numbered 17, and this is not an over-allowance for injuries.) Better still, they should have asked for an assurance from South Africa beforehand that the tour would be allowed even if d'Oliveira were selected. Unfortunately, however, they deferred to the political wisdom of Sir Alec Douglas Home, who advised against this procedure.

You have also over-simplified the issue by assuming that Vorster will consistently bar all visiting sports sides that include coloured players: it is not because d'Oliveira is "coloured" that he was political dynamite, but because he is a Cape Coloured. It is the spectacle of a local coloured boy who's made good abroad that the South African government is so afraid of and that could have made the cricket tour so valuable—if only the MCC, under "expert" political guidance, had not played so foolishly into Vorster's hands.

BARBARA SMOKER.

Czechoslovakia

I DID not say, as Mr Otto Wolfgang maintains, that the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia is justified by the US invasion of Vietnam: I do not believe this and he cannot find it in my article *Czechs and Counterchecks*. The main point of my article was to show that Western moralising is worthless as it only operates on

a partisan political basis. I am glad that Mr Wolfgang agrees with this.

However, he later says that "It is no argument to say that Czechoslovakia has always been regarded as a Russian satellite". I agree that this does not justify invasion, and I never said it did. The point *does* show—and this is all I intended in the article—that the West is hypocritical in the extreme. The West cannot both regard Czechoslovakia as a Soviet satellite (which is has done since 1948) and also express amazement when Russia shows this to be true.

G. L. SIMONS.

The Soviet Union and the Jews

WHERE does Mr Blood live that he mouths stale slogans and even resurrects the "Red Dean" as a witness for Birobidjan? This is what a later visitor wrote on this score:

"... in 1928 this inaccessible and utterly forlorn little segment of territory was set aside by the Soviet government as a 'national home for Russian Jews'... (as such) the experiment was a failure; few Jews liked it when they got there and during the period of Stalinist anti-Semitism none were permitted to go."

J. Gunther, *Inside Russia Today*: Revised Edition, 1962.

Perhaps he was biased, so I looked up the numbers of inhabitants and found: 1932—100,000; 1936—110,000; 1959—41,000; 1963—42,000; 1965—15,000. The place is so unimportant nowadays that it is no longer mentioned in recent publications.

Most ludicrous was Mr Blood's assertion that "the aggression by the USSR towards Finland was provoked" when the Finns refused to exchange territories ("Have my necktie and give me your coat!"). When the Israelis were already encircled for the kill and the closure of the Tiran Straits endangered further supplies of gasoline for tanks and 'planes, they were not "provoked" into breaking out! At a press conference on May 28, 1967, Nasser said: "We shall not accept any possibility of co-existence with Israel. ... A state of war has existed with Israel since 1948" (Cairo Radio, May 28, 1967). And in another broadcast, on May 25, 1967, Cairo Radio boasted: "The Arab people are determined to wipe Israel off the map". But Russian propaganda expected the Israelis to wait for the "finishing-off".

One year after the Six-Day War, the Communist Party of Israel issued a Declaration for Peace Initiatives and against Annexations:

"On the 5th of June, 1967, when our nation stood in the midst of the fight for survival, the Prime Minister and Defence Minister solemnly declared that Israel had no intention of conquering territory and that all it wanted was to make its very existence secure." (Information Bulletin, CPI, No. 5.)

It is true that the Israeli government dallied to make this clear once again. But this is beside the point: in the dock is the dishonest propaganda and unprincipled casuistry of the Soviet Union.

OTTO WOLFGANG.

OBITUARY

WE regret to announce the death of Mr Albert Evans, aged 85. The deceased was a vigorous advocate of secularism and Free-thought, and will be sadly missed by his friends in Leicester Secular Society. Mr G. A. Kirk, President of LSS, conducted the committal ceremony at Gilroes Crematorium on October 2.

Our sympathy is extended to his widow, Mrs Beatrice Evans.

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