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SPACE EUPHORIA

OVER THE Christmas period considerably more attention seemed to be paid to the now historic space flight of Borman, Lovell and Anders than to the popular cause for merriment, Jesus Christ. This is, in itself, encouraging for secularists, though some may have been a little peeved to hear the spacemen's Christmas greeting to us back on earth, which began with some verses from Genesis. However, to allow this to deaden the sense of human achievement aroused by this flight is surely to tend towards a secular neurosis. Personally, I would have been highly surprised if the Christmas message from these men had not carried religious undertones. At the present stage in the secularisation of America, and bearing in mind that astronauts are obviously conformists rather than rebels nothing else could be expected.

The real significance of their flight lies a long way from religion in that it is a measure, for all to see, of the phenomenal progress of science. Humanists agree that man's problems must be solved by science rather than by invoking supernatural aid. In this light they cannot but applaud this display of the power man now has over nature. Those, who say the immense sums spent on the exploration of space would be better spent on the starving millions, that we ought to set our own house in order before seeking other houses, have surely got their priorities wrong. Our house is not just the earth. The earth is only a room in an enormous mansion, the universe. The more we can discover about the universe, the better we will be able to see ourselves in perspective. In the long run the human race cannot but benefit from a better knowledge of space. In more tangible terms it may well turn out that the starving millions will directly benefit in the long run. We may find before many years have passed that one of the planets is a rich source of food. Food is being cultivated in the oceans. Why should it not come from space as well? Even further in the future we may find that the homeless could live on one of the planets. This sounds, and of course is, extremely futuristic. Nevertheless, the incredible speed of the progress of science and technology, exemplified by this flight, and the equally incredible speed of the increase of the world's population, combined together preclude none of these possibilities. In the last hundred years science has progressed geometrically. We have come from the horse to the space rocket. In the next hundred years we will go from the space rocket to something quite unimaginable. The prospects are inconceivable. No less inconceivable are the prospects created by the population explosion. Even in the next fifty years something, at present quite unthinkable, must happen in the field of science and technology to cope with the vast geometrical increase in the numbers of us mortals, who are, after all, the mere products of nature. Religion cannot provide a solution. Science must.

It is often said that science has advanced faster than men's minds. This is, of course, true when one considers that with the aid of science man has produced nuclear bombs, which could destroy the world. Space travel as yet has not been used as a weapon of warfare. What must be hoped is that space research will tend to unite East and West rather than widen the gulf. It is perhaps the only field in which all men have an equal interest. Speaking in terms of the universe the Russians and the Americans

have the earth in common. Co-operation between the two in space would surely benefit both and would be far easier to arrange than unilateral disarmament. We must hope that in this field the barriers can be brushed aside. If the world could unite in this project so important, indeed vital, to all men disarmament and the rest could follow.

INSIDE:

DR JAMES HEMMING, the celebrated educational psychologist and author, discusses *Religion in Our Schools* the book by Philip R. May and O. Raymond Johnston.

40 HERETICAL THEOLOGIANs

IN A 1,400 word statement sent to Rome recently forty leading Roman Catholic theologians have expressed the view that stringent reform is needed in the Holy Office, a committee of prelates which looks after problems of faith and morals. They have also called for a theological version of the Declaration of Human Right. Their statement is the most intelligible produced by any Catholic or Catholic group since the whole fiasco began with Pope Paul's encyclical. Pope Paul is openly accused of conducting an inquisition. Having expressed support for him and the bishops as teachers the statement continues, "At the same time, however, we know that this pastoral office cannot and must not supersede, hamper and impede the teaching task of the theologians as scholars. Any form of inquisition, however subtle, not only harms the development of a sound theology, it also causes irreparable damage to the credibility of the church as a community in the world".

Their main grouse then is that they are restrained from pursuing the truth and further when they do discover it they are restrained from telling anyone what it is—an understandably frustrating state of affairs indicative of the major evil which is perpetrated by religion in general. The preamble finishes: "We would like to fulfil our duty, which is to seek the truth and speak the truth, without being hampered by administrative measures and sanctions. We expect our freedom to be respected whenever we pronounce or publish, to the best of our knowledge and in conscience, our well-founded theological convictions". That forty

(Continued overleaf)

Freethinker

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Editor: David Reynolds

(Continued from front page)

leading theologians, who include Benoit from Jerusalem, McKenzie from the United States, Congar from Paris, and Schillebeeckx and Schoonenberg from Holland, feel deeply enough to issue publicly such a strongly worded criticism of the head of their church could surely be construed as the germs of a revolt in the Catholic church. However, let us not be optimistic too soon.

The actual points of reform, outlined in the statement call for a more representative Curia (The Papal Council of Ministers) and a more representative Holy Office. Proponents of all major theological schools in the Catholic church should be included. An age limit of seventy-five should be imposed on cardinals. Counsellors to the Holy Office should only be eminent professional theologians under the age of

seventy-five. In addition to this they specify a certain procedure which should be adopted when the Holy Office wishes to censure a theologian for his teaching. This procedure would create something not unlike a public courtroom, with particular stress laid on the necessity for the accused to be permitted to defend himself adequately.

This is all very interesting and one eagerly awaits the Vatican's reaction. Perhaps the forty will be summoned to Rome for arbitration.

A revealing, if rather trite, comment on this has already appeared in the fortnightly *New Christian*, which is basically an ecumenical publication with representatives of all the major Christian churches in this country on its editorial board. Having outlined the demands made by the forty Catholic theologians, the unnamed author continues, "They are not asking for any more than ought to be taken for granted in a reasonably mature society. Why should such elementary freedoms be denied them?"

"Once again the bogey of fear begins to raise its head. The church's hierarchy are afraid that Christian truth, of which they believe themselves to be the undisputed guardians, will be undermined if scholars are allowed to take their investigations and speculations too far. They also believe that ordinary priests and laymen will be confused, or even confounded, if some of the traditional ways of expressing the Christian faith are called in question."

The writer goes on to say that this sort of procedure is "about as far removed from the Christian gospel as anything can be". Equating truth with God he says that the church should encourage the pursuit of it, and goes on to say that whatever views are expressed no one need worry because "truth, like love, is well able to stand on its own feet and it is when the church attempts to provide artificial props that the truth is in gravest danger".

This, I would suggest, is a rather naive view. If it was so easy for truth to win through then there would be no need for the Catholics or anyone else to prop it up artificially. They don't try to obscure the views of heretical theologians for fun. The source of all this wrangling over something so straightforward as truth is that, what Christians have the nerve to call truth and to teach to children as such, is not truth at all. This must surely be becoming obvious to Christians as each new wrangle comes up. It seems ecumenism will be short-lived, if on the one hand there are to be those who realise that 'the truth' needs propping up and on the other there are those who are naive to think that if open discussion is permitted then 'the truth' will become obvious. It can't, ever, because it is not true.

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

Brighton and Hove Humanist Group: Regency House, Oriental Place, Brighton: Sunday, January 5, 5.30 p.m.: "The Population Problem", Professor SANG, PhD, FRSE (Research Professor of Genetics, Sussex University).

Bristol Humanist Group: Folk House: Sunday, January 5, 7.30 p.m. "Marriage and the Family", CYNTHIA PAUL.

Cardiff Humanist Group: Glamorgan County Council Staff Club, Westgate Street, Cardiff: Wednesday, January 8, 7.45 p.m.: "Humanists and Politics", Dr PETER BRIDGER (Lecturer in Government, University Institute of Science and Technology).

London Young Humanists: 13 Prince of Wales Terrace, London, W8: Sunday, January 5, 7 p.m.: "Art and Aggressive Society", EDWARD BOND (Author of *Saved* and other plays).

Luton Humanist Group: Carnegie Room, Central Library, Luton: Thursday, January 9, 8 p.m.: "Philosophy in Humanism", C. L. JACKSON.

South Place Ethical Society: Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London, WC1: Sunday, January 5, 11 a.m.: "Renaissance Humanism", Lord SORENSON. Admission free. Tuesday, January 7, 6.45 p.m. Discussion (Monthly theme: India Today) "History and the People", C. K. Kumar. Admission 2s (including refreshments). Members free.

Sutton Humanist Group: 67 Jasmin Road, West Ewell: Sunday, January 5, 7.30 p.m.: You are invited to a social evening.

FREETHINKER FUND

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THE SEX WAR

G. L. SIMONS

A CONTEMPORARY PHENOMENON in British society is the Battle of the Sexes, or the Sex War. The extent to which the phenomenon exists is open to debate, but there can be no doubt that many people believe a degree of conflict and tension between men and women to be inevitable in work, marriage and other fields. To some extent this doctrine is true: there is bound to be some friction in human relationships owing to differences in personality, sensitivity and psychological needs. But the extent to which this friction must exist because of sex differences is heavily exaggerated.

To some degree the idea of a Sex War has gained currency owing to progressive female emancipation. It is only recently that the working woman has become respectable. Historically, working-class women were forced into "service", mill, mine, factory and prostitution for purely economic reasons. Their toiling men-folk were unable to earn enough to maintain a family. (To an extent this is still true today: about 10 per cent of fully employed adult men earn less than £15 a week.) But although many women worked it was the comfortable middle classes who defined the value-structure of society, and accordingly it was not regarded as respectable for married women to go out to work.

Today the woman's right to work is generally recognised, but the days of discrimination against female employees are by no means over. Only 10 per cent of employed women are in jobs paid irrespective of sex. (My wife, with an honours degree in physics, was informed by two employers that it was "company policy" to pay women 90 per cent of the male salary for identical work; similar discrimination with a third employer was soon apparent.) If this naked discrimination were applied on the basis of racial origin or religion all liberal commentators would join in condemning the practice as reactionary and disreputable. But discrimination against women does not provoke such wrath. The situation is that women are persistently and blatantly exploited as cheap labour, and the practice is condemned too rarely in responsible circles.

Of course reasons are given for paying women lower wages and salaries:

(1) *Women soon leave work to start a family so their use to a firm is limited.* This is a patently absurd excuse. No-one seriously suggests offering a man a wage on the basis of the time he is likely to stay with a firm. In some jobs the male turnover is high: in others the female turnover is low. Furthermore many women return to work for a long spell after having had their children or raised their families.

(2) *Women do not work as well as men.* This is quite untrue. There are no recognisable differences in work capacity, except in jobs where brute physical force is required—and in our society women tend not to opt for such jobs.

(3) *Women have fewer commitments than men.* This is often untrue, and in any case is no business whatever of an employer. If it is anyone's business it is the government's in organising its tax-structure. No employer would seriously suggest paying bachelors less than married men for doing identical work.

The truth of the matter is that the historical attitudes persist. We still live in a patriarchal society. The vast

majority of important positions in our society are occupied by men. The newspapers, the large corporations, the nationalised industries, the BBC, the Church, the judiciary, the police, the banks—are all run by men. The overwhelming majority of male MPs determine legislation on all aspects of life that intimately affect women. Even the monarchy employs a succession convention based on male preference. Whilst the rights of women are theoretically acknowledged, most people in authority (i.e. men) are quite prepared to tolerate the unjust *status quo*.

It is the paradox between the theoretical entitlement of women to equal rights and the fact that they do not enjoy them that feeds the Sex War, insofar as such a "war" exists. Men, bred in a patriarchal climate, resent job-equality with women and equal authority between husband and wife in the home. The case for equal pay for equal work is overwhelming, and is only in question in certain circles because certain individuals, i.e. the large shareholders, are doing very well out of the present injustice.

I am not, however, suggesting that there *must* be equal authority, decision-making in the home. Every couple should adopt the attitudes that suit them best: in some marriages it may be best for the woman to dominate, in others the man. *The important point is that men and women should discover their roles for themselves and not allow society to thrust unwelcome roles upon them.* One sickening aspect of the impact of a patriarchal atmosphere is the extent to which the ordinary man in factory or office will denigrate his wife, referring to "the wife", and always trying to create the impression that she is continually under his thumb. In reality he may be a devoted husband, not exploiting his wife and willing to do his share of chores. But the social climate is such that he feels obliged to profess a superiority and authority which he may not feel.

Only when women are no longer economically exploited will it be generally possible to regard them unashamedly as they really are: as human beings, deliciously different from men in important respects, but having equal rights—in fact as well as in theory. When this stage is reached the sickness of an unconscious (or conscious) paternalism will be on the way to being cured, and men and women will be able to start living together in society and the home as equals and not, uncertain of their respective statuses, in stultifying and selfish competition—which the inferior/superior philosophy almost inevitably generates.

What I have suggested will not be radical to most rationalists, but these attitudes are not widespread in society and it is important that they should be.

TOWARDS HUMAN RIGHTS

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Annual report of the

National Secular Society

A WELL-MEANING MUDDLE

JAMES HEMMING

THIS BOOK,¹ while obviously well-intentioned and sincerely written is, in fact, an extraordinary example of double-think. Whereas Mr May and Mr Johnston frequently use contemporary educational language, they are plainly, at heart, good old-fashioned Bible thumpers who believe that moral education depends, above all else on a sound, regular injection of the Holy Scriptures.

Amid the quasi-progressive concepts, traditionalism persistently bobs up. For example: "In the first three years of the secondary course a solid foundation of biblical knowledge should be laid." This would seem to be a formula to bring about the lynching of RE teachers rather than to secure the development of moral insight among today's adolescents. Again, after calling for lively imaginative teaching of the scriptures so that children may be absorbed by the experience, the authors propound: "We would conclude, therefore, that good religious education should be child-centred and Bible centred, and above all, Christ-centred". It is just not possible, in the modern world, to be child-centred *and* Bible centred at the same time.

The confusions are so manifest, and so thick on the ground, that one boggles at the need to sort them out a little. However, let us take a look at a few of them.

The first chapter seeks to show that Britain is *really* a Christian country, without defining what is meant by this. If the authors mean that most Britons accept as good the humanity and social ethics taught by Jesus, that is one thing; if what the authors mean is that the country shares their devout conviction about the absolute rightness of traditional Christian beliefs, then that is quite another. Obviously the majority do not. Many leading Christians are themselves doubtful about the after life, the divinity of Jesus, the resurrection, and much else that the authors are themselves committed to and want to impose on the young.

The authors mention several times the results of their own, and other, surveys as proof that parents want RE to be retained in its present form. But they fail to consider the fact that parents, by and large, know little about the educational principles involved in developing moral insight in children and adolescents. Naturally parents say "yes" to RE because it *claims* to teach their children the difference between right and wrong. Incidentally, there is no reference to the gathering evidence that the majority of children don't like RE. (Schools Council, *Inquiry 1*, for example.) No-one was ever made better by being bored or affronted.

Unfortunately, objectivity is frequently lacking in this book. "Christianity", the authors write, "has never ceased in one way and another to influence the social, political, and economic development of the nation." Correct! But one could make exactly the same statement about Humanism which, at the Renaissance, rescued Europe from the dark ages of Christian authoritarianism and started the modern world on its way. Nor is respect for the individual, as the authors suggest, a discovery and monopoly of Christian thought, although Jesus powerfully restated the "Golden Rule". In fact, modern Britain is neither Christian nor Humanist, nor Jewish, nor religious, nor atheist, nor agnostic. It is an open, plural society in which any attempt to clamp down on the young any set

of dogmas as "undeniably true", must have disastrous consequences on their moral development by producing a foggy confusion of concepts and ideas. One cannot live by a conformist primitive mythology in a scientific age.

The authors even want to kid us that British law is based on Christian principles! Would that it were! But—"Judge not that ye be not judged". Where would the law be if *that* principle was put into effect? We should get a parking ticket or a prison stretch. Balance Jesus's urge to humility against the panoply and arrogance of law and what do you notice?



Chapter II, on "Why Religious Education?" is equally dubitable in its approach. "Any observer of the English educational scene," it begins, "who comes to the study of our schools with knowledge of other systems is at once struck by the way in which we have legislated for the inclusion of religion teaching." That may be true for the authors. But so far as *my* overseas visitors are concerned, I would have to substitute "shocked by" for "struck by". Not because my visitors are *opposed* to education about religion and man's religious striving—who is?—but because they are appalled by the licence to indoctrinate built into the 1944 Education Act.

The authors' attitude to the Agreed Syllabuses is particularly religious clauses of the 1944 Act—compulsory RE and a daily act of worship—are perfectly consistent with democracy. This is an untenable position to defend and they make an unavoidable hash in trying to defend it. For example, the authors quote Harold Loukes' unexceptionable statement that "the authoritative transmission of a received tradition must give way to the open search for living truth" *and yet* they seek to keep the law as it stands,

¹ *Religion in Our Schools*. Philip R. May & O. Raymond Johnston. (Hodder and Stoughton, 25s, pp. 123).

and to train teachers to present the Christian faith "with some degree of authority".

The authors' attitude to the Agreed Syllabuses is particularly confused. They admit that many of them are obviously motivated by the intention to indoctrinate and convert, but, nevertheless, want to retain them. Their suggestions for renovation fall behind rather than make an advance on the most liberal of the existing syllabuses. The authors lament the lack of ability and imagination in RE teachers but seem quite to have missed the point that few people of ability and imagination are likely to come forward as long as the autocratic, spoon-feeding approach to moral education manifest in the 1944 Act remains as their directive.

The saddest chapter in the book is one called "The Lion's Den", in which the authors seek to put heart into the sparse phalanx of RE teachers as they enter into battle with the resistances of modern adolescents. What comes through is a picture of struggling teachers grasping at straws of comfort.

One "success" story particularly bears quoting as revealing the confusions that emerge from the scriptural approach to moral teaching. A teacher set the children, as homework, to read the story of King Saul and the Amalekites. The moral message the teacher sought to evoke was the sin of King Saul's disobedience in saving the life of King Agag

and keeping the best of the Amalekites' flocks. But, of course, the real moral issue of this frightful story is that Saul was commanded by God utterly to destroy the Amalekites: "slay both man and woman, infant and suckling, ox and sheep, camel and ass" (1 Samuel 15 : 3). The story, in fact, presents race murder as virtuous—as the will of God. What are we to make of a mental attitude which uses such a story to teach the virtue of obedience?

If evidence were lacking that we need a really *new* start to moral education, this book by two members of the old guard would provide it. What is central to moral education today is not the imposition of Christian faith but the development of moral insight and personal responsibility through a whole range of experiences. This, while including knowledge of man's religious striving in its many aspects, will depend primarily on the discovery, within a purposeful, friendly school community, of what moral values are and why they matter, through participant involvement in community life, through the development of a valid perspective on the modern world, through contact with the moral aspects of all subjects, through sensitivity fostered by the arts and in other ways, and through the discussion of personal and community problems. Over against this contemporary concept of moral education the author's preference for a parcel of moral ideas wrapped up with the tenets of now dubitable dogma looks a pathetic hope indeed.

CHARLES BRADLAUGH ON RACE RELATIONS

NIGEL H. SINNOTT

AT A MEETING to commemorate the centenary of the first election campaign of Charles Bradlaugh (1833-1891) at Northampton on November 17, 1968, Mr Stephen Jakobi, representing the Liberal Party, mentioned that the great Victorian Freethinker and 'Member for India' would have been appalled at the recent speeches on immigration by Mr Enoch Powell, MP.

Strangely enough, Charles Bradlaugh echoed many of our present problems in a lecture on India in the self-same building, Northampton Town Hall, on November 19, 1883.

"Now, what is the character of the Hindus? . . . A Government Report printed in 1874 . . . says that, as a rule they are 'chaste, honest, peaceful, singularly docile, easily governed and patient'.

"Why should we insult these people? . . . I ask you—and I would have you forget the speaker in the sentiment I put—I ask you who really dislike me, or who are in any way against me—do not let these people feel that you intend to treat them always as a conquered race. If you do, they will despair of justice, and they will try revenge. . . . The past we cannot change, but we may redeem it. The shame of yesterday exists, but we may make the glory of tomorrow so great that the people may forget the iniquity which preceded it. We cannot make glory by dominance. . . . It is the school, the lessons of equal justice, interest, and love, that will win today.

"I regret that it should be needful, before an audience speaking the tongue which pretends to be identified with the traditions of liberty, to make such an appeal; but it is needful. When we find words of mocking go from such gatherings as the recent Conservative banquet at Wellingborough; when we find words of mocking go from a Con-

servative banquet at Bristol; when we are told that Mr Gladstone wants to put the Englishman with his neck under the heel of the Hindu; I say either these men are uttering wild and mad things, that they do not think, or are uttering wicked things that they may provoke an echo from the other side. The Hindus have been brave enough to fight beside us, loyal enough to keep our rule. We, at least, owe them that, having taken their land with the strong hand, we shall hold it as gently as it is possible for human hand to hold."

Eheu! semper idem! Bradlaugh's speech is, I think, a salient reminder of the need for the Freethought and Humanist movement of 1969 to continue to expose racialism in any form as yet another ignorant and harmful myth. To rephrase a very hard-trodden cliché, the price of liberty—for ethnic and other minorities in our community—is eternal vigilance on the part of us all. Bigotry soon wakes when reason slumbers.

Despite the obvious practical difficulties of assimilation, immigration, which only involves an arithmetical increase in a given population, is not the problem of our age. The essential problem is that of the geometrical increase of the human population in general, which, if unchecked, will lead to what Lord Ritchie Calder recently described as Ecumenopolis—"Hell on Earth". The remedy lies in educating mankind of all nations in the knowledge and techniques of 'artificial' birth control. Eighty years ago Charles Bradlaugh was fighting for the rights of all men and women to understand and practice contraception: the battle is still unwon!

REFERENCES: [Bradlaugh, C.] (1890) *Speeches by Charles Bradlaugh*, pp. 31-46. London: Freethought Publishing Company.

BOOK REVIEWS

G. L. SIMONS

CHRISTIANITY, FREETHINKING AND SEX by George Foss Westcott (Academy of Visual Arts, 8s).

THIS IS an interesting little booklet published under the auspices of the Academy of Visual Arts, with which FREETHINKER readers will be familiar. The booklet is divided into eleven short chapters covering in all 37 pages. The thesis is praise-worthy, if unoriginal—that it is time people viewed sexual experiences in a scientific and tolerant spirit, and abandoned the Christian “sex-is-sin” taboo which is still influential.

The important arguments are familiar and sound, and I will not summarise them. I will confine myself to minor points of criticism and some of the interesting snippets contained.

Mr Westcott says (p. 4) that “it should be remembered that Western civilisation, which is generally regarded as a great achievement, and even Western science . . . were developed in a Christian Europe”. I do not accept the implication that a temporal corollary is the same as a causative connection: I believe that science flourished *despite* Christianity, and that the “common ideology” praised by Mr Westcott is not significant in this context. A further implication that I would question is that psychiatric drugs are effective even though “they may reduce the patient’s conscious level nearer to that of a vegetable”. This is most unfair to many modern drugs and their evident successes.

I would further take issue with Mr Westcott on aspects of his interpretation of “conventional morality”. It is not true that couples, once married “are encouraged to try any variety of sexual practice they mutually agree upon” (p. 8). Research has indicated that the working classes tend to frown on experimental sex and that the middle classes are more imaginative: for example, positions of coitus other than *venus observa* are frowned upon by relatively uneducated people, and such practices are *cunnilinctus* and *fellatio* are similarly condemned. People are less tolerant of married sex than Mr Westcott believes.

An intriguing account is given of a recent Japanese book of sexual technique. Advice is given “by using roughly-shaped male and female puppets. The different coital positions are shown by different photographs of the male puppet and of the female puppet in every position, and the user of the book has to use his imagination to visualise their union in sexual intercourse . . .” (p. 19). Similarly fascinating is information about German-devised facilities: “. . . many of the special sex-enhancing devices developed in Germany are now on sale in England, apparently quite legally. These devices include dildoes, corresponding male masturbating instruments, strap-on phalluses for impotent males, provided with means for stimulating ejaculation, also a variety of condoms with self-stimulating corrugations, etc.” (p. 34).

There is more information about Germany and (inevitably) Sweden and Denmark. Mr Westcott poses a number of relevant questions that should be tackled in a scientific way, and he makes a plea for tolerance and love of others. His sociology and psychology seem rather superficial, but he clearly and reasonably represents an attitude which, if widespread, would allow a happier world.

PATRICK BRYMER

I LIKE IT HERE. Kingsley Amis (Penguin).

KINGSLEY AMIS, yet again, has produced another very intriguing book. It is a slightly amusing, slightly satirical, yet very serious work on contemporary political thought. The difficulty lies in separating what is supposed to be satirical from what is serious, and revealing the treasure that it holds. For it is easy to discover one line of thought and follow it to its conclusion, but it is hard to concentrate on more than one. The reader tends to cling to one and ignore the others.

Garnet Bowen, is a typical nondescript little Welsh journalist, with those typically grandiose aspirations to be a “Great Writer”. In his youthful search for literary stardom, he is offered by a well-off friend, the job of trailing a mysterious author in Portugal. With solemn innocence he sets off, family and all, to that famed word that lifted up so many people’s hearts, when this book was first written—“abroad”. It is a typical travelogue from the 1950’s—it hearkens to the same garlic-ridden food, the same cheap alcohol, the same awful English tourists, the same hole-in-the-ground routine that has been churned out again and again . . . and again. And it even has the “foreign bint”, that poor literary figure who has been so misused by English travellers, despite her old age. As an amusing picture of the Englishman’s first impressions of a foreign country, it fails abysmally.

But Garnet Bowen, as a character, is intriguing. Perhaps it is because he is the only character in the book that is a character at all; certainly it is because the reader tends to identify with him. His success lies in his typicality. He is more the sort of person that we all are—he has his high aspirations and his personal opinions—yet one tends to laugh at him as well. At times, the satire projected at him, is directed at the reader too.

There are mysterious airs surrounding the release of this book by Penguin. One asks one’s self—what is the point. I believe that ingrained in the story, symbolically there lies Kingsley Amis’ political views and possibly his religious views. Politically, due to the recent student protest movement and the call for revolution, and religiously, because his views were in need of a definition.

The journey of “our hero”, Garnet Bowen, is similar to the journey of Gulliver. England symbolises the traditional peaceful, almost heavenly haven whereas Portugal ironically stands for the new and attractive, the revolutionary idea, and chaos. Garnet is interposed to choose the path he wants to take. Is the choice of Garnet Bowen, the choice of Kingsley Amis? I tend to think it is.

“Know the enemy
He is a foreigner
Any foreigner
Learn to laugh at him.”

FILM REVIEW

AL SCHROEDER

LE ROI DE COEURS (King of Hearts), Cameo Poly, Upper Regent Street, London, W1.

Has Phillipe de Broca made an anti-war film?

THIS COMEDY begins quite early one morning, towards the end of World War One, when a battalion of retreating Germans plant a ton of explosives in a little town located in the French countryside north of Paris. Learning of their imminent destruction, the town’s inhabitants desert their homes in their flight abandoning all those who might prove burdensome to them, namely the animals in the zoo and the lunatics in the asylum. With the town deserted, the lunatics, innocent and harmless, realise their fondest dreams and begin occupying the empty houses and setting themselves up in the shops, churches and bordellos of their former inhabitants. The animals in the zoo are set free and it is an atmosphere of gaiety and romance that reigns that morning in the pretty sunlit town.

And it is into this scene of anarchic delights that a British soldier arrives to locate the ammunition stronghold and dismantle the timing device which has been set to detonate the explosives. Although the lunatics beguile him into joining them in their fantasies, and allowing them to crown him their King and present him with a beautiful virgin for his Queen, he manages to find the detonating mechanism and dismantles it in time to save the town and his new found friends from destruction. The allied army arrives. The inhabitants return to their homes—the lunatics to their asylum, and the town once more takes on its previous character. The British soldier is decorated as a hero and sent on another mission, this time to blow up the next little town. Unable to face this real act of war he deserts from the army and returns to his friends in the asylum.

Is this film what we have come to expect from films set in time of war? Indeed not! Phillipe de Broca’s earlier films (*The Five Day Lover*, *The Joker*, *Playing at Love*) were delightful anti-realist romances whose jovial characters lived in a world of make-believe and fantasy where such things as pain and suffering were never experienced—enchanting and endearing when set among the sophisticated intrigues of a modern Parisian society. But in *King of Hearts*, by imposing these fairy-tale values on characters (in-mates of a lunatic asylum) in a film set during World War One, he has created something of a paradox: an anti-realist war film.

Ah yes! His picture of a world without war is beautiful and touching, but to put his persuasions into the manners and behaviour of the mad would seem a rebuke against the intelligence of his audience. He suggests that only the insane perceive the profound absurdities of war, and that the sane are those capable of enduring pain and suffering and therefore deserve the harsh realities of war to justify and give meaning to their existences. How ludicrous!

But the film is a comedy and there are some funny moments in it. However, de Broca’s effortless ability to convey a *joie de vivre* should be contained in films where the inconsequential frivolities of the big cities are his themes. War is hell and if a film, even a comedy, set in time of war does not convey this then there is not a moment’s truth to be found in that film.

LETTERS

Sex and Secularism

I DON'T KNOW about you, but I am not prepared to accept arrogant instructions from Mr F. H. Snow.

He finds frank discussion of sex 'salacious', 'sensual' and 'a pornographic subject'. Like St Paul, he takes up the torch for 'decency'. His letter is a good illustration of the irrationality I complained about.

However, he asks two important questions. "Has youth anything to learn about how to breed?" The answer to this one is that young people are still extremely ignorant about sex, as surveys have shown, even amongst teachers in training. But what is worse is that they have a great deal to learn about how *not* to breed. The traditional Christian attitude to contraception still makes it a furtive and improper matter, and prevents the spread of knowledge by pretending that sex is 'pornographic' and 'indecent' it is sad to see Mr Snow on their side.

The answer to his other question follows from this: "Is the spate of illegitimate births the result of that secrecy?" Yes.

If sexuality and secularism are to be in conflict, it is not sex that will disappear. Why, after so many struggling years, does the NSS have so few members, and so few of those young? Mr Snow thinks that "the public which it must woo in order to survive" is concerned only to hear the case against God, and objects to the intrusion of other matters, finding discussion of sex particularly shocking. But the public we need to aim at is in fact the mass of enthusiastic and progressive agnostics amongst the younger generation. They will not join, partly because they find the movement stuffed with old traditionalists, pompous, conservative, emotional, out of touch with modern reality, and insufficiently interested in vital social topics such as sexual freedom. MAURICE HILL.

I WAS very surprised and disappointed to read F. H. Snow's letter (December 21). To my mind sex is one of the most important aspects of a man's life and should be discussed as such. Unless a person's sex-life is satisfactory he is an incomplete and frustrated being.

As to obscenity I have never thought anything obscene except cruelty and I have never been able to understand why 'fuck' is obscene and not 'sexual intercourse'. Both mean exactly the same thing.

Why illegitimate children? There should be none. A child is a child and should have the same legal status whether his parents are married or not. Personally I think rushing into marriage is wrong. How can anyone swear they will love and live with only one person "until death us do part" unless they try first. It's madness. Most people do it to be respectable, and until our laws are changed they will go on doing so, with misery very often all round.

Last question, what does F. H. Snow mean by salacious? Do let us get rid of the idea of equating sex with guilt.

LILIAN MIDDLETON.

RE: A Victim's View

WITH REGARD to your edition of November 2, I heartily agree with your article on religious education. I myself have to attend this compulsory assembly, but take no part in the proceedings, and while the 'Lord's prayer' is being said, neither mutter the words in parrot fashion, nor bow my head. Why should I? I am *not* ashamed.

Religious education has a very one-sided view and members of staff concerned with ramming religion down our throats do not seem to realise, nor do many other people, that the unbelievers know what they don't believe, unlike many 'Christians', who believe because they were brainwashed by religious education, and also feel that they need to fit in with religious society.

I feel that if assembly were for people who feel inclined to worship, that a large majority of the school would not attend.

Surely a simple solution would be to hold religious instruction on Sundays, at the school, so that people who feel they need a religious education, may receive one.

Many adults seem to believe that children are unable to think for themselves, therefore are inclined to talk down to them, not

treating them as able-minded adolescents, but 'teenage' morons. Most adolescents are able to think for themselves, and decide their own views about religion, so why should they have to suffer religious assembly each morning, plus religious instruction, if they have decided to be an unbeliever? Why should parents' permission be sought? Do parents make decisions where the offspring concerned may hold a different opinion? Why should they be denied the right to become members of the public who can think for themselves and be proud of it? Why does the church always govern the way of education with these religious rituals?

I am just fifteen and fully realise my views, and have realised the domination of religion on the society for a very long time.

The excuse made by my school, that we should attend this religious assembly, is that we may miss important notices. Surely these notices could be pinned on a notice board, or read out at registration.

Is a child unable to decide whether to accept a religion or not, that the state has to decide for them, while they are still at school? Because a child has been forced to pay attention to this rigmarole, is religion being treated as just another of these daily customs, such as eating lunch, or breakfast, and not how the church intended it to be treated?

I only hope the Secretary of State for Education is brought to read that edition of the FREETHINKER. FIONA PORTER.

Dons and Students

MR MEULEN contends that universities should "confine themselves to their original function" which he defines as "providing a place where a life of scholarship can be pursued". Frankly, such a view puts King Canute in the shade.

In the first place, this isn't the "original function" of universities which was to train the leaders of church and state in the disciplines of thought needed, that is, the law and theology.

A university is not, and should not be, some kind of secular academic monastery isolated from the community which sustains it. How does Mr Meulen think a university can provide courses in engineering, medicine, economics—to name only three main faculties—without providing education as an aid to a career in industry? As for the old cliché about the employer who looks for "examination degrees" in an applicant instead of "guts and willingness", there is surely nothing to stop him from looking for all of these things and there are today many technical posts in industry which only a graduate could possibly fill.

I serve on the governing bodies of two Universities—London and Brunel—and on the Appointments Board of the former. My experience has taught me the exact opposite of Mr Meulen's ideas. All the big employers are only too eager to recruit graduates and many of them in fact send "talent scouts" to scour the universities for students even before they have taken their degrees.

In short I feel Mr Meulen is just living in the past. This is, perhaps, revealed very clearly in his statement that "the boy who wants to succeed will be able to get in libraries all the knowledge he wants". This is pure and unadulterated nonsense. Without the education required, nobody can even use a library properly, much less understand its contents. Indeed one of the most valuable parts of a university education is, not to "cram" the student with "knowledge", but rather to teach him how to use the vast and complex stores of knowledge now available to find out anything he wants to know.

I was sorry to read of Mr Michael Cregan's expulsion from his University. Did he, I wonder, ever consult the statutes of that University to find out whether or not he could appeal against the decision to the Visitor of that University?

J. STEWART COOK.

Foiled again!

ON THE auspicious evening of Friday, December 13 twenty-one members of the London Young Humanists met at Schmidt's Restaurant in Charlotte Street to celebrate the society's first Un-Christmas Dinner in memory of George Bernard Shaw's remark, "I hate Christmas".

The surprise event of the evening was the arrival of a choir of men and women in Regency costume who proceeded to entertain the assembled company and other diners with a rendition of 'In the bleak mid-winter', 'Good King Wenceslas' and 'The First Noel'. They then came round with collecting tins which, to the relief of those concerned, were for cancer research. Honour was thus satisfied, and an enjoyable evening spent by all.

N. H. SINNOTT, Membership Secretary, L.Y.H.

More evidence of a horrifying heaven

RETURNING from Majorca via Barcelona, just before the last war, we got into conversation on the boat with an American gentleman, a permanent resident in Barcelona.

This gentleman invited me and three other friends to attend an unusual ceremony at the Barcelona bullring, just before a bullfight was due to take place.

We at first refused, as we had no wish to witness any fighting. However, as the gentleman insisted, assuring us that the ceremony was altogether distinct from the fighting and that we should not have to venture inside the precincts of the ring, we eventually accepted.

At the appointed day and time, our group was taken to the chapel adjoining the bullring, to witness the blessing of the performers: matadors, picadors, banderillos, all dressed up in their colourful attire. We watched the priest give them the last sacraments, each one in turn, as they were kneeling down apparently sunk in deep devotion. Afterwards the priest blessed the sword, which was brought to him on a gold embroidered red cushion.

I must say the ceremony was most impressive, and left a weird sort of macabre impression on the onlookers.

But at the same time we could not help feeling horrified at the hypocrisy of a minister of a religion claiming to uphold the principles of Christian charity who was deliberately perpetuating the cruel rituals of the dark ages and bestowing his blessings on the vile tormentors of dumb animals.

MAY L. BUTLER.

Two fingers ?

IN THE Athens National Museum there is to be seen a very large funeral stele showing a portrait of the deceased sitting on a chair with two women standing beside him. One of the women has the second and third fingers (nearest to the thumb) raised in her right hand as if to indicate some symbolic sign in the presence of the loved one. The stele dates from about B.C. 300.

In the post-war excavations underneath St Peter's in Rome there was discovered a mausoleum which belonged to the Marcii family. On the sarcophagus lid is depicted in marble a representation of Marcia. Here again, she is shown with the same two fingers raised of the right hand, the other fingers being bent as in the Greek stele. The grave is non-Christian, dating from about 300 A.D.

Viewers on TV may have noticed that the Pope raises the same two fingers of his right hand when giving the papal blessing to the crowd in St Peter's Square, and, of course, other priests and prelates give the same sign when they bless their congregation.

We Freethinkers, Humanists, Rationalists are well aware that the Christians took over lock, stock and barrel many of the "pagan" beliefs, representations, etc., and made them part and parcel of the Christian religion such, for example, as the Good Shepherd, Virgin and Child, to name only two. But what was the significance of the raised two fingers on gravestones in Greek and Roman cemeteries which has resulted in the Christians taking this over also?

All of us are, of course, also aware that in these days the raised two fingers are regarded as a rude or obscene gesture on the owner's part, but this, I believe, is of recent origin, and certainly has no connection with the sign on funeral steles, and as used by the Church—as I need hardly say!

Can someone enlighten me, please?

EDGAR M. KINGSTON.

Dons and Students

MR MEULEN may deem his letter of November 23 a "reply to Mr Cregan", but it is no such thing. He raises the tired old question of student loans to replace grants, and lauds the qualities of "guts" and "willingness"—presumably the "guts" to work hard for his employer's profit with none of this nonsense about agitation and representation—but does not touch upon the issues which I raised.

If dons are to be completely autonomous, why should they not send down a student for expressing views on Greek architecture with which they are in disagreement? Or because they don't approve of his choice in socks? Or because his face is not to their liking? And if government grants are to be rejected, where is the cash to maintain old universities and to build new ones going to come from?

I therefore put two direct questions to Mr Meulen: (a) Who is going to finance his "private enterprise" universities? and (b) Is there is to be any limit to the power of the dons? If so, where is it to be set, and who is to be responsible for ensuring that the dons do not overstep it?

And could we, this time, really have a reply?

MICHAEL CREGAN.

Animal slaughter

I AM SENDING to you with a little feeling of hopelessness a letter from *The Times* of December 7 giving the Jewish case for continued ritual slaughter.

No rational person will fail to see that your unqualified support for the Christian case in this matter is an example scarcely to be followed. To quote uncritically a line which claims that "veterinary surgeons, doctors and slaughtermen say it is cruel" is cruel to those of us who were attracted to the FREETHINKER and the Secular movement because of its claim to be rational.

Some of your contributors of late have been very good. Try and see if you can raise the standard of your critical faculties and stop accepting any old horse manure as long as it knocks some religion.

GERALD SAMUEL.

Pot in perspective

ROBERT BROEDER'S article (December 14) favoured pot mainly because (1) he liked it, and (2) he thinks it is not as harmful as alcohol or tobacco. May I comment from the point of view of the detached majority? Reason (1) is fine but reason (2) is negative. The positions of alcohol and tobacco in our society are, on balance, regrettable, but cannot easily be undone. We have seen TV interviews strongly suggesting the stepping-stone to hard stuff and we fear diminution of responsibility in such forms as drunken or doped drivers. We regret the "big-time" image which readily accrues to drink, smoking, dangerous driving and drugs in the eyes of youth. We have some contempt for the elevation of these things to the height of esteem but do not regard them as "evil".

If smoking had not become established society would on balance be the better for it. Tranquilisers for therapeutic use are readily prescribed by doctors. Smoking offers some benefits but these are not enough to demand its introduction to society which could manage very well without it. How can pot be so important except to one who craves (at least mildly) for more of it?

Commerce and advertising present some danger in smoking, alcohol, and dangerous driving. There is plenty of material to encourage youth to take to these for their big-time kicks to the detriment of society. My first thoughts would favour stronger measures than for the US smoking advertising, severely limiting the amount and type of advertising and levying a special tax to sponsor extensive propaganda (a) to present the harmful physical and social effects, and (b) to belittle the associated images.

MIKE O'CARROLL.

Free Will

G L. SIMONS surely makes an unwarrantable assertion when he claims (November 30) that if one has a reason for an action, that reason must be caused. We generally know that we have a reason for our action, but we do not know if that reason is caused or not. It may be spontaneous. Quantum physics has demonstrated that atomic action is quite unpredictable in about ten per cent of cases, and admits that the variations may be spontaneous.

We all act on the assumption that we can freely choose. Nobody really believes that he is merely conscious of his thought processes, and that his thoughts are merely a part of a gigantic cosmic machine grinding to an unknown purpose. Nobody really thinks that by taking thought he cannot change his actions. That way lies madness.

HENRY MEULEN.

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