

# Freethinker

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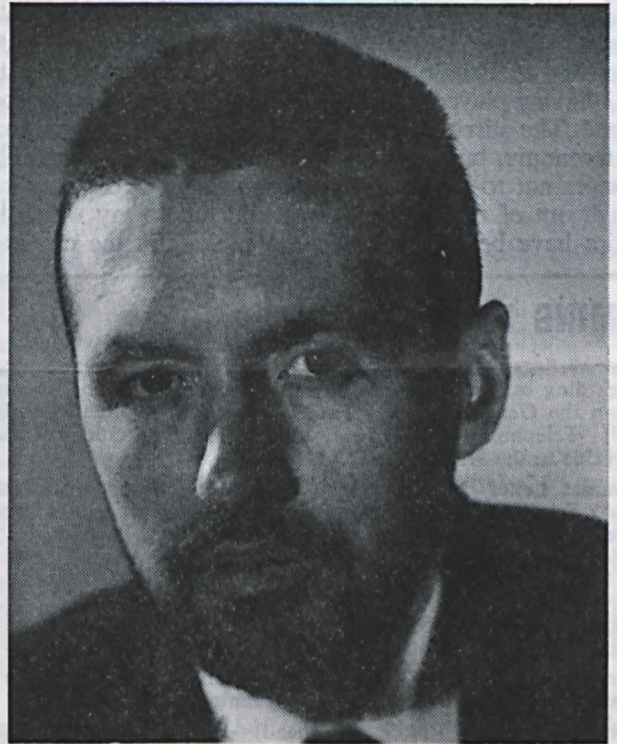
## DISTINGUISHED SPONSORS FOR FUND TO FIGHT SCHOOL RELIGION

THE PRIMARY PURPOSE of an education should be to provide its recipient with guidelines on which to conduct his life—in short to provide him with a philosophy. Each individual should be free to form his own philosophy, drawing on his education for the salient facts. Thus an educational system, which in any field teaches opinion as fact or presents opinions in a biased fashion, is restricting the freedom of its pupils to decide on their own way of life. Of course all our philosophies are influenced by the world around us, but this is not arbitrary and is inevitable. The teaching of religion can utilise neither of these excuses, and as such represents a grave and calculated assault on the freedom of individual minds—and those minds are the minds of children and as such are unlikely to fully recover.

It is on these grounds that the FREETHINKER welcomes the setting up of the 'Secular Education Appeal' with its distinguished sponsors, and on these grounds that we reproduce in full a press statement from David Tribe, the President of the National Secular Society, which has initiated the appeal:

*A few years ago the issue of religion in schools was virtually unheard of outside dissident staffrooms and Christian committees pondering why student interest and attainment in religious instruction and worship were so low. Today it is a frontrunner in the news items and correspondence columns of the religious, humanist and educational press, a leading preoccupation of the educational correspondents of the national dailies, the subject of many radio and television debates and discussions, the concern of the churches, teacher unions, pupil power, National Council for Civil Liberties, United Kingdom Committee for Human Rights Year, student debating groups, Confederation of Associations for the Advancement of State Education, parent-teacher bodies and the Secretary of State for Education and Science.*

*What has happened in the meantime? Many social and psychological seeds have germinated together. They might have burst into the open spontaneously. But their growth owes not a little to careful watering by the National Secular Society. Not that this could have had the desired effect if the water were stagnant and unproductive. Like Mark Antony we simply told the people that which they themselves did know. This was the nourishment that turned an ash-heap of discontent and frustration into a blossoming of moral consciousness and reformist agitation.*



Photograph by Jean Straker  
David Tribe, President of the National Secular Society.

*The work has been onerous and expensive. Recognising this, a number of distinguished educationists have come forward to sponsor a Secular Education Appeal. With the Secretary of State for Education threatening to rush through a new Education Act perpetuating the humbug, indoctrination and credal segregation of the present set-up, urgent action is required. We need people to organise discussion groups, distribute our free literature and modestly-priced pamphlets, write to their MPs, directors of education and local papers about the injustice and educational disaster of the imposition of unproven minority beliefs. Above all we need money: hundreds of pounds to inform MPs, LEAs and the media, thousands to mobilise teachers, hundreds of thousands to contact every parent in the country. Whatever donors make available to us will be used gratefully, efficiently and, with anticipated support, effectively.*

An appeal letter signed by the sponsors is to be widely circulated. Donations should be sent to: The National Secular Society, 103 Borough High Street, London, SE1.

# Freethinker

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Editor: David Reynolds

The views expressed by the contributors to FREETHINKER are not necessarily those of the Editor or the Board.

## MOTHERS BEWARE!

A NON-DESCRIPT printed sheet arrived at the FREETHINKER offices last week announcing the advent of a "National Cleansing Crusade". In case it is thought that I have suddenly taken it into my head to write a paragraph about lavatory bowls, may I say that the "National Cleansing Crusade" is not what it might seem. The sheet was headed "Mothers of Britain—'Wake Up'", but my hopes of the GPO having played their tricks on Marie Stopes were soon dashed. The stirring headline was followed by a verse from Deuteronomy, but somehow this quotation from the Bible manages not to be the most assinine sentence on the sheet, though out of the following it is difficult to say which is: (Italics have been substituted for capitals in the original.)

## COMING EVENTS

National Secular Society. Details of membership and inquiries regarding bequests and secular funeral services may be obtained from the General Secretary, 103 Borough High Street, London, SE1. Telephone 01-407 2717. Cheques, etc., should be made payable to the NSS.

Humanist Letter Network (International) and Humanist Postal Book Service (secondhand books bought and sold). For information or catalogue send 6d stamp to Kit Mouat, Mercers, Cuckfield, Sussex.

### OUTDOOR

Edinburgh Branch NSS (The Mound)—Sunday afternoon and evening: Messrs. Cronan and McRae.

Manchester Branch NSS, Platt Fields, Sunday afternoon, 3 p.m.: Car Park, Victoria Street, Sunday evenings, 8 p.m.

Merseyside Branch NSS (Pierhead)—Meetings: Wednesdays, 1 p.m.: Sundays, 3 p.m. and 7.30 p.m.

Nottingham Branch NSS (Old Market Square), every Friday, 1 p.m.: T. M. Mosley.

### INDOOR

Humanist Housing Association: The official opening of Rose Bush Court, 35 Parkhill Road, London, NW3, will take place on Saturday, June 7th, at 3.30 p.m. The ceremony will be performed by the Minister for Housing and Local Government, the Rt. Hon. Anthony Greenwood, MP.

Admission will be by ticket only because of limited accommodation. Applications for tickets should be sent to the Secretary, Humanist Housing Association, Rose Bush Court, 35 Parkhill Road, London, NW3. Please enclose a stamped addressed envelope.

London Young Humanists: 13 Prince of Wales Terrace, London, W8: Sunday, June 1, 7 p.m.: "Teaching in Botswana", Don Baker.

South Place Ethical Society: Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London, WC1: Sunday, June 1, 11 a.m.: "The Changing Face of Marxism", Dr John Lewis.

Thomas Paine Society and the Norwich Public Library: Central Library, Bethel Street, Norwich: Saturday, June 7, 11 a.m.: Dr Howard Temperley (University of East Anglia) will open an exhibition in commemoration of the 175th anniversary of the publication in Britain of *The Age of Reason*. The exhibition will remain open during normal library hours until July 5.

"We are a nation gone mad . . . Death penalty abolished . . . Child rapists and killer live . . . Sodomy is legal . . . Sex taught in our schools . . . With mongrelisation advocated . . . and all because a handful of MPs and bishops have forced these abominable laws upon the decent people of Great Britain.

"These Humanist Wreckers in our Parliaments, not content with passing laws permitting child killers and murderers-in-general to live, have legalised sodomy and do murder innocence.

"Wake Up . . . Mothers of a Britain gone mad . . . for if we who are responsible are to ensure the safety and decency of a truly Christian Heritage . . . then we must discriminate . . . give greater attention to the religious and national origins of all future Candidates for government . . . and . . . refuse your vote to supporters of these God dishonouring laws which appal the vast majority of decent men and women of Great Britain.

"Cry . . . shame to all men in Church and Government who degrade Britain through the act of sodomy.

"God save Britain from the Godless, in the faith that triumphs, *Veru Fletcher*."

That someone has used their money to publicise their remarkable ignorance is perhaps amusing. However, racialism is decidedly unfunny, as is the established fact that the children of those puritanically obsessed with sex tend to become the kind of perverts, from whom Mrs Fletcher is hoping her God will save her and her country. A God who is prepared to extinguish harmless sodomites, before tackling malicious racist, who distribute inflammatory rubbish, would be unworthy of his name. That he has not yet managed to deal with either would, I venture to suggest, render his existence just a little dubious.

## HUMANISM, CHRISTIANITY AND SEX

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# RELIGION—WHY TEACH UNTRUTHS?

MARGARET KNIGHT

AN IMPORTANT new Education Bill is shortly to come before Parliament. It is mainly concerned with getting rid of the 11-plus examination and with regularising the position of comprehensive schools. But it will cover the whole field of education.

In anticipation of this Bill, pressure is now building up from many sides for a radical change in the present system of religious instruction and daily worship in state schools—a system which is imposed in England by law and in Scotland by "use and wont".

The British Humanist Association, the National Secular Society and the Humanist Teachers' Association are in the forefront of the movement for reform. But the pressure does not come only from Humanists. Both the Fabian Society and the Liberal party, for example, have issued pamphlets calling for change—the Liberal pamphlet being significantly entitled "Education or Indoctrination?"

The reformers, however, can look for no support from the Minister for Education and Science. Mr Short, a former secondary modern headmaster, has several times expressed his uncompromising opposition to any change in the present system.

His most recent pronouncement was at the opening of a new church school in Northumberland, when he said: "All who care about the preservation of the Christian character of our country must man the barricades. If we do not do so, within two generations Britain will cease to be a Christian country".

This statement is more revealing than perhaps the minister intended. It shows an unexpectedly lively appreciation of the strength of the opposition to "RI". And it also clearly implies that if children are not indoctrinated with Christian beliefs when they are too young to be critical, there is little chance of their accepting them at a maturer age.

Mr Short clearly feels that this would be disastrous. Yet, surprisingly, he makes no particular claim for the truth of Christian beliefs.

When, in the course of a television interview, he was pressed on this point, he would commit himself to nothing more definite than that there is "an ultimate reality of some kind beyond the material world" (*The Listener*, July 11, 1968).

It is difficult to attach a clear meaning to this statement, but whatever it means, it certainly falls far short of Christian theism, which does not talk of "ultimate reality", but of a personal God, "Maker of Heaven and Earth", who, 2,000 years ago manifested himself briefly in human form in one of the remoter provinces of the Roman Empire.

No one can reasonably be called a Christian unless he believes at least in the incarnation. But none of the minister's public utterances suggest that he himself believes in it, or in any other of the specifically Christian doctrines such as the resurrection or the life hereafter.

In the television interview already mentioned, the most he would say was that the existence of God is "a reasonable hypothesis".

Why, then, is he so convinced of the necessity of teaching Christian belief to children? Because, he says, it will "enrich their personal lives" and give them "a moral basis for their relationships with other people".

But there is surely something paradoxical about trying to promote truthfulness and other virtues among children by teaching them things that are not true.

An inquiry among sixth-formers conducted in the early 1960s (Edwin Cox, *Sixth Form Religion*, SCM Press), showed that slightly more than half of them (just over 63 per cent of boys and just over 37 per cent of girls) rejected the belief in the divinity of Jesus. Today the proportion of unbelievers is probably higher.

Now, if children are taught, as they frequently are at present, that moral obligation and Christian belief are in some way inseparably connected, there is an obvious danger that those who later reject the beliefs will reject the morality also.

And there is yet another objection to equating "morality" with "Christian morality". It is often suggested that, whether or not Jesus was more than human, his moral teachings remain for all time as the best possible guide to the good life. But this is by no means obvious.

The Christian ideals of love and human brotherhood are of course admirable. But they were not introduced into the world by Jesus, and are in no sense exclusively Christian. They were proclaimed by the Humanist philosophers of China in the sixth century BC, and later in classical Greece and Rome by the Stoics and Epicureans. And they are basic to present-day Humanism.

The ethical teachings that are peculiar to Christianity have less to commend them—and in any case are often irrelevant to the world today.

Christianity is an ascetic, other-worldly Oriental religion, which originated among a subject people living under foreign domination, who looked forward with considerable confidence to the approaching end of the world.

Much of Jesus' moral teaching is incomprehensible until it is seen in its historical context. For example—whatever preachers may say—"resist not evil" and "take no thought for the morrow" are not acceptable as general rules of life.

But "resist not evil" may well have been sound advice to the Palestinian Jew who was being pushed around by the Roman soldiery. And "take no thought for the morrow" becomes less puzzling when we realise that the speaker believed that the end of the world was imminent.

"There be some standing here that shall not taste of death till they see the Son of Man coming in his kingdom" (Matthew 16 : 28).

If, however, children are taught that these and similar pronouncements (such as "turn the other cheek" and "blessed are the poor in spirit") contain the essence of moral wisdom and provide the best possible guide to the conduct of life today, they can hardly be blamed for feeling that morality is just another of those school things that have nothing to do with real life.

Humanists, of course, do not dispute that children should hear the Christian stories (as they hear other traditional stories, such as those of King Arthur and St George and the Dragon), and that they should receive some instruction about (as distinct from in) the doctrines of the Christian Church. Such knowledge is essential to the understanding of much of European history, art and literature.

But objective teaching of this sort about Christianity is very different from the present agreed-syllabus type of instruction which is explicitly aimed at making children into believing Christians. To replace the latter by the former is one of the aims of the current Humanist campaign.

[Reprinted from *The Evening Express* (Aberdeen).]

# RUSSELL'S MATHEMATICAL PHILOSOPHY

G. L. SIMONS

## SECOND OF NINE ARTICLES

BERTRAND RUSSELL started mathematical philosophy at the age of eleven when he questioned the need to assume the axioms of Euclid. Other (more mature) mathematicians had done the same and demonstrated the possibility of non-Euclidean geometries. Lobachevsky and Raiman had shown that by omitting Euclid's parallel axiom it was possible to evolve different geometries. When Russell later discovered non-Euclidean geometry he was delighted.

He was drawn to mathematical philosophy for a number of reasons: he wished to discover whether anything at all could be known with certainty—and it seemed to him that such knowledge would most likely be found in mathematics; to a degree he seemed to require the security which a quickly ebbing religious faith had failed to provide; and he found the study of mathematics a richly rewarding aesthetic experience—to Russell, mathematics is capable of a fine and enduring beauty. He characterises his feelings well in Chapter IV of *Mysticism and Logic*:

"Mathematics, rightly viewed, possesses not only truth, but supreme beauty—a beauty cold and austere, like that of sculpture, without appeal to any part of our weaker nature, without the gorgeous trappings of painting or music, yet sublimely pure, and capable of a stern perfection such as only the greatest art can show. The true spirit of delight, the exaltation, the sense of being more than man, which is the touchstone of the highest excellence, is to be found in mathematics as surely as in poetry."

In 1900, partly under the influence of the logician Peano, Russell came to believe that logic and mathematics were one, that the whole edifice of pure mathematics could be deduced from the principles of formal logic. If true, the theory has profound philosophical implications, not just for mathematics, but for epistemology in general. Historically mathematics had been regarded with a strange awe. Thinkers had not understood the nature of numbers and the curious relations they had to each other, and in consequence mathematics had come to acquire a metaphysical significance outside the scope of the empirical philosopher. What Russell's theory entailed was a de-mystification of mathematics, a demonstration that it was understandable in principle in terms of logical relations. The unification of mathematics and logic in this way has been compared with the unification of physics and chemistry following insights into sub-atomic structure; and Russell's mathematical work has also been compared to Darwin's on evolution. Darwin did not invent the idea of biological evolution, but by dint of great scientific ability and painstaking research he established the general theory beyond reasonable doubt. Similarly the unity of logic and mathematics had been posited before Russell but it was only with his work (and that of A. N. Whitehead) that the theory was systematically evolved in all its complex detail.

The work involved in demonstrating the unity of logic and mathematics ("logic is the youth of mathematics and mathematics is the manhood of logic") is based on a number of fundamental theories. Two of the most significant of these are found in the works of Peano and Frege (who have gained added historical significance because of Russell's subsequent work). If continuity was to be established between logic and mathematics it was necessary to show that the simplest mathematical concepts had continuity with higher mathematics (calculus, tensor analysis, Laplace transforms, Bessel functions, etc.) and to show that the simplest mathematical concepts could be defined in terms

of the concepts of pure logic. Peano began the work on the first of these two tasks; Frege began the work on the second. Russell, first on his own and later with Whitehead as collaborator, united the work of the two and developed the union with unprecedented rigour and detail.

Peano posited three primitive ideas (nought, number, successor), and five primitive propositions (nought is a number, the successor of any number is a number, etc.). These ideas and propositions became, in Russell's words, "hostages for the whole of traditional pure mathematics". That is, if the theory of natural numbers could be derived from the primitive ideas and propositions—and this was Peano's aim—and if the natural number series was shown to be adequate, with certain deductive rules, for the rest of mathematics, then the first important continuity had been established.

Frege began the task of showing that Peano's primitive ideas could be defined in terms of pure logic, thus establishing the second half of the continuity. In particular Frege worked on the concept of number, and he tried to show that this could be defined in terms of the logical concept of class. Russell gives a good account of this attempt in Chapter 2 of *Introduction to Mathematical Philosophy*.

Russell's own work in this field began at the turn of the century with an article on the logic of relations (published in Peano's journal), and continued until he was nearly forty. *The Principles of Mathematics* (1903) was Russell's first thorough-going attempt to establish the theory of the logic/mathematics unity. The work begins with a bold statement that summarises the thesis:

"Pure mathematics is the class of all propositions of the form 'p implies q', where p and q are propositions containing one or more variables, the same in the two propositions, and neither p nor q contains any constants except logical constants."

This work runs to 435 pages and is mainly cast in prose. Russell intended to write a symbolic follow-up to the work, but then he began a long collaboration with Whitehead which terminated in the three volumes of *Principia Mathematica* (a fourth volume on geometry was projected but never completed). The three volumes run to nearly 2,000 pages and are largely cast in a special symbology devised by Russell and Whitehead. Alan Wood (author of the popular biography *Bertrand Russell: The Passionate Sceptic*) remarks that "probably not more than twenty people" have ever read *Principia Mathematica* right through. Russell himself is even more pessimistic. With characteristic wit he comments in *My Philosophical Development*: "I used to know of only six people who had read the later parts of the book. Three of these were Poles, subsequently (I believe) liquidated by Hitler. The other three were Texans, subsequently successfully assimilated".

In addition to the central thesis a number of important points were established in *Principia Mathematica*. Alan Wood mentions the way its symbology is now written into analysis, the clarification of the notion of a limit, the discussion of mathematic induction, the distinction between infinite and reflexive classes, and the demonstration of the care needed to establish inequality between particular infinite numbers. Godel has stressed the importance of Russell's work on the logical paradoxes to which Cantor's set theory had led.

But not all thinkers welcomed *Principia Mathematica*. Two schools did not accept the central thesis: the Formalists, led by Hilbert; and the Intuitionists, led by Brouwer. The theory of the Formalists consists in the idea that arithmetical symbols are meaningless marks and nothing more, and that the rules of arithmetic are arbitrary like the rules of chess. Russell has dubbed this position "an unsatisfactory evasion", and he inclined to take the Intuitionist's theory more seriously. Brouwer and his followers denied the law of excluded middle, and maintained that propositions can only be said to be true or false when there is some way of ascertaining which of these they are; or simply, "true" should be identified with "verifiable". Russell comments on this in Chapter X of *My Philosophical Development* and in detail in the *Inquiry into Meaning and Truth*.

Following *Principia Mathematica* Russell did little further

work apart from papers to journals, on symbolic logic and its relationship to mathematics. His later philosophical interest centred on the nature of the physical world. To some extent this interest involved him in an examination of the nature of probability theory, and pages 353 to 436 of *Human Knowledge* are devoted to the philosophy and mathematics of probability. This, of course, relates to inductive rather than deductive logic, and the work is smaller in scope and intention than the earlier monumental stuff on the logic/mathematics unity.

But despite Russell's preoccupation with logic and mathematics he has never attempted to give them a status they could not justly claim. He has said "Logic and mathematics . . . are the alphabet of the book of nature, not the book itself". It is with the "book itself", and Russell's view of it, that we will be concerned in the next article in this series.

## CHRISTIAN MORALITY

L. B. HALSTEAD

J. S. CLARKE (*Satires, Lyrics and Poems* 1919) believed that 'Heaven's inscrutable plan . . . (was) . . . to syphilise man'. He had in mind both the past and present record of Christianity. Clearly for anyone to consider such a proposition suggests that there might be something in it—if not, then why should the thought have ever crossed his mind? In order to examine this question, it is worth having a look at the Book of Genesis. At first in the Garden of Eden 'they were both naked, the man and his wife, and were not ashamed', but later when 'the eyes of them both were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together, and made themselves aprons'. The inference of this little episode, is simply that once Adam and Eve were no longer ignorant automatons, they became ashamed of their bodies. Or rather those parts connected with sexual activity. And from this there followed the whole edifice of Christian morality, with particular emphasis on the virtue of abstinence and the sinfulness of indulgence. This has been well summed up by Anthony Storr (*Sexual Deviation*, Penguin Books).

Books). But if sexual enjoyment is something basic to humanity, it may well be wondered how such a religion could have survived. The answer is that sexual satisfaction is achieved in religious activity and also surreptitiously—on the side. Apuleius (born 124 AD) vividly described the early Christian rites as practised by a baker's wife—an enthusiastic adherent of "a fantastic and blasphemous cult of an Only God! In his honour she practised various absurd ceremonies which gave her the excuse of getting drunk quite early in the day and playing the whore at all hours; most people including her husband, were quite deceived by her". (*The Golden Ass*, trans. Robert Graves, Penguin Books).

William Sargant in his book *Battle for the Mind* (Pan Books) has described the mechanics of religious conversions. If one looks at Bernini's famous sculpture of St Theresa experiencing her vision, it is obvious that it was intensely erotic—whatever she may have said about the 'miracle'. (There is no need to feel pity for the nuns in their nunneries, they achieve sexual fulfilment without the complications inherent in such activity with real people. This basically masturbatory behaviour nevertheless ensures that there is no interference with sacred maidenhead of the virgin nun.)

Fortunately this celibate existence has not been followed by the majority—otherwise, as indeed happened with a few sects that believed in total abstinence, we should have extinguished ourselves. Nonetheless although it is considered right and proper to mate to reproduce, it was not supposed to be enjoyed. The late Dr Marie Stopes recorded the irate reaction of an English gentleman whose wife had read one of her books. His complaint was that his wife began to behave like a prostitute. He was disgusted to have this sort of thing in his home. A nice woman was not expected to know of such things. He in fact went elsewhere for his sexual pleasure—a subject not to be confused with the dignity of marriage.

This attitude of mind reveals a fundamental dichotomy in the attitude to women. An attitude that survived until very recently—young men were expected to sleep around for experience but were also expected to marry a virgin. Indeed for many centuries it has been customary to divide

(Continued overleaf)

"It is not always appreciated that, even today, the orthodox Christian attitude towards sex is, when one considers the generality of mankind, exceptionally severe. As one anthropologist remarks, the Christian prohibition of all sexual relations outside marriage is characteristic of only a handful of human societies which include, at the most, not more than five per cent of the human race.

There is good reason to suppose that it is the man who can achieve a stable heterosexual partnership who is best able to love his neighbour as himself; but the idea that sexual abstinence is an expression of a superior morality, and that celibacy is to be equated with virtue is still widely held, especially by those who belong to churches which insist that their clergy shall not marry. Such beliefs, which have been current for centuries, die hard; and, even in a society which is only nominally Christian, and in which the church itself is becoming gradually more liberal in sexual matters, there are still many people who still seem to suppose that sex is only another word for sin."

Indeed in the not too distant past sexual intercourse was considered to be just an unpleasant chore to be suffered by womanhood in order to gratify the animal lust of man and of course to procreate. The attitude of the Catholic Church even today appears to accept sexual activity ultimately as only justifiable if it is for procreation. Somewhere along the line it had been forgotten that as Lucretius (c. 55 BC) well knew, "the pleasure of sex is shared" (*The Nature of the Universe*, trans. R. E. Latham, Penguin

(Continued from previous page)

women into two groups the good whom one married and the bad with whom one enjoyed oneself—the former respected, the latter despised. But men need to enjoy their sexual activity, and this is hardly possible with a partner who is ignorant what this entails on her part. A passive, pure wife is not much use. Hence the establishment of the world's oldest profession—a profession for which there is not a great demand in a more permissive society.

There is however a more sinister consequence of the setting up of a stratum in society consisting of 'fallen women' to serve men sexually. The resultant promiscuity establishes the optimum conditions for the flowering and spread of venereal diseases of which the most virulent is syphilis. It is as if a culture of this disease is set up in society and carefully maintained to provide an ever-ready source for future infection of peoples without the benefits of our particular moral code.

With the opening of the trade routes and the spread of Western man around the globe, together with his prosyletising missionaries in attendance, the venereal disease of syphilis became as ubiquitous as the white man. The attitude of the sailors and traders was to take full advantage of the apparent lack of inhibitions in the so-called more primitive peoples with whom they came in contact—in return they gave these people syphilis. The Christian Church was aghast—not at the need for men to have sexual intercourse with fallen women or 'savages', but at the very existence of societies that had clearly not had the spiritual benefit of the imposition of Christian taboos in this sphere

of life. These peoples had to have their souls saved, to be made aware of the one true God and to be set upon the path of righteousness. Indeed the scourge of syphilis was ample proof of the displeasure of the Almighty at their moral code of behaviour. And so many noble humanitarian societies were infected by the cancer of the hypocritical morality of Christianity and so many of them died.

From this history it would be imagined that syphilis is a peculiarly Western ailment that was spread throughout the world by Christian civilisation. Yet it is generally believed that this was one of the first imports from the Americas at the time of Columbus. One of the greatest epidemics of syphilis was at about the time of Columbus's return (this was in fact the result of the activities of various armies and their eventual dispersal home). As Calvin Wells (*Bones, Bodies and Disease*, Thames and Hudson) points out "to accept a Columbian origin for the disease commits us to a belief that less than fifty sailors were sufficient nucleus to infect the continent of Europe within eighteen months". Moreover there is evidence of a comparable epidemic of 1484 before Columbus returned from the Americas. This is somehow discreetly forgotten, so too the fact as Calvin Wells again notes that medical authorities had described the disease and all its symptoms during the eleventh and twelfth centuries—in Europe. There can be no doubt that syphilis was familiar to Europeans centuries before the New World was discovered. It is so much more comforting to imagine this scourge to have been acquired from a primitive heathen race, much more reassuring than having to recognise that it was our civilisation that did the introducing. Perhaps it was 'Heaven's inscrutable plan' after all.

## DYNAMIC READING

I HAD SEEN the ads. claiming to treble fee paying adults reading speeds without loss of efficiency, so being both sceptical and nurtured amongst canny Scots, I managed to find a place on a course for nothing, accompanied by my Headteacher and ten Fourth Year Juniors. We received eight lessons in all and had to do homework every night for the duration of the course. The children were chosen with this work factor in mind, and although they were all adequate readers, they were not "creamed off". We learnt that the eye is very lazy, needing a disciplined hand movement to absorb the printed word. From a variety of hand movements, each elected the one most comfortable, and we began.

At frequent stages during the course we were examined to determine how much we had remembered. This was the initial blow to my ego. The first reading was by the "conventional" way, and I steamed ahead of the rest, notching up 465 w.p.m. on a life of Einstein. The average reading speed for an adult is reckoned to be about 300 w.p.m., but my elation was short-lived when the subsequent written test exposed me flat bottom of the list for retention. This assessment of retention—the Reading Efficiency Index (REI), relates to the percentage of questions answered correctly related to the speed at which one was reading (e.g. a score of 50 per cent after reading at a speed of 1,000 words per minute = REI of 500). We all endeavoured to establish a fast reading speed, and soon found that each of us had a different "ceiling". The "range" was from 1,300—4,500 w.p.m. The less inhibited children were by now performing far better than the adults! The tutor always stressed that the ability to read quickly was futile unless accompanied by at least an equivalent

ability to recall the bulk of what one has read. Oral testing was insufficient and he insisted on frequent written examination, with all results carefully recorded. Individual reading speeds were established, though these varied according to the nature of the reading material—and the REI's were increasing. The final results were quite dramatic, the best the Reading School had ever obtained. My reading speed was 2,000 w.p.m. and the REI 1,711, an increase of 9.5. The children's results were mostly better and the average increase was 13.2. Beneath this welter of statistics we had both enjoyed ourselves and acquired a valuable new tool.

No-one has reverted to the "old way", and no deterioration in reading "pleasure" has followed. The children are quite willing to be "tested" by special visitors: they have indicated that it is possible for adequate readers to increase both reading speed and REI. This brings into question the teaching of reading—why "stop" when a reasonable proficiency has been obtained? Most pianists progress from scales to sonatas—some even aspire to the concerto. If you feel that there is really "no need"—time yourself reading this article. If you took more than twenty seconds you are not a dynamic reader!

D. T. HARRIS

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Annual report of the  
National Secular Society

## LET ME TAKE YOUR BLANKET

MARGARET GREEN

BUT HOW could I take their blanket? How could I even puncture it, to let the cool draught of reason creep through? Why should I, a Humanist, chip away at their cosily embedded illusions, leaving the tatty shreds clinging to their shoulders? They'll still have their blanket; they'll pull it tighter round their unseeing minds, hanging on until time—one day—allows it to fall.

But the tragedy of it all, is they believe. They actually believe. There was so much I wanted to say; so many arguments to put forward. But where was the point of contact when they were all so firmly wrapped? Should I have grabbed one corner and yanked the blanket to the ground? Should I have said, "you don't need your blanket anymore". Because I have discarded mine, why should I make them throw theirs away? They need their blanket like a child needs love. Without it their world would collapse. Could I, who believes in freedom, be instrumental in perpetrating this collapse? Their world of faith is not my world, nor mine of reason theirs, but if I tried destroying theirs, how quickly would they find mine? Could I tell them they are living in a land of dreams? Could I say this is wrong? But *why* is it wrong? Who am I to say, "you mustn't dream", when we all have our dreams. Who am I to say, "reason has brought me to my conclusions, so you must reason too". For this is their shield against reality. One day perhaps they'll understand, but for them at the moment there is no alternative. They're not ready to emerge from their blanket just yet.

They haven't grasped that laws without reason have no meaning, because they believe God made those laws—they say 'thou shalt not kill', but they bless guns. How can they understand that man is self-motivated, when they be-

lieve God is in command? How can they realise that our self-motivation can be directed towards helping others, when they believe our actions are for the love of God? And if tragedy strikes it is 'God's will', not statistics—or carelessness.

If they say 'for God's sake care', why should they understand when I say 'for man's sake care'? Would they realise that I too *appreciate* the wonders, the beauty, the joys? That I can find tranquility and peace of mind from music or poetry or nature? That I can be inwardly thankful, without going to a man-made building and repeating man-made phrases of someone else's choice?

He said, "throw in a little psychology, it makes people sit up and listen, and its better than saying Adam and Eve!" Ah yes, psychology, I understand that, but can they really think in terms of id and ego when they talk of the Devil and sins, of divine powers and our Benefactor? And how could they talk about 'Satan' in 1969? Should I have said, "as a point of interest, who's Satan?" Should I have shattered their word pictures—the images they've carried for so long? And what of all those other clichés—Redeemed by His flesh—Died for our sins—Born in sin—The flesh is weak—Through His Holy Spirit—Rejoice with the Angels. How could I start to interpret them, when they peppered the discussions as well worn dictums. Words, words, words. What do they *mean*? Oh man, how can we communicate when we speak a different tongue?

And my first utterance would be like a moth nibbling at the woolly strands. My second, and the hole would get bigger. How could I? They believe. And I, a Humanist, believe they have a right to.

## FILM REVIEW

M. MALINCTUS

### Hell in the Pacific

TO RESORT to a very well worn cliché, this is indeed a war film with a difference! Instead of the usual hordes of Japanese screaming 'Banzai' and slaughtering as many Americans as possible, there is a single Japanese pilot (Tirosho Mifune). Instead of the usual hordes of Americans screaming, etc., there is a single American pilot (Lee Marvin). Both are marooned on the same island, and both have the degree of savagery which is common to screen soldiers. But at the same time, they are both delightfully unsure of themselves.

It is obvious from the start that the Japanese has been on the island for some time, because he has had time to erect a shelter and a water trough to catch the tropical rains. The film unfolds with the two men, facing each other as deadly enemies, each trained and conditioned to kill the other. The moment when the American is driven by thirst to first confront his adversary is very amusing indeed. We see in their imaginations how they are going to kill each other, but in reality they just end up circling each other with the American desperately trying to reach the water trough. In the end he is forced back into the jungle.

From then on they wage an endless psychological war on each other, both resorting to various tricks and subterfuges. The Japanese starts a fire in the jungle to smoke out his enemy. The American worms his way up a tree and urinates all over him! This outrage goads the Oriental beyond all reason and he chases his foe deep into the jungle where the American collapses from exhaustion. This is the turning point of the film. The Japanese has his hated enemy at his mercy but he can't bring himself to kill him. Instead he takes him prisoner and shackles him like a wild animal. It is not long before the American manages to turn the tables and the Japanese takes his turn 'playing' prisoner. Its here that the American finally gets sick of this senseless brutality and lets him go.

The two men, who have gradually gained a grudging respect for one another now reach a truce and face the problems of survival together. Again there are amusing moments, such as when the

American tries to explain the workings of a raft to his bemused companion who cannot speak a word of English! But one still feels uneasy despite the fact that they have come to terms with each other and their situation, and the hidden tension remains even when they are on their raft at the mercy of the Pacific. There are touching moments too, when the American gently lays his coat over the back of his exhausted companion to protect him from the sun. Finally reaching land, the two men find a deserted bombed out American army base and to their joy they also find some bottles of brandy, cigarettes as well as some old hospital instruments which they use to shave. Cleaned up and rested they break open the brandy and settle down to celebrate their survival. Here again one feels uneasy. The whole situation is incredibly unreal. Two men in the middle of a war, totally different in culture and outlook, drinking together even with the sounds of war only a few miles away. One realises that it is the war that should be unreal. To describe the plot any further would be superfluous. Suffice it to say that the remainder of the film underlines the deep cause of futility which pervades the whole. The ending, though unexpected, brings the film into perspective, and renders it a telling comment on not only war, but on a world where different races are brought up to hate and kill almost from birth. It is funny, cruel and shocking, and might serve children as an antidote for the traditional heroic war epic.

## BOOK REVIEW

ALASTAIR SERVICE

MARRIAGE AND DIVORCE: Based on a series from *The Guardian* (Pemberton Publishing Co., 9s 6d).

TO START WITH, I must make it clear that this review is from the point of view of one who has been actively working for the current attempt at divorce reform.

*The Guardian* series of articles was of great value when it first appeared in January 1968 soon after the publication of Mr William Wilson MP's Divorce Reform Bill. It is useful to have it in book form, with much additional material, and in spite of obvious

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## LETTERS

### Sex education

DENIS COBELL claims that I ignore the question of VD amongst young people. Perhaps he did not read my article on this very question in the January 25th issue of FREETHINKER, where I suggested a three-point plan to reduce the contraction and spread of venereal disease.

Mr Cobell seems to believe that I am recommending having intercourse with someone who is suffering from VD. On the contrary, it is my belief that if children were given an open and honest sex education, then they would be more likely to form satisfying relationships with other young people they know and can trust, and far less likely to seek sexual satisfaction with partners whom they care nothing for, which is the sort of behaviour that leads to venereal infection.

It is illogical for Mr Cobell to criticise my proposals for the reform of sex education on the grounds that the present state of affairs is not good enough! Perhaps he would present his own rational proposals for the elimination of illegitimacy and venereal disease and the release of young people from the effects of two thousand years of Christian inhibition and repression.

MICHAEL LLOYD-JONES.

### Free Speech

MR PAGES'S adolescent petulance is a poor substitute for argument. I have already answered most of his points in detail that he predictably ignores, and repetition on my part would be unlikely to remove his prejudices.

I will make two points only: (1) A mass communications medium, Mr Page, is, believe it or not, a medium that communicates with the masses. I am delighted that Mr Page believes that the masses are diligently devouring the writings of Marx, Engels and Co., but I regret I cannot believe him, (2) In order to show I am not a Marxist, Mr Page says I am a Maoist. Since I have not claimed to be either this is a remarkable argument. Is this your idea of "scrupulous regard for accuracy" and "rational argument", Mr Page? And my letter is "rambling". Phew!

And Mr Cook's ignorance is staggering. I will confine myself to the most important of his absurdities—that early trades unionists were not militant.

In the first place the very creation of trades unions demanded *illegal* action. In the early nineteenth century strikes were criminal activities, and strikers were fined, imprisoned and deported. Even union membership involved imprisonment, e.g. nineteen printers on *The Times* imprisoned in 1810 for up to two years, without even striking. In 1818 a cotton spinners demonstration involved clashes with troops and the imprisonment of strike leaders. And even after the repeal of the Combination Acts, strikers were imprisoned, e.g. the imprisonment of the leaders of the Gas Stokers' Union for twelve months in 1892. Despite this, there were hundreds of serious strikes in the nineteenth century, e.g. the General Strike of 1842, and the London Dock Strike (led by Marxists) in 1889.

In *Trade Unions* E. L. Wigham comments that factory workers "time and again broke out in desperate strikes, often accompanied by violence". In his book of the same title, A. Flanders writes (p. 17) that in the early part of the twentieth century "Expansion, confidence, militancy and success were now among the main attributes of British trade unionism". In *An Outline of Trade Union History*, G. Pattison describes (p. 28) Royal Commission Report (1869) which found that "the brickmakers' unions in the Manchester area and the grinding trade unions in the Sheffield area had both used physical force to further their ends". Wigham writes that in 1913 "there were violent incidents, arising from clashes between strikers and police or soldiers, in many parts of the British Isles, including South Wales, Hull, Manchester, Liverpool, Dublin". In *The Common People* by G. D. H. Cole and R. Postgate there are numerous accounts of union militancy, riots, hunger marches, and the like. Even the Luddites had their agricultural counterparts who "destroyed the threshing-machines and other new implements which reduced the demand for labour". In 1825, Joseph Hume, a parliamentary supporter of the workers complained of frequent strikes, which were "too often accompanied with violence" (see Parl. Deb., New Series, xiii, 1463—30/6/1825). In *Socialism in Evolution*, G. D. H. Coles talks of the leaders of the London Corresponding Society as "potential fomenters of a general working-class revolt", and in *The Miners' Association*, Challinor and Ripley describe the Plug Plot Riots

(1842) involving "thousands of angry strikers". In *The Making of the English Working-Class* E. P. Thompson talks of the "revolutionary objectives" of the early trade unions, and gives evidence of insurrection and riots. He comments of the unions that "secrecy and hostility to the authorities were intrinsic to their very existence", and he remarks (p. 550) that when the unions were illegal "unionism registered great advances".

And look also at the character of the early Chartist leaders, from whom the first influential unions sprang. Look at the lives of Hepburn, Taylor (who said his last action would be "to write his epitaph upon the tyrant's brow, in characters of blood, with a pen of steel"), and Harney (who advised his followers to carry "a musket in one hand a petition in the other"). And look at the lives of such men as O'Connor, Doherty and James Morrison ("The question to be decided is, Shall Labour or Capital be uppermost?"). In *British Trade Unionism* A. Hutt describes the early unions as "Schools of War".

The early unions were steeped in militancy, and from this militancy derived most of the social provisions that Mr Cook approves. But the evidence above is unlikely to penetrate his tightly closed mind. After all, since he regards the welfare of poor children as "beside the point", we know what sort of a socialist he is.

And as for Mr Cook's other feeble points—does he really think that dividend returns are unrelated to gross trading profits? And does he really think that the capitalist class of this country would not prefer a government they did not need to exert themselves to push around, even if the outcome in the case of either government is virtually identical. Start thinking, Mr Cook! G. L. SIMONS.

### BOOK REVIEW (Continued from previous page)

shortcomings it can be recommended to anyone studying the subject. Due to its origins it lacks the cohesion of a work intended to be a book, but it contains many individual contributions of great importance as well as some unfortunate gaps.

To deal with credits first, there are Dr Leach's typically thoughtful and contentious article on changing attitudes to marriage, Ann Shearer's helpful contribution about the effects on children, Lena Jeger's brilliant analysis of the effects of divorce reform on couples with low incomes and, on the other side, William Latey QC's revealing criticism of the Bill from the viewpoint of one who believes that "guilt" should be the only justification for divorce. There is also a useful section on the failures and successes of marriage guidance.

On the other hand, the examination of why marriages break down is sadly superficial—a real opportunity missed—and I searched in vain for the much-needed analysis of the Registrar General's revealing divorce statistics. The results of *The Guardian's* own survey on marriage and divorce are well analysed and quite interesting, but a survey using such a limited sample and with an inevitably low response rate is scientifically valueless in revealing national attitudes and experiences.

The most serious gaps are that there is no examination of the likely effects of reform, as demonstrated by experience in other countries (Russia is obviously of interest and New Zealand has for years had a law similar to that proposed here) nor is there an outline of alternative approaches to divorce reform. We need to think of the various possible approaches—after all, the present Bill will be a major improvement if it becomes law but few would pretend that it is likely to provide our divorce laws for a hundred years or so. Society is changing rapidly and it seems likely that the divorce laws will have to be changed two or three times each century if they are to keep up to date.

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