

Freethinker

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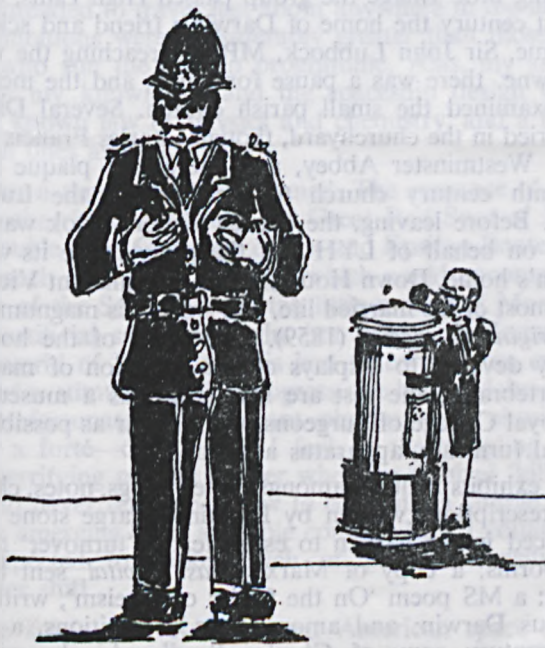
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Sixpence Weekly

FAIR AND SEEN TO BE FAIR

THE NEWS that about 160 MPs from both sides of the house, including six QCs, have signed a Commons motion which seeks to open the locked doors behind which, at the moment, the police conduct inquiries into complaints made against police officers, can be heralded as the initiation of a measure which would greatly strengthen the oft-made claim that Britain is the most free country in the world. The motion, which was sponsored by the Parliamentary Civil Liberties Group, read as follows: "That this house, aware of the concern which has been expressed by members of both the public and the police over the present method of investigating complaints against police officers under the Police Act 1964, urges the Secretary of State to amend that Act, with particular reference to the need for an independent element representing the public in conducting these inquiries; the publication of findings in appropriate cases; and to the circumstances in which any recommendations made should be binding on the Chief Constable of the force concerned". The chief signatories of this motion were: Mr Eric Lubbock (Orpington, L); Dame Joan Vickers (Devenport, C); Mrs Joyce Butler (Wood Green, Lab); Mr Ben Whitaker (Hampstead, Lab); Mr Nigel Fisher (Surbiton, C); Mr William Hamling (Woolwich West, Lab); Dr Michael Winstanley (Cheadle, L); and Mr Peter Jackson (High Peak, Lab).



A lawyer, David Napley the Chairman of the Law Society's Standing Committee on Criminal Law has made a statement which shows how the proposals would be of practical benefit to the police: "Greater publicity and an independent element would help the police because so many complaints were unjustified". It is abundantly clear though, that the greatest advantage of the proposals will be to heighten the public's trust in the police force, and to remove the nagging doubt that the few police officers, who are worthy of rephension, do not receive their due. It is one thing to have in Britain what is aptly described as the best police force in the world. It would be a far greater thing if any individual could air in public any grievance which he has against that force. As Mr Ben Whitaker, MP, has said, "Any good policeman would have nothing to lose, and it is in the interests of the police as well as the public that the occasional 'rotten apple' should be detected and removed as soon as possible".

Rather than introducing a bill, the signatories to the motion are trying to reach agreement with the Home Office, the Police Federation, and the Chief Constable. There seems little reason why an agreement should not be reached, which will put into practice a measure, whose greatest significance perhaps is that it will go against the current trend towards loss of individual freedom.

"REFORMING" THE ABORTION LAW

A GREAT DEAL, perhaps too much, has been written in these columns on the subject of the Abortion Law. The latest development, namely the failure of Norman St John-Stevas' amendment, would be deemed unworthy of comment had not David Tribe, the President of the National Secular Society, issued a particularly comprehensive statement to the press on the question of again reforming the Abortion Law.

"Mr Norman St John-Stevas and his friends are understandably elated that they got a higher vote for their proposals to wreck the Abortion Act than when the Bill was

A great deal of credit must go to the National Council for Civil Liberties, whose activities on this front have been largely responsible for prodding high ranking policemen into the realisation that an independent element in such inquiries would benefit the police as well as the public. Mr Reginald Gale, the Chairman of the Police Federation, has expressed his view that, "Although the system is absolutely fair, public concern was such that outside observers should be considered. . . . It should be possible to have outside observers such as officials of the Ombudsman's department or lawyers". Mr Gale here puts his finger on the heart of the problem. Society as a whole has not yet reached the stage at which it is prepared to accept anything on trust. If it had, a police force would not be needed. It is essential therefore that the system should be publicly seen to be fair.

continued overleaf

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.

(Continued from previous page)

in the House over two years ago. But they should be reminded, as they call for commissions of enquiry, that their vote was still a minority one.

Lurid stories about 'Abortion air-lifts' and 'London—the abortion capital of the world' came at a providential moment and undoubtedly aided what vote they got. To get steamed up over this is, however, quite irrational. In the first place, it isn't true. If it were, it would simply show that Britain was more humane in its legislation than other countries. It could also be said that it would earn Britain much-needed overseas currency, though this argument is outweighed by the fact that it would tend to divert British doctors from their responsibilities to British women under the NHS.

It is ironical that many of those who are now objecting so strongly to 'private enterprise' in abortion tend to be its most vocal supporters elsewhere. Not just in commerce and industry. They want private education and private patients in all other branches of medical work. They may not quite dare to abolish the NHS completely, but they certainly want the private sector in medicine and dentistry to expand. But while they say the public demands 'freedom' in all these fields, it is supposedly because the public is shocked by relative freedom in gaining abortions that they are now acting on its behalf. They talk of the social clause as if it gave 'abortion on demand'. Doctors are not obliged to accede to demands, but the more humane of them know that women seldom 'demand' abortion unless they have strong medical or social anxieties which should be taken seriously.

The simple fact is that most hard-line opponents of abortion are motivated by religious objections, which they are entitled to have. But they find it inexpedient to admit it. They will seize on any bogus excuse to rouse public alarm and solicit public support. If they were really anxious about the profiteers—whose cashing-in is distasteful to

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

Belfast Humanist Group: NI War Memorial Building, Waring Street, Belfast: Monday, August 11, 8 p.m.: Review of the year past and discussion of future plans.

most of us but who had ways of getting round the law before the 1967 Abortion Act came into force—they would seek to remove bottle-necks in the NHS. Instead, by demanding the endorsement of one of a relatively small number of consultant gynaecologists, some of whom themselves have strong religious objections and would never give it, they would further reduce the opportunities of women in public hospitals. As basic needs would not change, more unfortunate women would be driven to private clinics or back-street abortionists."

DARWIN REVISITED

IT IS SOMETIMES said that humanists tend to be either fanatically anti-religious or just dull and inactive. The following delightful report of a recent activity of the London Young Humanists would seem to disprove both these assertions.

"On Sunday, July 20, the day Man landed on the moon, a group of members of the London Young Humanists went on a walk to the former home of an earlier scientific pioneer, Charles Francis Darwin, MD (1809-1882).

After leaving Victoria station on an overcast, but warm morning, the party travelled to Bromley, Kent, where H. G. Wells was born (1866), and then by bus to Farnborough (Kent). After a few minutes' walk from this charming little village the group passed High Elms, during the last century the home of Darwin's friend and scientific colleague, Sir John Lubbock, MP. On reaching the village of Downe, there was a pause for lunch, and the members then examined the small parish church. Several Darwins are buried in the churchyard, though Charles Francis' body lies in Westminster Abbey, and there is a plaque in the thirteenth century church to members of the Lubbock family. Before leaving, the church visitors' book was duly signed on behalf of LYH and the party made its way to Darwin's home, Down House, where the eminent Victorian spent most of his married life, and wrote his magnum opus, *The origin of species* (1859). One room of the house is entirely devoted to displays of the evolution of man and the vertebrates; the rest are maintained as a museum by the Royal College of Surgeons, with, as far as possible, the original furniture, apparatus and books.

The exhibits include, amongst other things, notes, cheques and prescriptions written by Darwin; a large stone which he placed in the garden to estimate the 'turnover' rate of earthworms; a copy of Marx's *Das Kapital*, sent by the author; a MS poem 'On the follies of atheism', written by Erasmus Darwin; and among later acquisitions, a twentieth century copy of *Charles Bradlaugh, champion of liberty*.

After examining the house and its beautifully maintained garden, the more hardy members walked overland from Downe back to Farnborough through Cuckoo wood, an area that Darwin himself must have explored many times. This lovely scenery on the edge of the North Downs abounded with wild flowers, rare saprophytic plants, fungi and orchids (Charles Darwin became a leading authority on the fertilisation of orchids). On returning to Bromley South station, the group dispersed to watch another momentous event in human evolution on their television sets.

Among Darwin's many biographers might be mentioned the late Sir Arthur Keith, a prominent member of the Rationalist Press Association, and one-time curator of the Darwin House, who went to live at Farnborough, wrote *Darwin revalued* (published by the RPA in 1955)."

THIS SPACE TO LET

G. L. SIMONS

I HAVE BEEN INTERESTED in space for some years; I remember at eight or nine wondering about planets and stars and things—and Dan Dare in the *Eagle* comic sustained the interest for some time. And the interest had consequences: one was on the occasion of a school prize-giving. I was awarded the princely sum of seven shillings and sixpence for being top of the class or something, and was duly instructed to visit a bookshop with other prize-winners to spend my money. The other academics dutifully purchased their little Latin dictionaries or Atlases of the British Isles whereas I—shame on me!—selected *Men of Other Planets* by Kenneth Heuer, thus showing an impulse to nonconformity which I have never been able to suppress. I found Heuer much more intriguing than Virgil or Caesar, and speculation on voyages to the planets moved me more than any chronicle of the Gallic Wars.

A second consequence of my interest in space was that, at the age of thirteen, I wrote a book on it, with little chapters on stars, planets, meteorites, comets and such like; as far as I recall the factual information was probably accurate, if only because it was shamelessly extracted from other books. I think I felt that plagiarism was an adequate substitute for scholarship. One thing that certainly was *not* sound was the intricate design which I included of a spaceship intended to travel just about anywhere in the universe. My ambitions were considerably greater than those of the men who run the Apollo programme. Alas, my ambition outran my knowledge, and the spaceship design violated every known law of physics and chemistry, and a few unknown ones as well.

After a time my interest waned. The romance of astronomy—the rings of Saturn, the Great Red Spot of Jupiter, the double stars Gamma Leporis and Epsilon Bootes, giant stars such as Epsilon Aurigae which could encompass the whole of the Solar System, the little moons of Mars (were they artificial satellites?), the hot world of Mercury, the cold world of Pluto—all this had to come to an end as a realm for stimulation. To progress one had to delve deeper, and unfortunately this meant physics, and physics was never a *forté*—due chiefly, I feel, to the crippling impact of a terrifying physics master who was dubbed 'killer'. As I could never remember how to construct a simple upright image emerging from a simple concave lens, I could hardly be expected to make much of photon transitions or doppler shift.

The subsequent Russian and American space exploits revived my waning interest for a while, but even here my images were tarnished. The spacemen of *Eagle* days were sleek, cultured demi-gods, drifting through life with a panache that Russian and American astronauts do little to emulate. The spaceships of my boyhood were also an altogether different matter, with vast cabins, futuristic furniture and psychedelic colour all over the place. The modern practical vehicles are decidedly less impressive: there are no plush carpets or immaculately cast brass handles on the pulsating equipment; there are no Jules Verne-type organs erected at a far end of the hall-type cabin; there are no rich tapestries. Instead we see cramped quarters, starkly functional; we hear Yankee banalities drawled out at quite unnecessary length (doubtless the Russians are equally banal), and instead of the elegant, clipped monosyllables of the demigods we hear that Fred's been sick, Charlie's caught a cold, or tang of urine pervades throughout. The romantic in me rebels at such deliveries.

Of course it is very clever! I hasten to add this lest anyone think that I do not stand around with mouth agape at the sheer technological brilliance of the whole thing, as every other human being surely does. There can be no doubt that modern space flights are very, very clever. And the astronauts!—no account of space would be adequate if it did not include generous homilies on the courage of the spacemen. But has this not been exaggerated? We know more of the space environment than the ancient mariners ever did about the other side of the world before they got there. In one important sense the astronauts are *not* taking a leap into the dark. They know where they are going—which is more than can be said for Chris Columbus, Vasco da Gama, and old Henry the Navigator.

Another depressing thing is that the astronauts are mainly agents of governments—governments finance the trips, decide on the policies and make the awards afterwards. This was also true of friends Chris, Vasco and Henry—but the circumstances of the Cold War make the situation more serious today. Despite the happy clichés about 'We came in peace for all Mankind' it is obvious that, with earthly tensions and national jealousies, space journeys are more propaganda and military exercises than anything else.

There will be many other space-flights—presumably because 'space is there' (and how could it be anywhere else?). The related research will add to our knowledge of the universe and stuff out of which it is made. Journeys to the planets will be made, and when they are, perhaps my interest will revive again. For on the planets there may be life. It is of course a theoretical possibility on at least Mars and Venus, and I find the possibility of discoveries of new life-forms, perhaps highly intelligent, perhaps based on silicon rather than carbon, probably bi-sexual and social through the universal laws of evolution—this possibility, of discovering non-terrestrial life, I do find fascinating. But as to the rest . . .

Of course there will be spin-off. Developments in the sciences connected with astronauts may have applications to the domestic scene, but how disproportionate a return! Now we have non-stick pans as a result of space research, but it doesn't seem a great deal when we remember that the Americans alone have spent twenty-four billion dollars on getting a man on to the moon so that he can walk around for two or three hours and pick up a handful of dirt. And the idea that space travel may give Man a solidarity, a knowledge of his own kinship, an awareness that men and women are all just brothers and sisters in the same large family—strikes me as absurd, as so much pie-in-the-sky (or in space)! So long as the world's wealthy insist that two-thirds of humanity should be destitute so that the wealthy can stay wealthy, idealistic platitudes about the 'One Human Family' are so much baloney.

Space is here to stay. We cannot doubt that much. But let's face it—you can't do much with space! It's the things that are in it that are important!

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ROBERTSON AND THE CASE AGAINST MARXISM

MARTIN PAGE

(PART 1)

THE MARXIST Rosa Luxemburg once declared: "Marxism lays claim only to temporary truth; dialectic through and through, it contains within itself the seeds of its own destruction". Karl Marx was a revolutionary thinker and prophet of genius who dedicated his life to the liberation of mankind. Yet terrible crimes have been committed in his name, as in the name of Christ; and many of his ideas have had to be substantially modified in the light of historical events shaped largely by his influence. His theory of value was the corner-stone of his economic analysis of capitalism. Yet according to the eminent rationalist radical J. M. Robertson (1856-1933): "Marx constructed an *a priori* concept of value which answers to nothing in nature"; and it has often been said that Marx himself, in volume three of *Das Kapital*, all but abandoned his theory as expounded in the first volume. For Marx, the division of labour, a major factor in man's alienation, "impoverishes the worker and makes him into a machine". Robertson was more positive: "Our first traces of 'civilisation', strictly speaking, are in towns; and their civilisation consists largely in the development of the useful arts by division of labour" (*Pagan Christs*, second edition, p. 37).

For Engels, writing in *Anti-Dühring*: "It was slavery that first made possible the division of labour between agriculture and industry on a considerable scale, and along with this, the flower of the ancient world, Hellenism. Without slavery, no Greek state, no Greek art and science. . . . The introduction of slavery under the conditions of that time was a great step forward". This view was keenly contested by Robertson in *The Evolution of States* (pp. 62-63): "All the ancient states, before Greece, stood on slavery: then it was not slavery that yielded her special culture. What she gained from older civilisations was the knowledge and the arts developed by *specialisation* of pursuits; and such specialisation was not necessarily dependent on slavery, which could abound without it. It was in the special employment, finally, of the exceptionally large *free* population of Athens that the greatest artistic output was reached".

In 1845 Engels declared: "Malthus was right, in his way, in asserting that there are always more people on hand than can be maintained from the available means of subsistence". Forty years later, in *The Origin of the Family*, he markedly stressed the role of the sexual impulse; but in so doing, he undermined the materialist theory of history as expounded by Marx, whose concept of the industrial reserve army was, in itself, a repudiation of Malthusian doctrine. Marx did not explain how over-population would be prevented in the reconstructed society; and Robertson's *Socialism and Malthusianism* (1885) established its author as probably the first British post-Marxian to hammer those socialists who thought they could usher in Utopia without bothering about the population problem. Robertson pointed out that, certainly before the 1914-18 War, German workers rejected the advice to increase their families which was given them by socialist women and "strong anti-militarists" like Rosa Luxemburg and Clara Zetkin.

Marx and Engels had propounded the doctrine of inevitable economic crises, increasing in frequency and magnitude to culminate in the apocalyptic overthrow of capitalism. Yet this doctrine was stultified by Engels himself when, at the end of his life, he recognised that "the

old breeding grounds of crises and opportunities for the growth of crises have been eliminated or strongly reduced". Indeed, one Marxist prophecy after another has come to naught, e.g. the virtual disappearance of the middle class and the ever-swelling ranks of an increasingly impoverished and discontented proletariat. Marx, who wanted to dedicate *Das Kapital* to Charles Darwin, apparently believed that capitalism could not adapt to survive; yet the Great Depression (1929-1933) failed to produce a Marxist revolution. Marx's materialist concept was, said Engels, "destined to do for history what Darwin's theory has done for biology"; yet Darwinian evolutionism was a far cry from the Hegelian dialectic absorbed by Marxism.

Marx's reformist approach as regards Britain, the United States, Holland, even France and Germany, was consistent with that of Robertson, who declared: "any other way of getting rid of capitalism than by gradual evolution is absolutely chimerical, unless the zealots are to content themselves with a universal industrial smash in which wealth and leisure and culture will alike disappear, and the survivors will resume the primal task of getting a bare living from the soil. . . . If it be insisted that revolution is a mode of evolution, it cannot at the same time be denied that evolution is a protracted revolution" (*The Economics of Progress*, pp. 176, 286).

Engels wrote to Marx in 1858: "The English proletariat is becoming more and more bourgeois"; and this process has gained momentum. Despite the perpetuation of immense differences in personal wealth, revolutionary class-consciousness on the part of the so-called proletariat has largely evaporated in Britain, as in other highly developed industrial states, mainly as a result of increased and more widespread affluence. The 1848 revolutions, and even the Paris Commune of 1871, did not arise and develop in accordance with the postulates of Marxism. The "socialist" revolutions of Lenin, Mao Tse-tung and Fidel Castro, which emerged from the womb of predominantly *agrarian* societies, were more in line with Bakunin's political primitivism than with Marx's view that the revolution would be set in motion by the workers of the most advanced capitalist countries. Marx and Engels asserted that the Russian peasantry could skip the bourgeois stage of their development only if sustained by a successful socialist revolution in Western Europe; and twenty years before the Spartacist uprising, Robertson wrote of Germany's "apparent progress towards the political condition of Russia, the extraordinary abasement of public opinion before the personality of the emperor, the rapid gravitation of all the forces of freedom and progress to the side of Socialism, with the prospect of a death-struggle between that ideal and its opposite" (*The Saxon and the Celt*, p. 27). Yet the urban revolt of the German Spartacists was a tragic failure.

As Engels said: "history is the cruellest of all goddesses"; and in 1895 he described as illusions the early views held by Marx and himself, and he admitted that history had completely altered the conditions under which the proletariat were to struggle. Marx, to a far greater extent than the Manchester businessman Engels, failed to foresee the phenomenal growth of the trade union movement in Britain. Marx regarded trade unions potentially as "organised agencies for superseding the very system of wage labour, organising centres of the working-class in the broad

interest of its complete emancipation". Yet Robertson, who lived through the only general strike (so far) in British history, might have pointed out that trade unions have evolved to accept social "responsibility" as an integral part of capitalism rather than as a force for labour's emancipation from capitalism, and have become willing bureaucratic agencies of control for ruling élites in wartime. In an age characterised by the emergence of a "managerial revolution", Robertson correctly observed that Marxists often confused the wage-earning manager with the idle capitalist to whom he paid interest.

Marx the revolutionary journalist who opposed the censor did not foresee the rise of the mass media, with the consequent power of ruling élites, through their control and manipulation of the media, to indoctrinate and sway public opinion, and thus fortify their own position. Modern totalitarianism can process the masses so successfully that the mass-society becomes the architect of its own enslavement. In the so-called free world, what Marx called the "fetishism of commodities" has been enhanced by the fetishism of sex, which has powerfully rivalled religion as the opium of the people. In 1848 Marx and Engels declared: "National differences and antagonisms between peoples are daily more and more vanishing". Yet under the impact of capitalist technology, expanding populations and the growth of nationalism and racialism, alienation has increased, and bourgeois capitalism has tended to develop into bureaucratic collectivism rather than socialism.

Of the ten commandments for a socialist programme outlined in the *Communist Manifesto* (which, according to Tcherkesoff, was taken largely from Victor Considérant), no fewer than nine called for the enlargement of the State; and in 1880 Engels declared that once the State had undertaken "possession of the means of production in the name of society", it would begin to wither away. In 1884 he apparently believed that the dissolution of the State was at hand and that the whole machinery of the State would soon be relegated to "the museum of antiquities, by the side of the spinning wheel and the bronze axe". Engels's optimism was not shared by Robertson the practical politician, who, on the eve of a world war between the imperialist nations, remarked that an appetite for extended dominion was an inherent characteristic of States. The ideological basis of contemporary Soviet society was supposedly laid by Marx and Engels; yet 50 years after the Bolshevik Revolution, the State was probably nowhere stronger than in Russia, where it showed no sign of withering away—despite Lenin's reaffirmation of Engels's prediction. Marx and Engels themselves suggested that the State was a manifestation of human alienation; yet the State has emerged as a cohesive force, sustained by loyalties that cut across class differences, and its power has increased immeasurably since Marx's day.

Although Marx rightly regarded love of freedom and love of domination as the two motive-forces of social life, he did not really explain how everyone is at once oppressor and oppressed, in varying degrees according to one's position in the social hierarchy. He devoted little attention to the struggles within classes; and his emphasis on the ownership of property as the main determinant of class—valuable though it was—was an over-simplification. Indeed, he never fully defined a social class. He was inclined to forget that in a class society there could be a relative absence of economic antagonism between classes. His materialist concept of history tended to minimise the record of class co-operation, the impact of personality and the driving force of human irrationality. In a private letter

(hitherto unpublished) Robertson declared: "All social reconstruction is a *praxis*, calling for a practical skill that is quite distinct from power of abstract theorising; and very few Socialists have that form of wisdom. Marx certainly had not. . . . Broadly speaking, all thinking in terms of 'class consciousness' is for me suspect: 'class consciousness' is the consciousness of little souls. Truth has nothing to do with class".

[The concluding part of this article will appear next week.]

MYTHS ARE A LONG TIME DYING

WALTER SOUTHGATE

DURING one's researches amongst the pages of county social history, one is impressed with the number of myths persisting in the villages.

In the days of witch hunting we read of trials of old village women, some of whom went to the stake, for throwing spells on neighbour's pigs, which it was asserted literally climbed trees.

People no longer believe in such fantastic beliefs, yet curiously enough in the churches of today, as a religious practice, the priest casts a spell over the sacrificial wine and wafer, the partaking of which imparts some special favour.

When people in this day and age honestly believe in this sort of thing one can say that some myths or beliefs take a long time dying in spite of our scientific education. Take the case of the "corn dolly", quite an art practised in many Essex villages. These "corn dollies" are primitive in origin and are fostered by the Church for 'blessing' at Harvest Festivals. They are as much pagan in origin as the mistletoe and holly are useful for Christmas festivities.

Corn dollies of plaited straw are made up in various ways and centre round the ancient belief that the corn spirit was supposed to live in the cornfield and would die as the last sheaf was cut. Such spirits could only live by being reborn in the corn doll, or kern baby, made from the last corn of the harvest field. Thus the spirit it is believed passes on to the next sowing.

When therefore you see these "corn dollies" at harvest Festivals you are witnessing the survival of a myth or belief of our pagan ancestors, which has now become grafted upon the Christian harvest festival. With religion if you cannot suppress a myth or belief you join with it and thereby secure its survival.

National Secular Society

Annual General Meeting

CONWAY HALL, RED LION SQUARE
LONDON, W.C.1

Sunday, 3rd August, 1969

in two sessions, 10 a.m. and 2.30 p.m.

Members only. Representatives of affiliated organisations must be NSS members. 1969 membership cards to be shown at the door.

BRECHT'S ARTURO UI IN LONDON

BOB CREW

THE CONCERN of satire with the ridicule of political criminals and with the exposure of social value/circumstances in which such criminals come to rise, not to mention the exposure of the hypocrisies of apparently respectable people, is currently well demonstrated at the Saville Theatre in London where the Nottingham Playhouse's production, *The Resistible Rise of Arturo Ui*, by Bertold Brecht, has recently begun.

Arturo Ui is a small-time bum, dressed in the manner of an American gangster, who is allowed by the rulers and more prominent people of his society to become what is aptly described by Brecht as a big-time bum—Adolf Hitler, no less, set among Chicago's pre-war gangsters, looking and behaving suspiciously like Al Capone.



Leonard Rossiter as Arturo Ui.

The analogy with Al Capone and American society is both amusing and alarming, with Ui's accomplices and generals—in real life, Von Papen, Röhm, Goebbels, Goering, etc.—created in the image of American hoods and bums, while the social tapestries of pre-war Germany and Austria are reconstructed in the style of pre-war Chicago and Cicero. Von Hindenburg, Reich President from 1925 to 1934, and the Austrian Chancellor and Foreign Minister, Dollfus (who was assassinated on Hitler's orders in 1934), are referred to affectionately as Dogsborough and Dullfeet, respectively.

The dialogue is a curious and very dramatic mixture of poetic verse and hard-hitting gangsterland jargon and there

are numerous puns on Shakespearian and other resplendent linguistics, as Hitler rises from the obsequious illiterate to the unashamed illiterate.

Brecht sees the great national crises and wars as mere trade fairs creating an illusion of grandeur by the sheer and simple magnitude of their enterprise, organised by people who do not need much intelligence in order to set the fair in motion or, thereafter, to exploit the intelligence of vast hordes of others. The audience is left in no doubt as to Hitler's intelligence, although his grammar is allowed to improve somewhat as the play progresses.

The history of the events by which Hitler came to power in the period 1930-39 is accurately traced and the play is constantly interrupted by breaks in the performance to allow for historical data to be flashed to the audience on a small illuminated screen hanging from the top of the stage.

Applying ordinary work-a-day logic to the larger, extraordinary, historical scene which Hitler and his thugs architected, Brecht shows admirably well what happens when people abandon all that has previously held ethically good for them in their small relationship with life in order to facilitate their larger aspirations. Blood spots begin to look like beauty spots through the eyes of a petit bourgeoisie bent on a romanticised concept of history.

Systematically destroying all notions of grandeur and greatness attributed to Hitler and the so-called economic miracle which he achieved in a materially and morally impoverished Germany, Brecht provides some thought-provocative parallels between pre-war depraved attitudes and events and those which prevail today. For instance, in recent times Russian soldiers in Prague told their victims that they were there to protect them, as did Hitler's gangsters in their day, while President Ky has said that his one and only historical hero is Adolf Hitler, alias, Arturo Ui!

As Brecht has said, it was not by Napoleon's Civil Code that he captured the poor imagination of such Germans, but by the millions of his victims. So, too, is the glamour of Al Capone and many other American gangsters thus attributable, as can be evidenced by the glut of films and books created in their image.

Heralded as the best native production of a Brecht play ever seen in Britain, it is to be hoped that the production will have a long and successful run in London and most of the critics seem to agree that Leonard Rossiter's performance as Arturo Ui, in the lead part, is remarkably excellent. Certainly, for my part, I found his performance entirely compelling and on target. So, too, was that of the rest of the cast.

OBITUARY

WE REGRET to announce the recent death of Roger Frank Bateson of Birmingham, a former Hon. Secretary of the local Secular Society. In his earlier years he had also been an active worker in the Labour movement. His death, at the age of 69, followed a long spell of ill-health which he endured with courage and stoicism. Our sympathy goes out to Ethel Bateson, his wife, and to other members of his family.

A secular ceremony was conducted by Mr Richard Clements at Lodge Hill Crematorium, Selly Oak, Birmingham.

SIDELIGHTS ON SIN

ELIZABETH COLLINS

THE COURSE of True Faith is not running smoothly in Latin America according to a statement by some of its Bishops. (*Guardian*, January 30.) Among other criticisms they speak of 'social and economic inequalities bordering on a state of sin' in the republics. Of course as somebody once said 'it all depends what you mean' by 'sin'. It might be considered by many people that the original 'sin' in South American affairs was that committed by the Pope in 1494 when, with supreme arrogance, he divided lands he had no right to between Spain and Portugal, thus handing over the country to regimes of an alien culture eager to get their hands on its valuable mineral resources. Results during the last 400 years have been oppressive poverty, illiteracy, and conditions amounting to slavery, with the Roman Church as a dominant authority.

Complaining of 'colonial feudalism' the Bishops comment upon the dual structure of the country 'the extremely rich and extremely poor' sounds rather hollow from representatives of one of the world's wealthiest organisations! Regarding the extremely rich, what of the Church's faithful Mafia followers in North America? There does not appear to be any criticism of them. Recently the gangster Mafia leader Genovese, perpetrator of murders and assassinations who died in prison was buried by the Church assisted by a choir of convent school children singing at the graveside and a sculptured angel as a headstone! 'Sin' rewarded him remarkably well in his lifetime. But of course gangsters know how to make sin appear respectable. They instruct their followers to 'go to Church regularly and to give to charity'. That ensures the angelic choir and the rest of the trimmings. Since the Spanish conquests the condition of the people has continued to deteriorate. Although the conquerors alleged that one of their principal intentions was to bestow upon the great Inca civilisation the 'benefits of Christianity' their real object seems to have been to extract all the mineral wealth possible. This they did, reducing the unfortunate people to a condition of poverty and hopelessness. Nineteenth century rebellions threw off some of their oppressors and ended Spanish rule, but the Church remained dominant.

In a land where saints names proliferate and where even the dogs have their patron saint, St Roque, on whose day in certain villages dogs are taken to Church to be blessed, where almost every second day is a fiesta with processions bearing gaudily painted images dedicated to somebody, it now appears that things are changing, resulting in an alarming decline in the faithful, many people only using the Church for christenings, weddings and funerals. It rather looks as if 'sin' really has got the upper hand in the desire for a change, and there are pressures at work for social reform. Tourists see only the fine cities—never the miserable shacks on the outskirts where the poor exist.

It is estimated that 75 per cent of land is in the hands of 2 per cent of rich, often absentee landlords, with oil and vast mineral wealth owned and exploited by a few top business men and North American companies. Church authorities at various Congresses have accused the people of apathy—anti-clericalism—of deserting to other creeds—or to atheism, and defections have greatly increased, meaning loss of revenue to the Church. Hence the outcry from their Lordships! Their call is for more clergy, but it is more schools and teachers that are needed and the necessity to conform to modern progressive ideas of the scientific 20th century, and above all the knowledge and practice of

birth control. Some of the states are already moving towards reforms (Peru and others) in a way that worries the Church.

However all is not yet lost. To combat this 'state of sin' which may lead to reform—even to socialism that bugbear of Holy Church—a rallying-cry has been issued which should rouse the faithful. In the best ecumenical tradition a Texas Baptist millionaire, J. L. Hunt, is so concerned with the situation that he is prepared to collaborate with the Vatican to the tune of 11 (eleven) million dollars a year to resist what he calls the 'Communist' threat in Latin America! Mr Hunt's 'Youth Freedom Speakers' with their three-minute prepared talks are organised to change the world under the slogan 'God, Country, Christianity, and Freedom'. It will be interesting to see how a few young people with pious pep talks deal with the alleged 'state of sin' even with eleven million dollars a year! In a shrinking world these authoritarian religious groupings can cause untold damage especially in a backward area. Where are our Secularist millionaires who could help to reverse the process.

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NATIONAL SECULAR SOCIETY

103 BOROUGH HIGH STREET, LONDON, SE1

LETTERS

Have we a prophet?

SPACE—and perhaps my advanced age (50)—prevent me from replying to all the amusing distortions (e.g. "ganster" for "gang", i.e. follow-my-leader-governments), irrelevancies and misrepresentations of Connaire Kensit's letter of 7.6.69. But may I implore Connaire Kensit to read *all* my articles carefully and then to tell me:—

1. Whether money is some magic substance, growing on friut trees, which substance can, in itself, supply increasing, nay, unlimited, fresh air, fresh water, unadulterated foods, housing and a million other things which are fast being burnt up for ever by the swarming hordes of all countries, not only China?

2. How effective birth control and unlimited quantitative expansion can ever exist side by side in our present universe? (See particularly "Effective Birth Control—the New Atomic Bomb—8.2.69.)

3. Why so many of my predictions, dating from 1958, have been confirmed by subsequent events?

4. Why all "economic expansions", through the early empires, Napoleon, Wilhelm II, Mussolini, Hitler, Stalin, and not forgetting the possibly imminent clash between the Russian and Chinese "expansions", have always ended in international war—not just poverty.

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If an old man may be forgiven personal reminiscences, he remembers standards of food-quality, travel, contentment and happiness in England (and his parents were far from wealthy) which cannot today be obtained by even the most affluent, *because they no longer exist.*

For example, in 1930 it was possible to travel from Paddington to Torquay in a third-class carriage, only partially full, or even empty, and in the same time as is taken today, by a train with corridors bursting with people. Connaire Kensit's remedy, no doubt, would be to triple the number of trains on the already overcrowded lines.

No: the only way out is, *first*, to achieve an immediate reduction of all populations to a small fraction of their present sizes, this automatically entailing the collapse of the present crazy economic and financial expansion of mankind, together with Connaire Kensit's nightmare, poverty.

Although approaching senility, however, I am still not so far removed from reality as to hope that this will come about, even on reading the encouraging news of the bullying of anti-birth control husbands by their Chinese wives. Hence, the "Apocalypse" which (may I remind Connaire Kensit) involves myself as well as others, for I had hoped (perhaps foolishly) to dodder about for another four or five years before asking for euthansia, and it is most unlikely—but I do not say impossible—that things will last out that long.

R. READER.

Free Will

AS ONE of Mr Crommelin's "extremely foolish" people I believe strongly that if an act is motivated it cannot be regarded as free. In this field motivation can only be understood in causal terms, and if human acts are caused then determinism is true. Since Mr Crommelin evidently considers himself not to be extremely foolish would he please explain to me in detail his non-causal theory of motivation. Until he so enlightens me I will persist in believing that a scientific, i.e. determinist, view of man is the most rational.

G. L. SIMONS.

Pure rubbish!

IN REPLY to your disgusted correspondent David Petrie. His argument I could demolish quite easily, but space would not permit in your columns.

Mr Petrie has a perfect right to hold what political views he chooses but he has no right to regard other people's views as pro-Jordan and Hitler. I am not a fascist. The conclusions upon the question of immigration are my own and not dictated by any political motives.

Further I regard the statements made by Mr David Petrie void of understanding. His attacks upon both Mr Hall and myself are pure rubbish.

I would respectfully ask our friend, Mr Petrie, however we managed without the aid of coloured labour during those Crisis years of 1939 till 1946. Today those crises have passed and thanks to our noble British people. But unfortunately another crisis has arisen and it is the problem of this great number of immigrants both legal and illegal.

Our delightful friend tells us there is no housing problem—perhaps not for some.

Further I would remind Mr Petrie that coloured labour in our hospitals is like that of Christianity it has created more misery in other directions than it has relieved.

However I suspect David Petrie's arguments are based upon political motives and very much to the left. Whereas I have no axe to grind but impelled in the interests of mothers and children who seek homes but are unable to acquire them owing to the vast numbers of coloured immigrants who have settled in this small island.

CHARLES SMITH.

The historicity of Jesus

MAY I, as briefly as possible, attempt to reply to Martin Page's letter in the issue of June 7th.

I regret that space will not permit me to deal with every one of his points or queries which he raised following my letter of the 24th May, but I will try to deal with the more important, or what seems to me to be the more important.

I agree with Mr Page that the "Who touched me?" scene is hardly an impressive argument in favour of Christ's historicity, if one considers the whole story told in verses 43 to 56, in chapter 8 of St Luke, of which it forms part.

As for what Mr Page refers to as the Nazareth incident, this

seems more worthy of some study. The story is related in chapter 4, verses 16-30 of St Luke, and follows on from the statement that Jesus taught in the synagogues in Galilee, being "glorified of all" (verse 15). It begins "And he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up; and, as his custom was, he went into the synagogue on the sabbath day, and stood up for to read. And there was delivered unto him the book of the prophet Esaias. And when he had opened the book, he found the place where it was written" (then follows a quotation from Esaias).

Then the story continues, "And he closed the book, and he gave it again to the minister, and sat down. And the eyes of all them that were in the synagogue were fastened on him". Then, according to the Gospel, Jesus started to make a speech, which angered the congregation, and they rose up, and drove him out of the city.

There are writers supporting the Myth theory, who say that Nazareth never existed as an inhabited place in the first century. About that I can say nothing, as I have no information.

The purpose of the story appears to be to demonstrate how "astonishing" and "gracious" were the words spoken by Jesus in the opinion of his listeners in Galilee, but that his home-town after first being greatly impressed by his words (verse 22), rejected him, but he escaped unharmed from his angry listeners.

It seems to me that the story, told in such detail, is either part of the build-up of the humanised God Jesus, or it is a propaganda story, much enlarged, of something which actually took place concerning some Jewish "prophet" who we can call Jesus or Joshua.

If anyone can show that the same story also is told of other humanised gods, then, of course, we can accept it as a myth-drama thesis, or fact. Nobody really knows.

As regards the corn-plucking "incident", my apologies for saying that Jesus plucked the corn on the Sabbath—of course, it was his disciples who did so. I should have known better.

With respect to the often unsatisfactory answers of the (possibly) humanised sun-god as reported in the Gospels, one must surely bear in mind that they were written for circulation when the Christ-Myth was already largely built-up. In any case, no one has, to my knowledge, ever dealt with the question—who copied down Christ's speeches and words, if they were ever copied or taken down for future reference? After all, the Gospels were written, some say 40 years later, some even as much as 120 years afterwards. How were his words so accurately remembered years afterwards, unless, of course, they form part of a propaganda-story, which has no basis, or very little, in true fact.

There are those who believe that the virgin birth stories were added at a later date to gospels which were originally without them—hence the references to Jesus's brothers and sisters. If Josephus's alleged reference to James, "the brother of Jesus who was called the Christ" is not a forgery—an interpolation—then this obviously supports that view, and is important evidence in favour of Christ's historicity (in some shape or form).

There are, or were, others in the Freethought and Rationalist movements who believe or believed that Paul was the true founder of Christianity as we know it today, and as it has been known for centuries, and that he deified as a saviour-god some obscure Jew whom we know nothing about for certain, but may have been an outstanding and remarkable religious rebel in the first part of the first century AD. If Pliny can be accepted, the Christ-god worship was already well-known to the authorities in Rome by AD 112.

I think the whole business is more or less insoluble now; it is a matter for argument and conclusions only. But there is not a scrap of evidence that the Church's claims for Jesus are true, and that is where they and I parted company 40 years ago.

EDGAR KINGSTON.

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