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ROYAL PAUPERS ?

THE REPERCUSSIONS of the Duke of Edinburgh's pronouncements in New York have been strange indeed. Bermondsey dockers have set up a fund to buy the Duke a new Polo pony and Harold Wilson has declined to set a committee to study the Civil List. While not disputing the right of dockers or anyone else to do what they like with their money, it would seem that Harold Wilson's lack of concern is the more realistic approach. To suggest that the Royal family is poor is clearly quite ridiculous. In a recent press statement David Tribe, the President of the National Secular Society, put the affair in perspective:

"It is reported that the price of coal will rise 10 per cent this winter. More old age pensioners may therefore be expected to die of hypothermia (a polite expression for death through being unable to afford the cost of keeping warm). While this occurs we are all expected to feel sympathy for the Royal Family as it struggles on with various allowances whose total is well in excess of half a million, plus additional grants for overseas tours and the upkeep of royal palaces. It is suggested that this is inadequate and that the Queen will soon be calling upon her personal fortune.

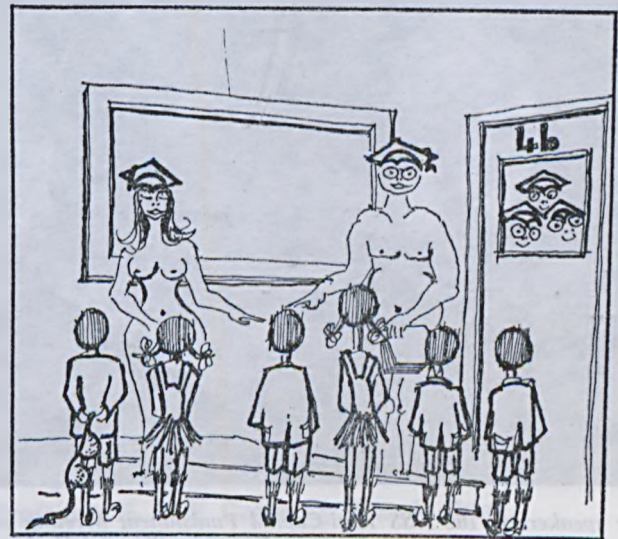
Where, one might ask, did this fortune come from originally except from national endowments, unrevealed, untaxed and, most important of all, not subject to death duties? In this way the Queen is reported to be the richest woman in the world. If she is apply for further national assistance, we trust all her sources of income will be revealed.

The founder of the NSS, Charles Bradlaugh, was one of the foremost republicans in Victorian England. Since that time the monarchy has become somewhat more democratic, while overseas republics have appeared in a less attractive light. Views therefore vary on the ideal Head of State. What is abundantly true, however, is that as the Head of the Church of England, anointed by the Archbishop of Canterbury, and of the secular Establishment, the Sovereign is the fountainhead of national religiosity and hereditary privilege and is as such essentially undemocratic."

SEX IN THE CLASSROOM

THE BBC'S DECISION to broadcast programmes of sex education for children, is one of the first worthwhile results of the mounting wave which is generally known as permissiveness. As barriers and taboos are done away with, there is an inevitable desire on everyone's part to revel in the new found, and initially alien, freedom. Like children who make themselves sick when granted the freedom of an unexpected bag of sweets, we have all read our "pornography", seen what nakedness looks like from a theatre auditorium, studied sexual intercourse in Todd Ao, and bandied four letter words about like confetti—all with such abandon that the only thing which keeps us from entering a monastery is our lack of faith. Now we can sit back and put the new permissiveness to good use,

There have been surprisingly few objections to the BBC's venture. At the trial showings of the programmes 95 per cent of parents, were very impressed, and teachers and children were said to have been appreciative. Objections have come only from predictable quarters. The Archbishop of Cardiff wrote to *The Times*, but the only real objection he had was that children might watch by themselves and be disturbed by what they saw. True. But this is little reason to abandon the project. It is more a reason to abolish the news, or the violent serials. Parents and teachers will have to take care that children are not left alone, but this is not very important, for we all seem to get over our first edition of *Danger Man*.



An naturally enough Mary Whitehouse said: "I do not want to prejudice programmes, but I have great reservations about this. Already there is evidence that children may well experiment because their curiosity is aroused by these lessons". One could ask for evidence as to why childish experiments are automatically frowned upon. But it should be enough to ask Mrs Whitehouse to consider whether it is not better for a child to know, and perhaps experiment with the truth, than to be confused by, and perhaps experiment with, a collection of prevarications and lies. (A stork has been killed by an air gun before now.)

Despite Mrs Whitehouse and the various protests from lips more often employed to talk to and of God, we in

Freethinker

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Editor: David Reynolds

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Britain must count our decidedly secular blessings. For in America those in favour of sex education are having a tough time. So far 60 per cent of American schools have some form of sex education, though it is far less advanced than in Britain. In recent weeks the campaign against it has reached a quite extraordinary and in many ways laughable pitch, with the result that Louisiana has banned sex education altogether and fifteen other states are considering similar measures. The New York state legislature has forbidden the use of state funds for sex education. This is the result of a campaign which has condemned sex education as a "Red plot". A host of bizarrely christened groups have

been formed to halt the insidious efforts of the Communists: SOS (Sanity on Sex), POSSE (Parents Opposed to Sex and Sensitivity Education), MOMS (Mothers for Moral Stability), and believe it or not—POPE (Parents for Orthodoxy in Parochial Education). A remarkably depressing achievement for the country which prides itself on being the most civilised in the world. These groups and others are encouraged by the right-wing Christian Crusade Movement and by the John Birch Society. It is these who are emphasising the communist aspect. A Kansas Baptist minister, a leading figure in the protest movement has come out with: "The Communist Party knows that a demoralised nation does not have the will to resist infiltration". Another thinks sex education is "All part of a giant conspiracy to rape the people, weaken their wills, and make them sensuous".

Perhaps, however, it is the rumours that school children have been encouraged to explore their differences in darkened rooms, and that teachers are stripping in front of their classes in order to illustrate their lessons, that is at the back of Mrs Whitehouse's mind. I fear such things are more in the nature of a fascist plot than anything approaching reality, which is a pity. But thank God, or whoever, for uncivilised Britain.



The speakers at the NSS Anti-Capital Punishment Meeting on November 6 (left to right): Canon Collins, David Tribe, C. H. Rolph (Chairman), The Rt. Hon. Kenneth Younger, PC, and Dr Louis Blom-Cooper.

COMING EVENTS

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.

INDOOR

Leicester Secular Society: 75 Humberstone Gate: Sunday,

- November 23, 6.30 p.m.: "Long to reign over us?", Alan Bates.
 North Staffordshire Humanist Group: Cartwright House, Broad Street, Hanley (near Cine Bowl): Friday, November 28, 7.45 p.m.: "Campaign for Moral Education", Bryan Milner.
 South Place Ethical Society: Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London, WC1: Sunday, November 23, 11 a.m.: "Faith—Communication and Participation", Dr St Blaize-Molony. Admission free. Tuesday, November 25, 7 p.m.: Discussion, "Psychology and the Individual", Joshua Fox, MA, MSc. (Career Analyst). Admission 2s (including refreshments). Members free.
 West Ham and District Secular Group: The Community Centre, Wanstead (near Wanstead underground): Thursday, November 27, 8 p.m.: Meeting.

FURUROLOGY

OSWELL BLAKESTON

TWINKLE, TWINKLE little star, we need no longer wonder who you are: you're home base for tomorrow. Well, on a clear night one can see thousands of millions of stars with a telescope; and if, say, one in a thousand has conditions for some form of life, there are possibilities of 180 million planets. Of course some of us may have to plod around permanently in space suits, for it is not necessary that the conditions of life will be ours. Even on our earth scientists know there are forms of life that need no oxygen, the anaerobic bacteria: oxygen acts like poison on them. Then Dr Siegel has recreated the atmosphere of Jupiter in his laboratory and bred mites in it, although it shares none of the prerequisites we have hitherto laid down for "life".

Already, then, our world picture begins to thaw. So why should we be outraged when Erich von Daniken¹ suggests that many mysteries and superstitions can be explained if we allow the possibility of visitors from other planets in our perplexing past. Isn't it a relief to know that those Eskimo legends about men in metal birds, those early Indian manuscripts which practically describe rockets and their propulsion, those Tibetan books which speak of "pearls in the sky", that these enigmas may after all make sense? That even the gods make sense, if we translate fiery chariots into UFO's?

Our author proposes that the gods, the astronauts, came with first-aid for feeble men. They gave knowledge which enabled Sumerians to calculate to 15 digits (when the Greeks never rose beyond the figure 10,000 and described the rest as "infinity"), or showed men how to move mighty blocks of stone for monuments which contemporary engineers cannot shift. They also interbred with selected females to "improve the strain", and gave the god-like promise that they would return in time to see how their proteges were making out. Sometimes, on their return, they felt people had been too stupid and ought to be punished—perhaps with an atom bomb. (Why, in the biblical text, was the angel so urgent to drive Lot and his family away from their home, pulling them along by the hands? Why should an almighty God be tied down to a time-table? But if a count-down had already begun and the angel-astronaut knew about it . . . ?)

So the future gnaws away the past. How can one account for the accuracy of certain ancient maps unless the figuration was observed from a space craft? Doesn't the Terrace of Baalbek at last become self-explanatory if one thinks of it as a gigantic air field? Might not the first Egyptian mummies have been prepared with the same intention that today drives rich men to be buried in ice so that they can be resurrected in a better future? The Egyptians, of course, would have been waiting to greet the reappearance of the astronauts. (Yes, in March 1963 biologists of the University of Oklahoma showed that the skin cells of the Egyptian Princess Meme, who had been dead for several thousands of years, were still capable of living.)

In all this, you may admit, there are some uncomfortable facts, but you're not going to let yourself be confused by a hotch potch of fables about fiery chariots descending from heaven? Yet Heinrich Schliemann accepted Homer's *Odyssey* as more than fable, and discovered Troy. Indeed I think the most exciting notion presented by Mr von Daniken is not that gods may be rationalised as astronauts,

but that we should turn to the relics of the past for clues to further development of space travel. Certainly archaeology needs to be taken from the monopoly of those who stick religiously to accepted theory and are incapable of making imaginative jumps. The stuffed geese who refuse to digest anything else.

After a world holocaust, archaeologists of the future might dig up the Statue of Liberty. If they are as blinkered as our specialists, they will probably promptly assume an unknown divinity, a fire god (because of the torch) or a sun god (because of the rays around the head); for inevitably archaeologists confine their explanations of why Easter Island was called "Land of the Bird Men" to superstitions, and tacitly ignore the depiction of space suits in cave drawings (some are reproduced in this book).

It is a pity that *Chariots of the Gods?* is, finally, rather superficial in treatment; but then one could not expect an established pundit to have the author's daring. One must be grateful for so many remarkable pointers, and hope others will be courageous enough to take the speculation further. Burdened with a legacy of mumbo-jumbo, we need new positive thinking; and it was Thomas Mann who said that "the positive thing about the sceptic is that he considers everything possible".

Certainly I'm with the author when he refuses to be shouted down by the pious who are infuriated by a "space outlook" which explains their gods without mysticism. Probably we do need "memories of the future" to make sense of old records and monuments, just as we need space exploration with the menace of our population explosion. Naturally we'll have to pick our stars carefully. One cannot imagine that more advanced civilisations would be pleased to see us with all our belligerence, arrogance and presumption; but it's a nice thought that some nitwits somewhere might take us for god-figures . . . at least for a few years until they discovered that our tradition does not conceive education as preparation for change but as static knowledge.

¹ *Chariots of the Gods?* Eric von Daniken (Souvenir Press, 30s).

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WHOSE HOMESTEAD IS PALESTINE?

PERCY ROY

THE FIRST PART OF A TWO-PART ARTICLE

HENRY CATTAN is a Palestinian and a well-known international lawyer; small wonder then that in his latest book, *Palestine, the Arabs and Israel* (Longmans, 40s) he makes a good case of the claim of the Palestinian Arabs. Unfortunately, his arguments rest on rather shaky premises. Right at the beginning he writes: "When the Israelite tribes, after their exodus from Egypt, invaded the land of Canaan in the twelfth century BC, they found a settled population and established culture. The population of the country then included the settled Canaanites, the Gibeonites and the Philistines". What a knot of popular misconceptions!

Settlers at that time were few and far between in Canaan and they were continually harassed by more or less nomadic tribes, including the Hebrews. The Hebrews were never an ethnic group in Egypt. Exodus is pure mythology, rather than history (cf. "The Jewish Easter Tale" in the *FREETHINKER*, April 15 and May 27, 1960). The earliest mention of Israel is in a Hymn of Triumph, when in about 1230 BC Pharaoh Menephtah at Piari in the Delta destroyed a motley army of Mediterranean pirates and, pursuing them, invaded Palestine. Enumerated among the peoples subject to Egyptian rule, the Israelis therefore must have been more or less settled in the region.

Gibeon ("Hill town") was a Hivite settlement mentioned in 965 BC when it was captured by Shishak. The Gibeonites were not a people, but the inhabitants of this town. After being repulsed by Rameses III (c. 1204-1172 BC), the invading Philistines had settled down in the Shephelah, the coast-plain of Canaan, which afterwards was known as Philistia, whence the name 'Palestine'. The Greeks, however, called the country Phoinix, after the more important Phoenicians. Canaan means "Lowland". The Philistines (in the Old Testament "pelishtim") are supposed to have been originally an Indo-Germanic people who had migrated from Crete and become semitised.

The oldest Semitic language of importance was Accadian, the speech of the people who inhabited the plains of Arabia before settling in Mesopotamia. From there, however, peoples under Indo-Arian leaders like the Hittites and the Amorites, were driven out by an invasion of hill tribes, namely the Kharri and the Mitanni, and settled around the Lebanon range. Considering so much migration and dimming of racial identity, I cannot understand how Mr Cattan can decree: "The Palestine Arabs are the original inhabitants of Palestine" (p. 6).

Jerusalem, the greatest apple of contention, appears in the Tell el-Amarna letters as Woro-worusmi, the name given by the Carians of Anatolia which corresponds to the pro-Hittite (Hatti) *Wurusemmu* and hieroglyphic *Us'mmu* or *Urushlm* since it was a foundation of Hittites and Amorites rather than Semites. Even if for historical facts one relies—as Cattan seems to—on the Bible, Genesis 10:6 asserts that Canaan was "the son of Ham".

If, however, the author meant to say that the inhabitants of Palestine were Arabic-speaking peoples, then it must be remembered that Arabic is not the language of an ethnic entity but of the religious community of Islam, since its believers were compelled to read and chant the Qur'an in the language of the Prophet himself.

The Arab conquest started in the second half of the seventh century, but already one century later their intel-

lectual and political leaders were Arabized strangers: after the fall of the Omayyads, the Persians were the main statesmen, men like Harun-ar-Rashid. The great Saladin (Shala-ud-Din) of the Crusades was a Kurd. Medicine and science was mainly in the hands of Jews writing in Arabic. Greeks were leading the economy and Turks the army. The 'Arabs' of Spain were Berbers.

The Arabs therefore are rather late conquerors of Palestine. Paleography for this part of the world distinguished three phases: Phoenician, Hebrew and Aramaic. However, does the fact that the Hebrews were more or less autochthonous give modern Jewry a right to Palestine?

Antiquity has no direct descendants

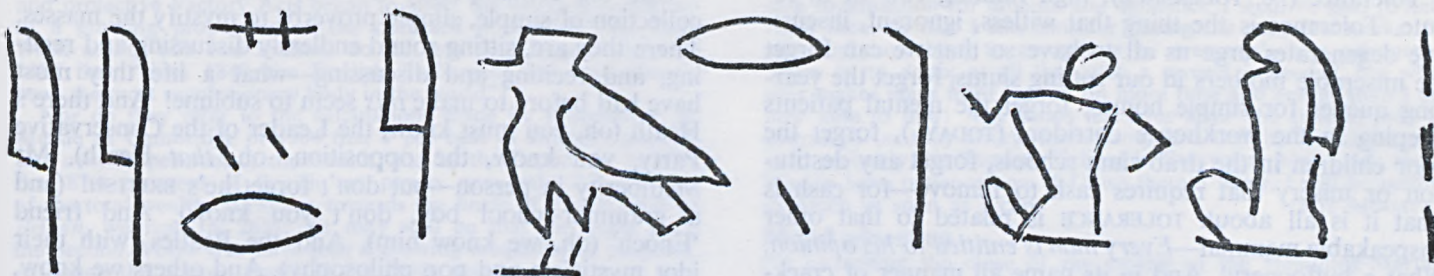
In antiquity peoples were not so numerous as biblical exaggerations try to suggest. The Assyro-Babylonians developed a consistent policy of resettlement of conquered populations as a device to discourage potential rebellion. The Hebrews were driven out of their homeland and replaced by peoples drawn from other parts of the empire (cf. 2 Kings 17:17-25), starting the process of "acculturation". Later, absorbed into the Hebrew community by intermarriage and concordance in religious belief and practice, the ethnical and cultural aspects underwent certain changes.

At Marisa in Judea the archeological discovery of tombs cut out of limestone rock and prepared for leaders of a Sidonian trading community, are proof that—especially during the Hellenistic era of Palestine—foreign trading communities also brought new foreign blood among the established people. All during the centuries down to their dispersion on a wider world stage, the Jews continued to absorb new elements and were unconsciously functioning as one of the active centres of *gene* redistribution for the part of the world to which they belonged. It is odd, in the light of their past, that the Jews are often considered to be, and want to prove that they are, in effect, a distinct race.

They are in reality a kind of synthesis of the population existing in the area surrounding Palestine. In the course of the Diaspora and isolation of the various sections of their host people, mutation or genetic change came about. Thus we might describe the Hebrews as basically Mediterranean with some minor addition of the broad-headed element that was beginning to become manifest in some localities.

Proximity provides the opportunity for intermarriage—apart from rape during pogroms, etc.—and intermarriage is the means by which genetic exchange occurs. It is true that both the minatory and monitory utterances against outmarriage were written long after the formative stage we are considering and at a time when religious distinction had become formalized traditionally. The Bible itself contains numerous references to intermarriage (connubium), both during this early phase of Israel's history and later. For the practice of taking captured women for marriage and accepting converts into full citizenship was recognised as customary and permissible so long as the Mosaic law was observed.

Between the twentieth and fifteenth century before our era the Hittites, with a non-Semitic language and Indo-European aristocracy, showed an ascendancy of brachycephaly in a form associated with the Armenoid people, with whom modern Jews share most of their facial traits. The mainstream of Jews, therefore, are a section of Western



The oldest historical mention of Israel (cut upon the back of a stele of Amenhotep III at Thebes), here given from left to right with the two deathers for 1 and ending with the deterrmantives for "people" (man and woman) and the three strokes for "Plural".

society, set apart merely by their *religious beliefs*, concomitant traditions and certain facial traits perpetuated through inmarriage. Like the Roman Catholic Irish the Jews, as a result of centuries of persecution, are obstinately clinging to a religion that originated in the Early Bronze Age and was later codified under a monotheistic veneer (in about 540). Only now that both peoples no longer feel the threat of discrimination this religious neurosis gradually is beginning to evaporate.

It therefore should be clear that the Jews are anything but a 'race' in any biological sense and must stop considering themselves to be one. The eminent linguist, Professor Max Muller, fuming against the 'Aryan' race myth, once exclaimed: "To me an ethnologist who speaks of an Aryan race, Aryan blood, Aryan eyes and hair is as great a sinner as a linguist who speaks of dolicocephalic dictionaries or a brachycephalic grammar".

On the grounds of being the 'indigenous population' of Palestine therefore neither Jews nor Arabs have a claim to the land. Archaeological records in certain caves in Mount Carmel and elsewhere in Palestine, tell of neolithic cultivators passing from the stage of savagery to barbarism; they go under the name of Natufians and were cave dwellers.

The earliest Semites settled in Ugarit (Ras-Shamara in Syria) early in the Bronze Age (c. fifteenth century); their language was closely related to Hebrew and their religious legends were plagiarized by the authors of the Old Testament. (See "The Mother of God" in *Humanist*, March 1959.)

There is no direct link between the Hebrews of Antiquity and the Jews of today, just as there is none between modern Normans and their Viking ancestors. Modern Jewry developed in two distinctly separate groups: the Ashkenazim in Central and East Europe and the Sephardim in the Mediterranean; they differ at least as much as the Scotch and the Irish or the Cornish and the Bretons. Taken all together it should be clear that the Jews are not an ethnic group *per se* but a westernised community clinging to traditions and religious observances derived from oriental antiquity alien to their Western education. Since nowadays they belong, culturally, to Western civilisation, there exists no earthly reason for perpetuating Jewishness in contradistinction to all other Western peoples. There is no denying that in the Near East, established as a political entity, they represent a Western enclave resented by their Arab neighbours.

If early settlement in Palestine gives neither contestant a right to the land, the latest settlement is definitely in favour of the Arab Palestinians, with the only valid limitation that the United Nations wanted to provide a homeland for the Jews. This has been hotly opposed by the Arabs who claim that the UN as a loose association of independent states has no right to make political decisions. However, if such decisions are in favour of Arab claims, they eagerly accept and adopt them.

Clearly they can't have their cake and eat it.

(To be concluded next week)

LET'S ALL BE IRREVERENT

G. L. SIMONS

MOST LANDS are inhabited by sacred cows of one species or another. Sometimes, as with other animal species, they evolve—their horns grow longer or they acquire an extra udder. But cows, sacred and protected, continue to occupy the land and foul our freedoms.

The value of irreverence should be obvious to freethinkers. Freethought grew up on irreverence, but irreverence directed solely at the clerics in their intellectual dotage. This of course is a grand start. Let's teach our children to laugh at the ridiculous ceremony, the pomp and sanctimony, the total irrelevance of most clerical activity. Priests mouth their comic prose and the sheeply crowd echo the jokes. But they do not laugh. They do not think it at all funny. Even A. N. Whitehead felt obliged to remark that there was little humour in the Bible: one might have expected a little of Russell's wit to have rubbed off while they were fiddling about with *Principia Mathematica*. But come

to think of it I don't expect there are many jokes in that either.

Another carefully tended cow is FREEDOM. Freedom is magic; *freedom* does all things for all men; if your love-life is unsatisfactory then *freedom* will cure it; if society is unjust it will only be made less unjust by *freedom*; if lands suffer under tyranny then *freedom* is the answer. With *freedom* we can fly to the moon, liberate the commie, clear the slums, and sprinkle perfumes with strawberry flavour on our genitals (true!—reference supplied if requested). Freedom is the genie in the bottle, the fairy at the bottom of the garden, Santa Claus and the Angel Gabriel. But, but, but . . . why in unfree Cuba are there suddenly fewer slums, illiterates, diseased, brothels, etc., than in FREE, FREE, FREE USA, where the cows graze happily all over the place and the pavements stink (but enough political propaganda). What's next?

Tolerance (i.e. TOLERANCE), high ranking cow of ill repute. Tolerance is the thing that witless, ignorant, insensitive degenerates urge us all to have so that we can forget the miserable mothers in our rotting slums, forget the year-long queues for simple homes, forget the mental patients sleeping in the workhouse corridors (TODAY!), forget the poor children in the drab slum schools, forget any destitution or misery that requires cash to remove—for cash is what it is all about. TOLERANCE is related to that other unspeakable mammal—*Every man is entitled to his opinion*. What a buffoonery! And in its name all manner of crackpot reactionary utters cliché and obscenity like a sausage factory.

And what about personalities? Buddha got fed up with his wife. I wonder why. Maybe he should have tried another position. Maybe his wife said he was impotent (World religions have been founded on less)—and maybe Mohammed had similar problems, except that he urged men to till their wives with ardour. If Nietzsche is anything to go by, and he probably wasn't, then Zoroaster had reason to hate women, and Joseph Smith's mental state was nothing to write home about—hardly in the all-American tradition, except that there is no evidence that he had the all-American mammary fixation, which perhaps lets him off the hook a bit.

And political leaders. What a dreary and unsavoury crew (the leftists are dreary, the rightists unsavoury). How dull the great classics of Marxism—what tedious prose in Marx and Lenin (Engels is a bit better, but after all didn't he spend longer in England—ha! ha!). Statistic after miserable statistic, on and on, logic chopping, defining, redefining, analysing *ad nauseam*. And look at the other lot. Mussolini going on about how beautiful tanks are, and Hitler talking about Jews spewing filth into the face of mankind. Lovely people! So poetic, so clear-headed, so wretchedly obsessed with their egocentric perversions. But *Mein Kampf* is easier to read than *Capital* which is one reason it caught on earlier—and anyway what left-winger understands *Capital* anyway! Let's face it, Harold Wilson (and who could be leftier than that?) has never even read Marx—and so we come to contemporaries (if H. Wilson can be so delineated).

One big contemporary is Mao, who has dished up a collection of simple, simple proverbs to mystify the masses. There they are, sitting round endlessly discussing and reciting, and reciting and discussing—what a life they must have had before to make *this* seem to sublime! And there's the Heath (oh, you must know, the Leader of the Conservative Party, you know, the opposition—oh, *that* Heath). Mr Mediocrity in person—but don't forget he's BRITISH! (and a grammar-school boy, don't you know). And friend 'Enoch' (oh, we know him). And the Beatles (with their idiot mysticism and pop philosophy). And others we know, who drop cliché, platitude, banality and lie with accomplished virtuosity. Well, are the freethinkers still with me? Let's have a look at a few of them.

Top most of course there are the freethought gods of the historical pantheon, i.e. the ones who are pushing up the grass. Paine and Robertson and Cohen *et al*, all worshipped with rare reverence. I wonder what sort of sex life they had, and were they continent or afflicted with b.o.? Did they make rude noises at inconvenient times? Who knows? Their pious biographers and disciples would never have noticed (it's called selective filtering of information, if that's what you want to call it). And then there's Ayer (nicely warm in his waistcoat and inhaling cool, cool air through his cigarette holder—and when's he going to start doing some work? Only half-a-dozen books in about thirty adult years! Really!). And Bertrand Arthur William Russell—well, he urged we start a nuclear war with Russia, and he suggested that a way of stopping the country from being flooded with the offspring of working-class men and women was to make the state pay for the children of the middle classes, the "best parts" of society. Then of course the superior middle classes would embark on an orgy of procreation. Yes, Russell did suggest this, he did, I tell you! (Reference supplied.)

Well, we could go on like this for ever. But Mr David Reynolds might get cross. He seems to think that *other* people should have articles in the FREETHINKER. The taste of some people! I can't think why they want to. It's only a rag, really. Not up to much at all.

Let's *all* be irreverent.

Book Review

MARTIN PAGE

The Wealth of Britain, 1085-1966, by Sidney Pollard and David W. Crossley (B. T. Batsford Ltd., 303 pp., 45s).

THOUGH MARRED by a woefully inadequate index and a rather dry style, this work is probably the first scientific study in depth of the wealth of Britain from 1085 to 1966, with indications as to how that wealth has been shared out. Despite the difficulties inherent in a survey of this kind—difficulties posed by the changing forms and concepts of wealth, the deficiency of adequate data regarding the earlier centuries, and so on—*The Wealth of Britain* is a monument of scholarship and painstaking research, a veritable mine of information, a most valuable book of reference. The authors, Professor Pollard and Mr Crossley (both academics from Sheffield University), have skilfully woven into a coherent pattern the various strands marked by the progress of agriculture, industry and trade, the distribution of wealth, and the impact of population-pressures, epidemics (such as the Black Death), the agrarian and technological innovations.

There are, however, some surprising omissions. There is no evaluation of the claim that by 1405 the English Church possessed a third of the country's property. In the chapter on the sixteenth century scene, there is no assessment of the effect on national wealth of the unemployment caused by the enclosures, the discarded bands of noblemen's retainers and the dissolution of the monasteries. "The controlled release of monastic lands into the market over the decades after 1540 supplied and stimulated a demand governed by profit and prestige. Purchases by a wide

range of society, from the peerage to the yeomanry, took lands into the management of the more enterprising, who, successful in managing these, were on the look-out for more" (p. 94)—yet our authors do not explicitly observe that in this transitional age both feudal and capitalist traits were discernible in the British economy.

There is no mention of that brilliant engineer Andrew Yarranton, who, between 1677 and 1681, published a remarkable book in which he not only claimed to have doubled the value of land in five counties through his agricultural reforms, but also outlined schemes for Britain's economic prosperity, which, he thought, would be heightened by a viable internal system of navigation. There is no account of the South Sea Bubble, whose bursting (1720) was long regarded as the most terrible financial disaster to befall a commercial nation. There appears to be no reference to Tooke's classic *History of Prices*, to Karl Marx or to Engels' *Condition of the Working Classes in England*. It would, no doubt, have been too much to have expected any allusion to Ledru Rollin's provocative study, *The Decline of England*.

Our authors claim that the years 1816 to 1848 marked the most rebellious period in the history of the British working class. They point to the transition "from the bucolic celebration of set feast days to the demoralising daily drinking to escape the slum surroundings": they fail to add that Nonconformists, with Anglican connivance, made widely successful efforts to close every place of recreation not a beer-house on Sundays, the only "free" day for the proletariat (the legislation governing Sunday Observance still has to be purged of its theological presuppositions). "Two generations of men had been sacrificed to the creation of an industrial base, which was completed by about 1845-50. Thereafter, the population of Great Britain (though not yet of Ireland) was lifted, for the first time in human history, by a clear margin above a sub-

sistence standard, while at the same time hours of work were cut and protective Factory Acts began to affect the working conditions of a growing proportion of the occupied population" (p. 210). What a pity our two authors do not evaluate Engels' claim in 1885 that "since 1848 the English Parliament has undoubtedly been the most revolutionary body in the world!"

Nor do they refer to the calculations made by Professor J. E. Meade of Cambridge in 1964 that 5 per cent of Britain's population own 75 per cent of the wealth, and by the *Economist* in 1966 that 87.9 per cent of British tax payers own only 3.7 per cent of the total wealth. However, towards the finale of *The Wealth of Britain*, we read (p. 265): "it may well be that the years since the Second World War have seen a growing inequality of property. Although the poorer classes in the 1960s possess much more personal property and small savings than their counterparts 50 years earlier, the distribution of capital is still as highly concentrated in the hands of a tiny proportion of the population as ever". This situation in a supposed democracy presents a challenge to the humanist—not least because more widespread affluence in a sense creates a more pernicious and complex situation than prevailed, say, in Marx's time, when the discrepancies between rags and riches were blatant enough for all to see. "When Adam delved and Eve span, who was then the gentleman?" Thus did the popular rhyme condense the levelling doctrine of John Ball. For the humanist, Adam and Eve are allegorical figures, not the progenitors of the human race, and he may deem it ironic that John Ball, a priest, was the first recorded Englishman to preach the natural rights of man to his compatriots. Yet the dream of John Ball, no less than the vision of Piers Ploughman, reminds the humanist of the tension between the real and the ideal—that tension which provided a dynamic of social progress—and after surveying the development of English economic life over nine centuries, he may ask: when will Piers Ploughman come into his own?

Theatre Review

LUCY DANSIE

THE OLD LADIES: Westminster Theatre, Palace Street, London, SW1, until December 6.

RODNEY ACKLAND is perhaps the most under-rated of all contemporary British playwrights. It can well be said that he pioneered the revolution which gave Osborne, Pinter, Wesker, Stoppard, Bond, Storey and many others to the theatre-going public. Traits of what was once a revolutionary style are detectable in this exquisite production of *The Old Ladies*, a play taken from a novel by Hugh Walpole—a penetrating and at times heart-rending study of three old ladies, who have only one thing in common, loneliness. Living "many years ago in an old house in Pontippy Square, Polchester", are the timid god-fearing spinster, May Berenger, the good-natured efficient widow, Lucy Amorest, and the cantankerous selfish widow of an unhappy marriage, Agatha Payne. Miss Berenger's life is dominated by her fear of Mrs Payne, Mrs Amorest's by the long-awaited arrival of her son and Mrs Payne's by a craving for a "piece of amber" owned by Miss Berenger. The three are the sole occupants of a house, in which they each have a room. By presenting the stage as a house with the side-wall removed, Peter Cotes' direction enables us to see the interaction between the three rooms which make up the house.

The play with its macabre ending points to the inadequacy of our society's provisions for the aged. All three are doing nothing but waiting to die, and each clings to her own little ray of hope which gives her life some sort of purpose. Only Mrs Amorest has a real hope—the arrival of her son. The other two have nothing beyond contrivances of their imaginations. Mrs Payne thrives on bitterness and greed. Miss Berenger keeps going with the help of the idea of getting herself a dog, and God in the form of going to church on Sunday and kneeling to pray at night. Flora Robson as Mrs Payne, Joan Miller as Mrs Amorest and Joyce Carey as Miss Berenger all blend the sad helplessness born of their loneliness, with the characteristics which distinguish them. If any of these three performances can be singled out, it is Joyce Carey's Miss Berenger which comes across with particular effect. But it is all three who together with Walpole's plot, Ackland's dialogue and Cotes' production make up a memorable evening's theatre.

LETTERS

Humanist Letter Network

FOR BOTH medical and selfish reasons I now intend gradually to close down the Humanist Letter Network (International), which I have been running since I founded it six years ago. I shall of course be contacting all those members who responded to the April Newsletter and may I reassure everyone now that no confidential papers will be passed on to anyone else. If, however, there

is any Secular Humanist thinking of starting up a new pen-friendship organisation for atheists and agnostics, I shall be glad to hear from them so that I can consider during the next few weeks if I can (and how best) to co-operate to everyone's best advantage. There is no doubt at all that such a project is needed, but whoever makes plans must reckon on more time and energy than I am now able to find! Any funds left over after 'the funeral' will of course go (as they always have done) to a definite Humanist project; probably the Swaneng School in Botswana. May I ask members to have patience now if I owe them a letter. I will be getting in touch as soon as I can.

KIT MOUAT.

Moral education

ON re-reading the close of my review of the Hemming-Marratt pamphlet on moral education, I thought myself it was a bit bald and am not surprised that James Hemming wants clarification.

I agree with him that discussion of the practical issues he raises in his letter (November 8) are of great interest and importance, and can only wish this sort of material had been prominent in the pamphlet. The questions he asks, however, illustrate one of the difficulties I have in mind. I couldn't give a cut-and-dried answer to some of these queries, and in suggesting that at least one of the situations he outlines is purely personal I would say it is not a 'moral' issue at all.

It seems to me that the humanist movement, naturally anxious to answer the question 'If you take religion out of schools what are you going to put in its place?', has spoken rather too glibly of replacing RE with ME, somewhat after the fashion (though without the political implications) of MRA, as if it were the easiest thing in the world. While believing that the school should be a moral community and that 'moral issues' should be discussed in social studies, I have the gravest suspicions of any formalised, or syllabised, 'moral education'. What I fear is:

1. It might be, especially under the influence of the current crop of headteachers, RE by the back door. The children could be told that religion gave them the strength needed to live the good life and Jesus was the ideal they ought to follow.

2. It might become too academic and abstract. Personally I am very concerned about trends appearing in the work of John Wilson. He seems to be making the subject impossibly difficult, losing sight of spontaneity and becoming rationalist in the wrong sense. One can conceive of Wilson examination papers (using Dr Hemming's words): 'Q. What are the ideals of moral behaviour? A. Truth, kindness, consideration, thoughtfulness and so forth—and the school cheat or bully walking off with the first prize. Wilson tries to avoid this dilemma by going into the question of motive, but overlooks the problems of how this can ultimately be known (even to the individual) and whether he has set a standard of altruism and insight that is beyond the reach of ordinary mortals. Indeed, one is tempted to ask him the little boy's question, 'But have you become a better person since you've been studying morality for the Farmington Trust?'

3. It runs the risk of re-establishing that climate of opinion which was one of the more serious *sequelae* of traditional Christianity and Ethical Culture. With the focusing of attention on individual responses, social conditions can readily be overlooked. In other words, 'changed lives' deputise for 'changed living conditions'.

4. It may be didactic and simply reflect the conventions of an older generation.

DAVID TRIBE.

Aid to underdeveloped countries

MR G. L. SIMONS writes (November 1) that the people of the poorer undeveloped countries "watch the wagons carrying, in thousands of tons, the rich ores for disposal to America so that middle and upper-class Americans can enjoy two or three cars in every garage". Inflammatory stuff this; but if foreigners had not sunk the mines, the ore would be still in the earth today. The natives of those countries very willingly work in the mines because the wages afford them a standard of living vastly superior to that in their villages. The ore is exported to industrialised countries because there is as yet no industry at home to use it.

Later on he writes that the overflow of profit from the poorer countries is nearly three times the investment inflow, and he concludes that Western capitalism is robbing the poor countries. If this accusation of robbery be true, then very bank in London that lends £100 and receives back £105 is robbing the borrower. This is simple nonsense, since the loan may enable the borrower to earn £40 or £50 annually, out of which he is only too glad to pay the bank £5 for the risk it undertook in lending. If Western capital can earn higher rates in the undeveloped countries, it is because the risks are greater; and the frequency of revolutions, plus the readiness of so many undeveloped countries to nationalise, i.e. seize, the foreign installations do nothing to lessen the risk.

Finally, I suppose it was too much to hope that Mr Simons would mention how much of the aid to undeveloped countries was a gift.

HENRY MEULEN.

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CORRECTION

IN the FREETHINKER of November 1 in the article 'Servetus' by Elizabeth Collins on page 347, it was stated that Servetus' publication *Christianismi Restitutio* was printed in Vienna. In fact the document was printed in Vienne in France.

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