

Freethinker

Registered at the G.P.O. as a Newspaper

Founded 1881 by G. W. Foote

VOLUME 90, No. 29

Saturday, July 18, 1970

Sixpence Weekly

STUDENT HEROES?

MR JUSTICE MELFORD STEVENSON had an excellent opportunity to display the traditionally renowned impartiality and fairness of British justice at Hertford last week. Had he merely fluffed this unique chance, the affair would be of little importance, but that he has by his strange handling of the case managed to breed more intolerance in every involved quarter than existed before cannot but alarm the large number of Britons who gained confidence from the view that our courts were well-intentioned, even if our legal system as a whole suffered from antiquity and red tape.

For a first offender a sentence of eighteen months imprisonment is obviously exorbitant. Analogies have been drawn showing that in comparison to either soccer train vandals or skinheads the students have been hard done by. Few people have tried to deny that the sentences were exemplary, or in lay terms designed to deter others from committing similar crimes. Many people hoped that with the abolition of capital punishment the antique and oft-disproven principle of punishment as a deterrent would at long last be discarded. Their thinking has been shown to be more than wishful.

One of the main arguments against the deterrent principle has been that it tends to further the autocratic rule of a minority over an uneducated majority. With the advent of state education British society accepted it as desirable to educate people as far as possible. The chief object of education is, or at least should be, to fit an individual to live amongst others in a manner determined by a consensus of opinion. If the consensus decides that certain modes of behaviour are not to be tolerated, then in a system where education is considered desirable, it should endeavour to educate its miscreants away from crime, to deal with each criminal case individually. Only where a minority is deliberately keeping the masses in ignorance can a deterrent system be made to work, for in essence it applies the same methods as men apply when training animals.

It is thus all the more astounding to find Mr Justice Melford Stevenson applying the deterrent principle to the educational elite of society. There might just be a case psychologically for applying the principle to the lesser educated skinheads, but does anyone really believe that a student with strong ideological leanings is going to be anything but encouraged in his belief that he must demonstrate, sometimes violently, against the world's ills, when he sees that the establishment even in Britain is out to repress him by passing an 'exemplary' sentence on a fellow student? And does Mr Melford Stevenson really feel he has deterred anyone by making his cliched, and now notorious, gibe about the students who live on public money? Did the judge really mean to imply that it is less serious to smash up hotels if one is a student whose father is in the super-tax bracket, or even that it is less serious if one earns one's living in a job instead of as a student?

Little doubt is left about Mr Melford Stevenson's attitude when one considers his gibe about the evil influence

which senior members of the university had exercised over the criminals. Apart from its sheer fatuousness, the particular danger of this remark is that it will add to the breach between academics and leading members of the establishment at a time when more co-operation is urgently needed. And even if the allegation were true, by condemning the imaginary lecturers he is coming out in favour of political discrimination in the appointment of university staff. One remembers Sir Edward Boyle quoting Bertrand Russell on the importance of the autonomy of universities at the Bertrand Russell Memorial meeting just a month ago. Russell said that universities were: "havens for dissenters, who were they not employed at universities might well not be employed at all". Already the autonomy of universities has substantially eroded. Mr Melford Stevenson's remark will only tend to draw the attention of more students to this sad fact.

His suggestion that the South African and the Brazilian offenders be deported after serving their sentences, indicates that he is either ignorant of how the governments of those countries would react to the criminals, or that he holds aliens as less deserving of justice than their British counterparts. Whichever of these holds true, the suggestion underlines the ugly fact that Mr Melford Stevenson has taken it upon himself to give students and academics a slap in the face on behalf of the establishment, or should one say empire? It is to be hoped that he is not representative of the judiciary as a whole. In this light the appeals will prove interesting, though already *The Law Guardian*, the legal journal with the largest readership, has strongly criticised Mr Melford Stevenson's behaviour as "just not good enough".

Of course the student's behaviour was unintelligent. They made a mockery of their intention to demonstrate against the viciously violent regime in Greece, by resorting to violence themselves. This was foolish but lest anyone lose sight of realities beneath the welter of opinion currently being propounded by judges, journalists, students, professors and others, may it be said that it is vile to attend a dinner thus giving tacit, and probably financial, support, to a regime built on butchery and sustained with torture to an extent which surpasses most of modern history save Hitler and Stalin.

If anyone is susceptible to the deterrent principle it is these diners. It would thus appear that the students displayed considerably more insight than Mr Melford Stevenson.

Freethinker

Published by G. W. Foote & Co. Ltd.

Editor: David Reynolds

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

TOUGH MINISTER?

THE ABOLITION of religious education being the most pressing law reform for which humanists are campaigning at the moment, the Secretary of State for Education and Science is perhaps of all the government ministers the one with whom we deal most frequently.

Mrs Thatcher, though only in the job for three weeks, has already given the appearance of being a woman who gets on with the job, and who doesn't worry about opposition to her ideas.

Her circular to local authorities on secondary school reorganisation which withdraws the Labour Government's Circular which requested local authorities to prepare plans for abolishing selection at 11-plus, has angered many people, educationists, parents, children, and not least teachers in the form of the N.U.T.

Now that the post mortems have decided that the Labour party lost the election because they failed to present the electorate with any new policies, it is ironic that Mrs Thatcher should replace a definite policy with no policy at all. The whole question of policy is to be left to the local authorities, most of whom are in the middle of transition to a non-selective system. They can now go on, go back, or stay where they are. No guidance at all is offered on this. The excuse for this is that it gives the local authorities freedom. But the people that matter, the parents and children, are the ones for whom freedom should be provided first. Under the selective system the freedom of choice of school ends in most cases at the age of eleven. The comprehensive system has been shown to offer a real choice.

The other major disturbing aspect of Mrs Thatcher's action is that it creates a likelihood of a number of areas being left with bad systems for some time to come, and I use the word bad, not in an ideological sense but with regard to the workability of the system whether it be selective or non-selective. A proportion of the large number of conservative run local authorities will be tempted to mark time leaving systems incomplete. It is the absence of guidance from Mrs Thatcher as much as the set back to the comprehensive system which is a cause for concern.

It is, as has been stated before in these columns, now very unlikely that progress can be made on the religious education issue. Nevertheless, it should be pointed out that Mrs Thatcher is perhaps not as tough as she seems. When one remembers that Edward Heath promised the removal of any form of compulsion on local authorities to go comprehensive, Mrs Thatcher's circular with its lack of positive policy is the most innocuous and uncontroversial method she could have chosen to set about proving her leader a man of his word.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

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

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

Humanitas Stamps: Help 5 Humanist charities. Buy stamps from or send them to Mrs. A. C. Goodman, 51 Percy Road, Romford, RM7 8QX, Essex. British and African speciality. Send for list.

Humanist Holidays. Youth Camp, the Wye Valley, late July and early August. Family Centre, Aberystwyth, Monday, August 17 until Tuesday, September 1. Full board just over £2 per day with reductions for children. Details from Mrs Mephram, 29 Fairview Road, Sutton, Surrey. Telephone 01-642 8796.

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

South Place Ethical Society: Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London, W.C.1: Sunday, July 19, 11 a.m.: "The Genesis of Scepticism", H. J. Blackham, BA.

West Ham and District Secular Group: The Community Centre, Wanstead (near Wanstead Underground): Thursday, July 23, 8 p.m.: Meeting.

SECULAR EDUCATION APPEAL

Sponsors:

**Dr Cyril Bibby, Edward Blishen, Brigid Brophy,
Professor F. A. E. Crew, Dr Francis Crick,
Michael Duane, H. Lionel Elvin,
Professor H. J. Eysenck, Professor A. G. N. Flew,
Dr Christopher Hill, Brian Jackson,
Margaret Knight, Dr Edmund Leach,
Professor Hyman Levy, A. S. Neill, Bertrand Russell,
Professor P. Sargent Florence,
Professor K. W. Wedderburn, Baroness Wootton**

All donations will be acknowledged
NATIONAL SECULAR SOCIETY
103 BOROUGH HIGH STREET, LONDON, SE1

MEMORIAL EDITION

WHY I AM NOT A CHRISTIAN

BERTRAND RUSSELL

Preface **DAVID TRIBE**

Introduction **Professor ANTONY FLEW**

PRICE 3/- (plus 6d postage)

NATIONAL SECULAR SOCIETY

103 Borough High Street, London, SE1

WHEN KILLING IS JUSTIFIABLE

PETER CROMMELIN

THE THEOLOGICAL concept of sin and damnation still helps to provide a good income for popular preachers such as Mr Malcolm Muggeridge and for popular novelists such as Mr Graham Greene. Moreover it remains one of the foundations of popular religion as this survives in the reserved areas of churches, chapels, synagogues, mosques, etc. Yet the thought of sin is one that can no longer find a permanent abode in the rational mind. Even if people kill one another, they are no longer committing a mortal sin. They are performing an act with social or political consequences for which they may be praised or blamed, rewarded or punished according to the circumstances in which the act is performed. Of course it is universally agreed that, all the world over, the majority of folk do not *want* to kill; they simply want to live and let live. Yet this peaceful majority, eager only to live for as long as may be, find themselves in a world where quite a lot of killing is held to be necessary even by the most civilised and law abiding governments. Hence the vast amount of time, energy and money devoted to the manufacture and distribution of lethal weapons designed for one purpose only, the killing of human beings. But when killing is held to be entirely blameworthy and totally unjustifiable, it is called murder, and murder is still a word that shocks people although it is no more effective as a killer than are the military operations for which men are praised or the careless or dangerous driving which involves no great loss of respectability although it does result in considerable loss of life.

There are, here in England, at the present time, a considerable number of individuals, who, shocked and horrified by what seems to be an alarming increase in that kind of killing that is called murder, would like to see the re-erection of gallows for the hanging of murderers. They do not appreciate how senseless it is to hang murderers when there is no proof that this penalty stops other people from committing the same offence. There seems to be plenty of evidence that increases or decreases in the number of deaths due to murder have nothing to do with the punishment for the crime. To many lovers of liberty, it might seem that a very long term of imprisonment is as much a deterrent to murder as a quick death by hanging.

Certainly to the mind of a humanist, it is intrinsically impossible to regard "death" as a "punishment". Death in itself, regarded simply as a physical event, involves the termination of any punishment even as it involves the termination of life. If criminals are to pay for their crimes they must be given life and time in which to pay. It is sheer folly to kill them. Far from being a rational punishment, it is more like a conspiracy to enable them to escape from any form of punishment. It is rather like the legal folly of making people "bankrupt" which has the effect of putting them out of business altogether, and is often a cunning way by which clever individuals manage to evade the payment of their debts.

Of course, if it were possible to stop murder scientifically by killing the murderer in advance of the predicted crime it might be a reasonable course of action. But to kill the murderer "after the crime" is very much like the proverbial idiocy of shutting the stable door after the horse has bolted. To hang criminals as a ritual gesture to "justice" is clearly a product of a theological concept of sin that is no longer

valid. To think that peaceful co-existence can be established and maintained between killers and non-killers simply by the physical presence of the gallows is like thinking that peaceful co-existence between the great powers can be kept going for ever simply by the presence of the "bomb" or by the possibilities of chemical and biological warfare. To the rational mind it seems illusion or delusion.

It is therefore not for the sake of the criminal but for the sake of the Law that we must oppose ourselves to any move towards the re-introduction of what is called "Capital Punishment". We do not want to see the Law of England degraded simply because some individuals degrade human nature by their conduct. Humanism is a great many things, but among other things it certainly is an attempt to bring humanity both to Law and to the administration of Law.

There is, however, one kind of killing that does not offend the humanist conscience either as crime or punishment. Killing can be act of mercy and compassion. We kill animals that we love for no other reason, when we feel that to extend their lives any further would be an act of cruelty. There are an infinite variety of activities that can make a human life worth living even when the life has a very long past and a very short future. Some persons can keep going until the day they die, even though that day may not come for a very long time. Yet there are many folk not nearly so fortunate. There are many for whom death provides the one and the only way of escape from a life of misery. To relieve such unfortunate individuals from the burden of mortality, would according to the humanist opinion, be an act of mercy or compassion. This thought can come only to those who are emancipated from any expectation of life after death.

As a general rule when healthy people express a desire for death we should encourage them to keep going, for we know that they are giving way to a temporary depression and that better and happier times will come for them. But when there really and truly is no further hope of enjoyment in life, then the time has come to stop the game and it should be stopped. The basis of human existence should be entirely voluntary. The will to live should be a free one it should not be subjected to anything more than rational persuasion. To help people to live is a good thing. To force or compel people to live against their will is a bad thing.

In general therefore, the kind of killing that we condemn is called murder, suicide, war, or judicial execution. And of these four forms of unjustifiable homicide, the most unjustifiable is that of judicial execution. The kind of killing for which we are trying to gain a sympathetic hearing is called euthanasia. An enormous amount of human suffering could be stopped by a Law designed to help those who by some great misfortune have acquired a right to want death but lack the knowledge or the courage or the strength to terminate their own lives without some external assistance.

There is pain that can and must be endured by all who want to live. There is also pain that must prevent anyone

(Continued on page 231)

ROBERTSON'S MARXIAN KINSHIP

MARTIN PAGE

J. M. ROBERTSON (1856-1933) was perhaps the greatest literary scholar of plebian origins ever born and bred in the British Isles. There is absolutely no evidence that he slavishly accepted Marxian interpretations (on the contrary!); yet there was often a striking similarity of view between him and outright Marxists which did not devalue his own contribution any more than Marx's genius was stultified by his considerable debt to his predecessors and contemporaries.

In his famous conclusion to *Critique of Political Economy*, Marx had asked why ancient Greek art and epic "still constitute with us a source of aesthetic enjoyment and in certain respects prevail as the standard and model beyond attainment". His answer indicated a difficulty inherent in Marxian aesthetics: "Why should the social childhood of mankind, where it had reached its most beautiful development, not exert an eternal charm as an age that will never return?" In his classic *Short History of Christianity* (Thinker's Library edition, p. 122), Robertson eloquently elaborated this theme of a lost Greek "golden age":

Pagan Greece lives for ever in men's thought as a dream of grace and beauty and enchanted speech; and though behind the shining vision of art and song there lingers immovably a sombre memory of strife and servitude, the art and the song are a deathless gift to mankind. At every summit of its attainment our civilisation looks back to them with an unquenchable envy, an impotent desire, as of a race disinherited.

"The rise of Christianity is to be explained in terms of social metabolism; it points to the emergence of the ideals of a slave class in place of those of a ruling and military class." With this description of a Nietzschean transvaluation of values Robertson may be said to have adumbrated the thesis that was to be developed a decade later by the Marxist scholar Karl Kautsky in his invaluable *Origins of Christianity* (1908). Of Kautsky's book he said: "When he [i.e. Kautsky] denies that there were Hellenistic experiments and propagandas which in a later period could have set some Christian enthusiasts upon inventing a communistic beginning for the Church, he seems to ignore his own argument from the Epistle of James, and evidence which he could have found in Kalthoff. But unless the communistic theory is pressed as giving the whole origin of Christianity, it remains a part rather of the sociological problem than of the hierological inquiry" (*The Historical Jesus*, pp. 190-1).

However, Robertson approximated to a Marxian analysis when he wrote: "in not a single country could the Reformation have been accomplished without enlisting the powerful classes or corporations, or alternatively the *de facto* governments, by proffering the plunder of the Church. Only in a few Swiss cantons, and in Holland, does the confiscation seem to have been made to the common good". Declared Marx: "Luther destroyed the enslavement that sprang from devotion, only to put in its place the enslavement that springs from conviction". Declared Robertson: "Luther and Calvin alike did but set up an infallible book and a local tyranny against an infallible pope and a tyranny centring at Rome". Just as Gerrard Winstanley and the Diggers became Marxian heroes, so Robertson—along with Morrison Davidson—championed the Leveller John Lilburne at a time when Victorian his-

torians were busy extolling the authoritarian and religiously fanatical Cromwell, a founding father of the English (mis-called British) Empire.

Of the foremost British pioneer in co-operative socialism, JMR rightly said: "Owen had in him much of the idealism which inspired the quasi-communistic religious movements of earlier times. He was credulous of the potency of goodwill to regenerate the earth. And his own early and signal success at New Lanark gave to his benevolent bias the fixity of a conviction borne out by a great experience". Here, at least Robertson joined hands—so to speak—with Engels in his interpretation of this utopian socialist, whose disciples may be said to have included Karl Marx himself: Robertson emphasised "the great and ill-acknowledged doctrinal debt of Marx to the earlier English Socialists, in particular to William Thompson, some of whose main doctrines he adopted".

Robertson was well aware of the affinities between Marx's materialist theory of history and Buckle's analysis, which Marx had partly developed and which JMR largely accepted. In his masterly *Buckle and His Critics* (1895), he declared (pp. 432-3):

The teaching of Marx has not passed away. As a system of economic logic it has been sufficiently trituated; and its strange stress on the formula of "surplus value" is apt to make one do less than justice to its scientific value. But there is in *Das Kapital* a sociological teaching of permanent importance, and that is the principle which has been stated by his followers as "Economic determinism". That principle is not a new one for the students of Buckle; but it is newly applied by the school of Marx, in terms of the economic life not of the primary civilisations but of the most complex industrial civilisation of today. Marx represents the results of a German theorist's stay in and study of industrial England, with the stimulus of French schemes of organisation. The socialism of Marx is a complex of the sociological cultures of three environments; and it is some confirmation of our doctrine of the effects of cross-fertilisation of ideas that this result should be the most effective performance in its kind. . . . The doctrine that all social phases, early and late, are to be explained in terms of economic conditions is indeed of profound importance, but used as a sole interpretative principle it may lead to all manner of errors.

Marx believed that social developments were the result of "tendencies which work out with an iron necessity towards an inevitable goal", and so could be scientifically predicted; whereas for Robertson, as for Buckle, the ability of the scientific historian to forecast the shape of things to come was limited by the knowledge that human history was not, and indeed could not be, an exact science.

In the 1890s and, again, in the revolutionary year 1917, Robertson proposed a whole series of measures which in Marxist terminology, would "necessitate further inroads upon the old social order, and are unavoidable as a means of entirely revolutionising the mode of production". These measures included: taxation of land-values and the ultimate nationalisation of land; a graduated income tax and a tax on capital; State banking; railway nationalisation and municipalisation of tramways; profit-sharing schemes for industrial workers and a programme of public works to tackle unemployment; and "the extension of the principle of Free Education to the higher schools and Universities". These proposals bore a striking, though no doubt unintended resemblance to the ten-point programme outlined in the *Communist Manifesto*, which JMR had read.

Marx described the modern industrial worker as "a mere machine for producing alien wealth, broken in body and brutalised in mind"; Robertson spoke of "that burden of joyless, mechanical, mindless toil at the machine". In proposing railway nationalisation, JMR said: "It remains to urge upon the workers that it is only by such steps as the one here proposed that any vital progress can be made towards the betterment of their lot in general, towards the removal of idle wealth, towards equality of comfort, towards social justice. The matter lies in their own hands". This appeal to the workers was akin to the concept—enunciated by Flora Tristan in 1843, and by Marx in 1864—that "the emancipation of the working class must be won by the working class itself". Like Marx, Robertson believed that, in England at least, a transition to socialism could be accomplished entirely by peaceful means; and in 1885 Engels went so far as to assert, quite seriously: "since 1848 the English Parliament has undoubtedly been the most revolutionary body in the world" (significantly, the letter from which this remark is taken—letter of June 15, 1885, to J. P. Becker—was omitted from the editions up to 1962 of the Moscow miscellany *Marx-Engels on Britain*).

At about the time of the notorious Jameson Raid, Robertson wrote: "Whatever of glory and social distinction goes with the trade of war is reaped by the upper classes. It is the blood of the common people that flows like water to carry out the quarrels of the ruling classes". "Capitalism began the war," said JMR of the Boer War, which seems to have been instigated by the English ruling class to secure undisturbed possession of the Transvaal gold mines; and in his opposition to this war, Robertson joined forces with the Marxist H. M. Hyndman—though the noted German socialist Wilhelm Liebknecht attempted to explain, if not condone, the British Government's action as "political necessity".

On August 3, 1914, two days after declaring war on Russia, Imperial Germany declared war on France and began invading Belgium. The next day, all the hundred and eleven German Social Democratic deputies voted for the Kaiser's war credits. On December 2, a solitary German deputy, the socialist Karl Liebknecht (son of Wilhelm), defied party discipline to vote against war credits—and three years later, J. M. Robertson wrote of pro-German socialists: "While the Socialist majority, who truckled to the Kaiser and exhorted the Belgian Socialists to submit, are scheming for a peace which shall leave the plunder of Belgium in German hands, Liebknecht, I read, is dying in prison. Which of you all, I wonder, is most to be envied? I think I would rather be Liebknecht!" (*War and Civilization*, p. 156). In his masterly swan-song in the British Parliament (August, 1918), Robertson paid eloquent tribute to the courage of Karl Liebknecht, who was soon to be brutally murdered with the approval of the Social Democratic Minister of War. Robertson rightly pointed to *Political Parties* by Robert Michels as "a treatise of some weight"; but if only he had commented in depth on Michels' contention that even the European socialist parties, ostensibly devoted to the negation of élite control, conformed to the "iron law of oligarchy"!

Robertson, who recognised that every empire contained within itself the seeds of its own decay, said of European imperialism: "In 1929, Winston Churchill was writing that in 1918 England had reached the highest point in her history. He could not conceive, doubtless, that already the

arc was on the downward turn, and that in 1948 this would be obvious to English as well as to alien eyes. Yet in the World War four empires had been smitten to fragments because their rulers had lacked vision". Ten years later, in 1938, Robertson's analysis was substantially reiterated by the English Communist historian A. L. Morton, who regarded the First World War as "turning point, marking the passing over of European Imperialism into decline". Certainly Churchill's funeral in 1965 symbolised the death of English imperialism.

Robertson opposed the blatantly undemocratic Bolshevik regime with much of the vigour with which, no doubt, Marx and Engels themselves would have opposed it. In 1925 he exclaimed: "The absolute denial of freedom of criticism to opponents of the Bolshevik system in Russia is a black infamy, discrediting to the last degree all Bolshevik profession to seek freedom at all". He thus joined hands—so to speak—with Rosa Luxemburg, the Marxist martyr who, in memorable words, had prophetically discerned the seeds of Stalinism in the suppression of political freedom by Lenin and Trotsky:

With the repression of political life in the land as a whole, life in the Soviets must also become more and more crippled. Without general elections, without unrestricted freedom of press and assembly, without a free struggle of opinions, life dies out in every public institution, becomes a mere semblance of life, in which only the bureaucracy remains the active element.

Maxim Gorky—who may have been poisoned on Stalin's orders—called the Leninist Revolution "a cruel experiment, doomed to failure in advance". Robertson was in substantial agreement with this view, and in 1931 he declared: "the brutality of the latest Communism, working gross social failure, is ominous". Two years earlier, he had pointed out that "the Russian cataclysm took place in a field of the most widespread ignorance, long maintained by religious machinery".

Said JMR: "The spirit of freedom and toleration in the modern world has been predominantly anti-religious; and the spirit of social reconstruction has been no less so. Paine and Owen, Lincoln, Bradlaugh, Garibaldi, Stepniak, Marx, were all Freethinkers". For Robertson, religion dehumanised man; for Marx, it was "the opium of the people", alienating men from truly human ends. Darwinian evolutionism dealt Christianity a well nigh fatal blow, as Robertson realised. Both he and Lenin acknowledged the remarkable popularity of *The Riddle of the Universe* by Darwin's German apostle Haeckel; and just as Marx welcomed *The Origin of Species* as providing "a basis in natural science for the class struggle in society", so Lenin said *The Riddle of the Universe* became "a weapon in the class struggle".

Significantly, neither Lenin nor Robertson was acquainted with Marx's explicitly humanist *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*, which were originally published in an incomplete Russian translation in 1927, then in German in 1932, and did not reach a mass English-speaking audience before 1961: they did not receive widespread discussion until after World War II. Meanwhile, Robertson had died in January 1933, and his admirers have surely profoundly regretted that he did not analyse these seminal writings of the young Marx. There can be little doubt, however, that JMR would have applauded Marx's

(Continued overleaf)

(Continued from previous page)

magnificent statement: "The criticism of religion ends with the teaching that *man is the highest being for man*. it ends with the categorical imperative to overthrow all conditions in which man is a debased, forsaken, contemptible being forced into servitude". Marx prophesied that out of the ruins of man's prehistory there would rise "a higher type of society, whose fundamental principle is the

full and free development of every individual". Only a few years before his death, Robertson pointed to the Marxian socialist formula, *From each according to his abilities, to each according to his needs* as the highest of social ideals; and he declared: "we cannot say that ultimate Socialism will be felt by anybody as a restraint on liberty. Is it at all unlikely that our posterity will regard our economic 'liberty' somewhat as we now regard that of savages!"

THE WISDOM OF SENECA (4 BC to AD 65)

BARRY HOBSON

"I NEVER SPEND a day in idleness; I appropriate even a part of the night for study. I am working for later generations, writing down some ideas that may be of assistance to them."

On groundless fears: "Do not be unhappy before the crisis comes. . . . You may suffer soon enough if it arrives, so look forward meanwhile to better things. . . . Perhaps it will come, perhaps not; in the meantime it is not."

"We are unequal at birth but are equal at death. . . . Think of all the brave men who have conquered pain: of him who continued to read his book as he allowed the cutting of his veins; of him who did not cease to smile, though that very smile so enraged his torturers that they tried upon him every instrument of their cruelty. If pain can be conquered by a smile, will it not be conquered by reason?"

"Let us be brave in the face of hazards. Let us not fear wrongs or wounds, or bonds or poverty. And what is death? It is either the end, or a process of change. I have no fear of ceasing to exist; it is the same as not having begun."

"Life, if courage to die is lacking, is slavery. . . . When I was still young, I could put up with hardships and show a bold front to illness; but I finally succumbed and was reduced to the extremity of thinness. I often entertained the impulse of ending my life then and there, but the thought of my kind old father held me back. For I reflected, not how bravely I had the power to die, but how little power he had to bear bravely the loss of me. And so I commanded myself to live. For sometimes it is an act of bravery even to live.

"Two elements must be rooted out once and for all; the fear of future suffering, and the recollection of past suffering. Let a man fight against them with all his might; if he once gives way, he will be vanquished; but if he strives against sufferings, he will conquer."

"A great number of books overwhelms the learner instead of instructing him; it is much better to devote yourself to a few authors than to skim through many."

"My studies were my salvation. I place it to the credit of philosophy that I recovered and regained my strength. I owe my life to philosophy."

Seneca wrote of the degeneracy of the Age, of women becoming more like men, of the increase in sickness and the consequent pill taking, of "affected singing" and "clothing that conceals nothing"; of tenements rising storey upon storey, city crowded against city; of the keeping up with the Jones!

FREETHINKER BOOK LIST

TITLE	AUTHOR	Price	Post
RI and Surveys	Maurice Hill	1/0	4d
Religion and Ethics in Schools	David Tribe	1/6	4d
Religious Education in State Schools	Brigid Brophy	2/6	4d
Ten Non Commandments	Ronald Fletcher	2/6	4d
Humanism, Christianity and Sex	David Tribe	6d	4d
103: History of a House	Elizabeth Collins	1/0	4d
Freethought and Humanism in Shakespeare	David Tribe	2/0	4d
The Necessity of Atheism	Percy Bysshe Shelley	1/6	4d
The Secular Responsibility	Marghanita Laski	2/0	4d
The Nun Who Lived Again	Phyllis Graham	6d	4d
An Analysis of Christian Origins	George Ory	2/6	4d
New Thinking on War and Peace	A. C. Thompson	1/0	4d
A Humanist Glossary	Robin Odell and Tom Barfield	3/6	6d
The Vatican versus Mankind	Adrian Pigott	4/0	1/4
Evolution of the Papacy	F. A. Ridley	1/0	4d
Lift up Your Heads	William Kent	5/0	1/0
Men Without Gods	Hector Hawton	2/6	10d
Origins of Religion	Lord Raglan	2/6	10d
John Toland: Freethinker	Ella Twynham	4/6	4d
The Bible Handbook	G. W. Foote and W. P. Ball	7/6	1/2
What Humanism is About	Kit Mouat	10/6	1/6
The Humanist Revolution	Hector Hawton	10/6	1/6
Pioneers of Social Change	E. Royston Pike	10/6	1/6
The Golden Bough	J. G. Frazer	15/0	2/6
Religion in Secular Society	Bryan Wilson	15/0	1/3
The Humanist Outlook	Various	35/0	2/2
Catholic Terror Today	Avro Manhattan	12/6	1/6
Materialism Restated	Chapman Cohen	5/0	1/4
The Rights of Man (Hard-back)	Thomas Paine	14/0	1/6
The Martyrdom of Man	Winwood Reade	10/6	1/9
Morality Without God	Chapman Cohen	6d	4d
Catholic Imperialism and World Freedom (Secondhand)	Avro Manhattan	15/0	2/2
From Jewish Messianism to the Christian Church	Prosper Alfarc	6d	4d
Age of Reason	Thomas Paine	3/6	10d
Rights of Man (Paperback)	Thomas Paine	7/0	1/4
Police and the Citizen	NCCL	4/0	5d
The Hanging Question	Edited by Louis Blom-Cooper	15/0	1/0
Rome or Reason	Col. R. G. Ingersoll	1/0	5d

Also a Good Selection of Penguin Books Available
The Freethinker: bound volumes available. Please write for details

FREETHINKER BOOKSHOP

103 Borough High Street, London, SE1. Telephone: 01-407 0029

Book Review

DENIS COBELL

WHEN KILLING IS JUSTIFIABLE

(Continued from page 227)

God is an Englishman, by Donald Horne (Penguin 7s).

WHEN Queen Elizabeth I was on the throne and John Aylmer was Bishop of London, he wrote "God is English". Matthew Parker, Archbishop of Canterbury had also said at that time, "When Almighty God is so much English . . .". Yet these comments are not so unusual as they may at first sound. Even in days far less governed by religious consideration than the seventeenth century, statesmen and churchmen have invoked cries of, "God is on our side"; this is only a little removed from actually giving God a passport according to the nationality of the invoker!

Certain patriotic images may still be used to give school-boys a sense of discipline, but beyond this context there is very little use for this sort of language. Today, when the church is in decline, and only the most fanatical think seriously about the Good Lord at all, who cares whether God is an Englishman or not? In this book, Donald Horne an Australian journalist, attempts to scrutinise the British predicament—whatever that may be other than a journalistic invention. However to use such a title for a serious study, seems peculiarly inapt in this day and age.

His book starts insomewhat humorous vein, a manner demonstrated far better in George Mikes little book *How to be an Alien* published over twenty years ago. But as the book proceeds, the reader realises this form of humour is only suitable for a short work or a few articles in *Punch*, and Mr Horne makes it quite clear that his book is a pot-boiler of the first order when he takes mountainous trouble to describe the everyday functions of the British Establishment. The various chapters are strung together in disjointed fashion, and one wonders if they are not discarded remnants from Mr Horne's earlier journalistic activities. Remarkably, in view of his title, he has little to say about the Anglican Church. Perhaps this only serves to indicate the minor role it plays in the act of government today.

A typical example of its totally irrelevant flippancy comes quite early in the book: "In 1933, when Hitler withdrew Germany from the League of Nations, Britain, for the first time in twenty-two years, won the Davis Cup". Where the connection between these two events leads us I do not know; it would seem to show that Mr Horne is in a predicament rather than Britain.

There has always been plenty of pointless discussion about the difference between English and British, and this book takes several pages trying to enlighten us about facts which are quite straight-forward.

The prologue to this book remarks that it sets out to be a 'guide to Britain'. Apart from displaying a mass of generalisations and repeating oft-quoted clichés about this country, there is very little to stimulate anyone other than the most naive newcomer to the scene.

Mr Horne's eye is so little in contact with this scene, that he perceives only an aspiration to 'Black Power' in this country. He seems to be obsessed with the influence of the public schools, as though no other country possessed an hierarchical system of education. He makes no mention of our much vaunted permissive society, which it is alleged some American tourists have sought the address of, and he may realise, as I do, that it permits very little—but he should have written this down.

I think Mr Horne believes Britain is altogether unique as a class stratified society; perhaps his native Australia is less so, but by the very nature of oligarchic nations, which includes most of the countries in the world, surely he has struck on the one thing which is not unique? I doubt if it is possible to find any society which has much uniqueness about it today, the age of rapid communications. Maybe Mr Horne will soon be unique in thinking God has anything to do with the affairs of men, let alone an Englishman!

from wanting to go on living. There is pain that can be stopped only by death. For this class of patient, euthanasia is proposed as the ultimate and final anaesthetic.

Capital punishment shocks the humanist conscience by being carried out in the name of law, justice, religion and so on. It is equally shocking that hopeless and incurable patients should be kept alive, to satisfy, not so much the ethics as the etiquette of the legal and medical professions.

But euthanasia as a thought has been born in the mind of man. It will eventually give birth to law, that will have the effect of making human life on earth, both shorter and sweeter.

LETTERS

South Place Ethical Society

IN YOUR otherwise excellent editorial report on the Bertrand Russell Memorial Meeting (June 19) you made passing reference to "The Ethical Society". Some time ago, however, we reverted to the old and honourable title of South Place Ethical Society, in order to preserve the continuity with the present Conway Hall and the old South Place Chapel and Institute, Finsbury, where we had our origins in 1793.

NIGEL H. SINNOTT, *Lettings Secretary*.

Schopenhauer on Nature and Mankind

BARRY HOBSON'S article "Go to the Ant" was quite interesting, and I must say quite to the point with regard to nature. Nevertheless what does his article all go to prove? Let us consider it all from a Schopenhauerian angle. Schopenhauer, considered by Tolstoy as the greatest of genuises, dealt most thoroughly and profoundly with all this in his essay *Ueber den Willen in der Natur* and in his *Die Welt als Wille und Vorstellung*. The insects, animals and man according to Schopenhauer are nothing but a manifestation of the 'will to live'. This 'will to live', manifesting itself as an untiring machine, an irrational tendency which has not its sufficient reason in the external world. And this irrational tendency produces a world of suffering in the whole of nature and in the whole of mankind. The question that Freethinkers should therefore consider is this: "How is it possible for the millions of deluded human beings to manifest their 'will to live' without causing great distress and suffering in this world?" Surely it is man himself who is the highest manifestation of the 'will to live', and it is well known that it is man himself who causes the greatest destruction, distress and suffering to his own kind.

Schopenhauer still remains unanswered on this question despite of all the so-called humanist philosophers and writers may say to the contrary. If the "will to live" led to a harmonious process in nature surely we would see evidence of this. But neither in nature or mankind does it lead to a harmonious process. The whole process is quite meaningless and senseless as the world quite clearly shows. Even in the best of men we find this senselessness.

Did not Bertrand Russell, the so-called great philosopher once advocate the dropping of the atomic bomb on the Soviet Union? And he was supposed to be a super-humanist.

The biggest pageant of disguise and masquerade takes place in human society, not in nature.

At least, the insects and the animals can be excused as they are not supposed to know any better, but why pick on them when men are continually doing the same thing—even humanist philosophers.

HECTOR MACDONALD.

A prophet of doom?

PETER CADOGAN (July 4) would seem to belong to a mixed company of witnesses preparing "to meet catastrophe with imagination". This country's "quite incredible" 'spiritual decadence' (also our blinding sickness) has been revealed to him in 'a retreat' of 'social values'. (See his suggestion (June 13) that "we should rid ourselves of blinkers about our own past"!.) Moreover, without the salvation (spiritual?) of such 'recovery mechanisms' as "new select committees in the House of Commons" he foresees "some quite appalling crisis of a military-financial order".

Indeed, it is *never* time to be smug' and *always* time (especially for imaginative freethinkers) "to start to rethink just about everything from first principals"—but surely 'imagination' is only *sometimes* "relevant to reality".

CHARLES BYASS.

PETER CADOGAN seems to be a real Prophet of Doom. He reminds me of those extraordinary chaps with sandwich boards assuring us that "The End is Nigh", and with about as much conviction.

I assume his letter is serious and not just a leg-pull. There was a time when Britain stood alone in 1940 with Hitler's hoards on the other side of the channel when we really did think the End was Nigh. Peter I suspects is too young to remember those far off days. As one who does let me assure him I have never seen Britain more prosperous, stable and happy than she is today. His forebodings are absurd, ill informed, and wring nobody's withers.

He cites five famous battles of long ago to assure us how wicked the British really are. Four fought by Cromwell, and Culloden, the final demise of Bonny Prince Charlie in 1746. What has this to do with the Britain of today?

The ghastly civil war in Biafra could hardly be blamed on Britain; although it is obvious such gruesome carnage would have been impossible while Britain still governed Nigeria. It is a sad fact of history that newly acquired independence is often followed by civil war; as it was in the Congo.

That war is the most futile way of trying to settle disputes I would agree entirely. In the world of today it seems only the communists are determined to use violence on every occasion to impose their will on others. If only they would clear out of Indochina and leave the inhabitants to get on with their affairs in peace instead of trying to establish their wretched dictatorships everywhere!

But what is this I read? Is Peter telling us the war was not a traumatic experience for Britain? Surely this must be a misprint Mr Editor? Has he never heard of the Blitz? If he likes I will give him a list of the number of civilians killed and wounded by German bombs; it may surprise him. They found the war quite a traumatic experience I can assure him.

If we have returned to a state of nature what could be better? Surely it is the artificiality of life that is our great danger in this technological age. A return to first principles would seem to be part of the humanist philosophy.

By the way what does "spiritually" mean? Like most humanists I don't believe in the supernatural so I don't know what spirit is. Can anyone enlighten me? CLAUD WATSON.

YES, Mr Watson, we would all like to understand you, but why are you making it so difficult for us? Again you talk of communist aggression. Many weeks ago I challenged you to show, in the necessary legal and historic context, why Vietnam is not one country but two (which it would have to be for North Vietnamese aggression to be a reality). I suggest that you either withdraw your assertion of N. Vietnamese aggression or establish that Vietnam is two countries.

I invite *Freethinkers* readers to observe Mr Watson's answer, or lack of it, closely.

G. L. SIMONS

World government and language

FOR PAWL ENESYGOW'S information, I am in favour of a world language (how does he know I haven't been studying Esperanto anyway?). One good thing about Esperanto is that it would stop him using long words and cumbrous phrases like "Natural infrastructure"—"Spurious internationalism". Perhaps he has to use long words so that people can't understand his arguments and see how wrong they are?

He says nations are a good thing for World Government. But he gives no facts nor arguments in support. And it's clear his statement is wrong. Nations mean armies, foreign offices, military and diplomatic staffs, patriotic emotion and propaganda, hatred and suspicion of the peoples of other nations—all of which militate against World Government.

He talks about "nations as distinct from artificial states and empires". What's the difference? Elsewhere in his letter he defines a nation as "a common entity with a common ethos". What on earth does this mean? It could mean anything from a football team to the Roman Catholic Church. But the words "common ethos" suggest that everybody in the common entity has to have the same ideas—in other words, nationalism means uniformity!

I like H. G. Well's definition of a nation much better, because it's clearer and nearer the truth, i.e. "A nation is a piece of land with a number of people in it and afflicted with a foreign office".

By the way, do you notice a verse effect in one of Pawl Enesygow's phrases:

"Cloaking cultural imperialism

With a spurious internationalism".

Rather like those lines in T. S. Eliot's *Murder in the Cathedral*:

"Hoping that your gravity

Will excuse my humble levity".

And Pawl Enesygow's letter is like Eliot's poetry in another way—you can't understand what it means half the time!

I. S. Low.

Anti-God Freethought

IT WAS YOUR contributor Claud Watson (April 11) and he alone who said "the price of freedom is eternal vigilance". Even though he offered no prize I would tell him that for nothing, but I do look for a prize for uncovering his source, that inflammatory secular thinker, John Philpot Curran (1750-1817) who said, "The condition upon which God hath given liberty to man is eternal vigilance". The 280th anniversary of his utterance (July 10) has just passed and deserved recognition for the intrusion of God into an otherwise simple pontification.

Then, as now, the secularist must needs thrust God into almost any situation, like an anchorite sporting hair-shirts at a night-club. I imagine it's hard to avoid when you're all working against him but secularists still seem to need God in the way Gladstone needed harlots. Is it straight anti-pathetic dependence, do you think, or sheer fascinated horror?

Mr Gladstone is dead and buried these 72 years; would that arid anti-God freethought, unextended, were too.

LEN MOORE.

FREETHINKER subscriptions

and orders for literature . . . The Freethinker Bookshop
01-407 0029

Editorial matter . . . The Editor, The Freethinker
103 Borough High Street, London, SE1 01-407 1251

POSTAL SUBSCRIPTION RATES

12 months: £2 1s 6d 6 months: £1 1s 3 months: 10s 6d

USA AND CANADA

12 months: \$5.25 6 months: \$2.75 3 months: \$1.40

The FREETHINKER can be ordered through any newsagent.