

NSS MAKES IMPRESSIVE CONTRIBUTION TO EUROPEAN CONSERVATION YEAR

Despite threatened power and transport strikes there was a large audience at London's Conway Hall on 8 December for a meeting arranged by the National Secular Society as a contribution to European Conservation Year. There was one of the most impressive arrays of speakers ever assembled by the NSS to deal with various aspects of the subject, A Free and Comprehensive Family Planning Service for Britain. David Tribe (president of the NSS), who was in the chair, said that family planning had been of great interest and concern to the Society since its earliest days. He recalled the work of its founder, Charles Bradlaugh, and Vice-President, Annie Besant to educate the public and promote the idea of birth control. This pioneering work led to the establishment of the Family Planning Association, and it was gratifying to note the increasing recognition of the fact that many social ills and a great deal of human misery were associated with the population problem. It was also encouraging that there was now all party support for the idea of a Government population policy.

Unplanned Families

Casper Brook, director of the Family Planning Association, said that in the United Kingdom there are between 200,000 and 300,000 unwanted pregnancies every year. They were part of the 500,000 to 600,000 unplanned pregnancies which occur.

Mr Brook went on to say that contraception was not practised widely enough, and outlined some of the reasons for this. There was not enough basic health and sex education, or provision of contraceptive services, "The cost of

effective contraception to the individual is a deterrent, and there is a lack of appreciation amongst local councillors and MPs of the cost in misery and money of unwanted pregnancies and how cheaply public authorities could give a free service."

Referring to abortion, Mr Brook said this was not part of the work of the Family Planning Association. The FPA concentrates on contraception, and the greater the contraceptive effort, the smaller the need for abortions.

He said there is a population size problem in the United Kingdom, and whilst that remains largely unrecognised and untackled, it is arrogant for us to suggest that the third world should have giant family planning programmes. "We have to put our own house in order. Step one must be free family planning for all who want it, with a large drive to educate the public to use the available family planning services", Mr Brook concluded.

Prevention Cheaper Than Cure

Richard Crossman, MP (Lab., Coventry East), Secretary of State for the Social Services in the last Labour Government, said that the last job he did in that capacity was to submit his notion of the National Health Service over the next four years. One of his major propositions was that a free family planning service was absolutely essential. It would cost £5 million the first year, but this was not an astronomical sum, and the long term saving would be enormous. He was confident that the present Minister was sympathetic towards the idea.

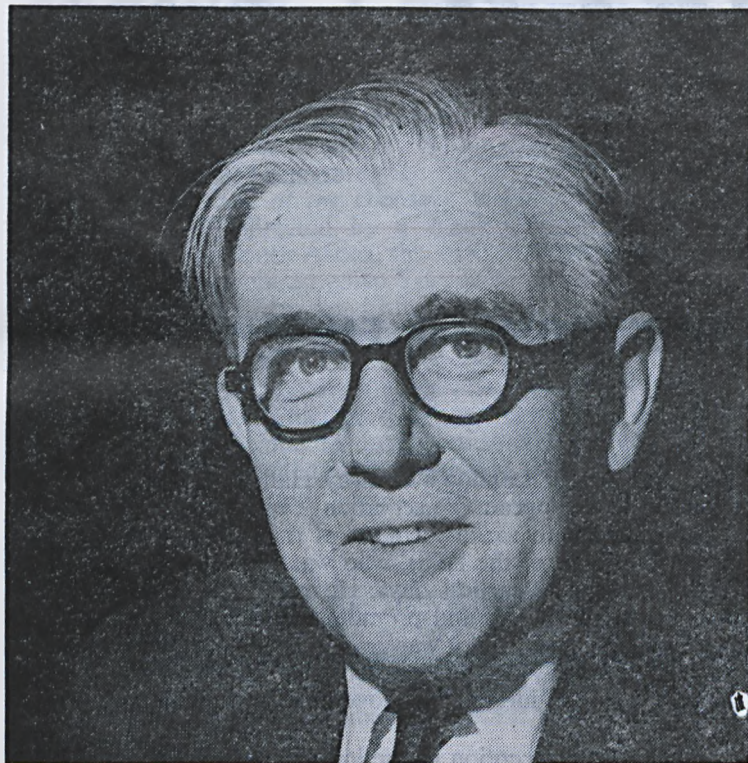
Mr Crossman said that preventive medicine was expensive, but it was preferable to paying £50 to £60 pounds a week to keep a person in hospital. "We should aim at having fewer people in hospital. We must build up a service where people live and die at home, and perhaps even be born there. There should be far greater concentration on preventive medicine, and contraception is an important part of this."

The former Minister went on to say that local authorities



Casper Brook

(Continued overleaf)



Richard Crossman, MP

(Continued from Previous page)

should be compelled to provide family planning services. The provision of the contraceptive pill and appliances would not require a change in the law, but a change in the administration of the health service.

Mr Crossman strongly criticised the attitude of some hospitals and doctors towards family planning. There were all kinds of prejudices among hospital staff who should be giving a lead in health education. "I find it absolutely fantastic to have hospitals where abortions are carried out regularly and where education is not a part of the treatment. We ought to expect hospitals and doctors and nurses to take the lead in such matters."

Mr Crossman concluded that the time was opportune for a big advance, and that the Abortion Act had made many converts to the idea of family planning.

Realities of Family Planning

Dr Caroline Deys (deputising for her husband Dr Malcolm Potts who was abroad), said that we need to face some important realities if a free and comprehensive family planning service is ever to become available. Family planning is a difficult undertaking, and even today many people find it more difficult to take precautions against the possibility of conception than to take action once they are faced with the reality of pregnancy.

Dr Deys was also critical of the attitude of many doctors and hospital staff, and of the difficulty in obtaining reliable information about contraception and family planning services. She said there must be freedom of availability at all levels: "If the patient is in hospital she should not have to know who to ask. She may not be able to see the consultant. In a maternity hospital where I worked and where beds were so short that only socially and medically difficult cases were delivered, a birth control clinic was started.

It was very successful except the matron would not permit any notices about the clinic—women had to know by intuition that it was there or ask the 'right' person.

"At present not even women with medical reasons for avoiding pregnancy are getting advice. Mr Crossman, when he was Minister, stated that vasectomy for medical reasons for husband or wife was an acceptable NHS operation; not long ago I saw a man of 29 with muscular dystrophy whose wife had just had a baby, but who had been unable to get an NHS sterilisation."

Dr Deys went on to say that family planning clinics must be accessible and convenient: "Any barrier between the couple and the service, however minor, tends to deter those who need help. The people who most need help won't ring up for an appointment; they may have sixpence but they won't be able to find it at the right time. There must be no special days for the married or the unmarried, or questions like, 'are you Pill or cap?' when you go in. Providing they get common sense and friendly care, these things are more important than whether the person sees a doctor or nurse.

"There must be freedom from doing things the patient does not understand, like signing forms. Allowance must be made for those who are afraid of examinations—and also for those who are afraid if they are *not* examined—because family planning cuts across all social and educational barriers. There must be freedom from uncertainty. We need to recognise that family planning is not just the nice methods like the Pill and the cap—it is every thing women and men do to plan their families from abstinence to abortion. Family planning cannot really move forwards until we recognise that most abortions are for social family planning reasons, and the abortion rate won't go down until there is a radical improvement in family planning services."

The Quality of Life

Sir David Renton, MP (Con., Huntingdon) and a former Minister at the Home Office who was recently elected president of the Conservation Society, said that as a member of the Church of England he did not agree with the National Secular Society's attitude towards religion. "But", he added, "I am prepared to co-operate with people of any religion or none, who wish Parliament and the Government to act now to uphold the quality of life and decent human standards, in face of the threat of 'a plague of people'."

Sir David continued: "From the beginning of human history until just a few years ago, mankind was pre-occupied with the struggle for survival. Now, however, the struggle has been won, and mankind is faced with the greatest turning point in evolution. The challenge now is how to limit our numbers so that we can enjoy the earth and its fruits without being so numerous as to destroy all that is best in life, and eventually place at risk man's chance of survival.

"Britain is already one of the most densely populated countries, and imports nearly half her food from a hungry world. Our immediate problem is to convince people that we must start now the 20 to 30 task of stabilising the population by moderate voluntary methods. If this is not done, much more stringent methods will be required later on. So the sooner we start, the easier it will be."

(Continued on back page)

WE THREE KINGS OF ORION ARE

R. J. CONDON

Rome, in the early years of the Christian era, was the capital city of a great empire. Among its inhabitants were people from many countries, and in the generally prevailing religious tolerance they followed their native forms of worship. Whatever credal differences they might have had, a week or so before the end of December would have found almost everyone preparing for a great festival, the Birthday of the Sun, whose date, 25 December, was written in gold letters in their calendars. On that day the sun began to rise higher in the sky, the first indication that it would bring winter to an end. So they had a great feast, with parties and presents, and above all it was an occasion of religious rejoicing.

The Persian god Mithra had a large following in Rome, particularly among the military. At midnight, the first minute of 25 December, the temples of Mithra would be lit up, with priests in white robes at the altars, and boys burning incense, much as we see in Roman Catholic churches at midnight on Christmas Eve in our own time. Mithra, his worshippers believed, had come from heaven to be born as man and redeem men from their sins; and he was born in a cave or stable on 25 December.

The Egyptians who lived in Rome would also be celebrating. Horus, their saviour-god, was born of a virgin in a stable on 25 December. In the Egyptian temple there would be a crib or manger with a figure of the infant Horus lying in it, and a statue of his virgin mother Isis standing alongside, rather like the Christmas cribs in our own churches. The Greeks, too, would have been paying respect to the figure of a child-god in a manger, while the gladiators, the war captives from Germany, would be celebrating Yule the northern European midwinter festival. Yule, or the Wheel, signified the turning-point of the year.

The Jews would have just finished their festivities. Their Hanukah, or Feast of Illumination, fell on 25 Kislev. This was somewhat earlier than 25 December, the Jews having adopted a lunar calendar during their subjection to the moon-worshipping Babylonians. Hanukah, they said, had been instituted in 165 BC by Judas Maccabeus as a joyful feast in honour of his victory over Antiochus IV, who had set up a pagan altar in the Jewish Temple in Jerusalem on the sun's birthday. But 25 Kislev had been a Jewish winter solstice festival long before that.

Christians Take Over

Only the Christian Church stood aloof at the festive season. The birth of Christ could hardly have been fixed on so notorious a day as that of so many pagan gods. The Church had already adopted much from the pagans, who were apt to make pointed remarks about it. Not until the fourth century would the Church be powerful enough to silence its rivals and brazenly announce that henceforth the birth of the true Sun of Righteousness would be celebrated on the day of the "Natalis Solis Invicti".

Not the least of Christian borrowings was the Nativity story itself. Some 1700 years BC its prototype was being applied to the first-born sons of the Pharaohs, the sun-kings of Egypt. It is portrayed in four scenes on the walls of the Temple of Amen at Luxor, built by Amenhetep III.

In the first scene the ibis-headed god Thoth, the Egyptian Gabriel, hand upraised in a manner reminiscent of Christian paintings of the Annunciation, hails the Virgin

Queen Mut-em-Ua and informs her that she is to bear a son in the character of Horus, the divine child. Next comes the Descent of the Holy Spirit. Kneph, whose name means "spirit", together with Hathor, impregnates the Virgin by touching her with the "ankh" symbol of life. Conception is indicated in the queen's fuller form. The third scene is the Birth. The mother is seated on the stool then used in childbirth, and a nurse holds the new-born child.

Finally, we have the Adoration. The child is enthroned, receiving gifts and homage from gods and men. Behind the ram-headed Kneph are three human figures, kneeling and offering the gift of life. The egyptologist Samuel Sharpe declared: "In this picture we have the Annunciation, the Conception, the Birth and the Adoration, as described in the first and second chapters of Luke's gospel; and as we have historical assurance that the chapters in Matthew's gospel which contain the miraculous birth are an after addition not in the earliest manuscripts, it seems probable that these two poetical chapters in Luke may also be unhistorical, and borrowed from the Egyptian accounts of the miraculous births of their kings".

In Search of a King

Albertus Magnus, greatest of 14th century scholars and teacher of Thomas Aquinas, wrote that "the mysteries of the Incarnation, from the Conception on to the Ascension into heaven, are shown to us on the face of the sky and are signified by the stars". He noted, too, that the constellation of Virgo rose above the horizon at the moment of the birth of Christ at midnight on 24 December. Long before, at that same moment, the Egyptian priests had proclaimed: "The Virgin has brought forth; the light is waxing". Irenaeus, Bishop of Lyons in the second century, wrote: "The Gnostics truly declared that all the supernatural transactions asserted in the gospels were counterparts (or representations) of what took place above". Note that "truly". The Gnostics were the men who "knew", and they did not accept the gospels as human history.

Astronomical allegory is indeed the key to the Nativity story. Take, for example, those three kneeling figures who were known to the Egyptians ages before they were supposed to have followed a star to Bethlehem. We are told that wise men came from the east in search of a king whose star they had seen in the east, and Catholic legend says that these wise men were three kings. Now if, on a clear evening in midwinter, we look eastward, we see the most striking of all constellations mounting the sky. The three stars so conspicuous in Orion's belt are pointing to the east from whence they came, as if announcing a marvel. And the marvel comes. Sirius, the most brilliant of all the host of heaven, rises in the east in line with those three

stars, whose old name was The Three Kings. To the Egyptians, Sirius was the most important star of all, for they regulated their calendars by its heliacal rising. Six thousand years ago the star which rose at the winter solstice to announce the birth of the sun was Sirius. Accordingly Sirius was known as the Herald of the Sun and the Star of Horus. Thus it was true, astronomically speaking, that the Three Kings had "seen his star in the east", the herald proclaiming the advent of the true King of Kings.

We need not look far among the winter constellations

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FREETHINKER

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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 St., 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.

EVENTS

Eastbourne Humanist Group, New Hotel, Grange Road, Eastbourne, Saturday, 19 December, 7 p.m., Winter Solstice Dinner. Tickets 26s each from David Purdon, 88 Broderick Road, Hampden Park, Eastbourne.

Humanist Holidays, Christmas House Party, Osborne Private Hotel, Freshwater Bay, Isle of Wight, 23 to 28 December. Details from Mrs Mephem, 29 Fairview Road, Sutton, Surrey.

Leicester Secular Society, Secular Hall, Humberstone Gate, Leicester, Sunday, 20 December, 6.30 p.m. F. A. Ridley: "Survivals and New Arrivals".

South Place Ethical Society, Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London, WC1, Tuesday, 22 December, 7 p.m. Nigel Sinnott: "England and Ireland—Then and Now".

BHA CRITICISES COMMISSION

Michael Lines, general secretary of the British Humanist Association, accused the Church of England of "wanting to have its cake and eat it". It wants to stop Parliament having a say in Church affairs, without losing its own privileged position. Mr Lines was commenting on the report of the Archbishop's Commission on Church and State. He said: "Humanists stand foursquare for disestablishment. We believe that this is the only democratic solution to the present anomalous position of the Church".

Mr Lines said there was no justification for the continued right of some Anglican bishops to sit in the House of Lords, or for the influence this gives the Church in our legislation. "Everything shows that active membership of the Church is declining fast; the very limpness of the Commission's claim that people still want to feel that "religion has a place in the land to which they can turn on the too rare occasions when they think they need it" is evidence of their reluctance to face facts".

PRESS FREEDOM

Lord George-Brown is not my favourite public figure, but I raised my hat to him last week when he took a swipe at London *Evening Standard* production staff, who demanded that a cartoon which criticised striking power workers, be suppressed. Apparently the offending cartoon was strong stuff, but cartoonists are not the most respectful individuals, and their victims include very august personages and institutions. Power strikers are not wilting lilies in need of special care and protection. There have been similar incidents in Fleet Street recently, and it is deplorable that editors are being subjected to such coercion.

Of course the Press is not exactly famous for fair and accurate presentation of both sides of the argument in an industrial dispute. All too often reports are biased and misleading, particularly in provincial areas where the local newspaper often becomes the self-appointed mouthpiece of the employers. And the practice of pushing a striker in front of a microphone or television camera outside a factory gate and expect him to give an articulate explanation of what the dispute is about, often does the workers' case real harm.

Nevertheless it is vitally important to the public—including the strikers, who are members of the public—that there is freedom for newspapers to publish what they lawfully may, and of editors' rights to decide the contents of their newspapers.

FALSE ECONOMY

One of the meanest acts by the present Government is the decision to impose admission charges at art galleries and museums. Although these charges will be steep enough, the gains will not be very great after administrative costs have been taken into account. But it will mean that thousands of people, including children, will have to curtail or even end their visits to such places. A triumph indeed for the financial skinflints of Whitehall and the cultural skinheads of Cannock who voted against Jennie Lee at the General Election.

Edward Britton, general secretary of the National Union of Teachers, has written to the new Minister for the Arts, Lord Eccles, about the charges.

Mr Britton stresses the important part visits to museums and art galleries play in school life, and continues: "It is possible that the Government may be considering exempting school parties from any charges, but we believe it is equally important that children and students should not be discouraged from making their own visits to museums and galleries. Part of the value of visits organised by schools is that they stimulate the interest of children and encourage them and their families to make further visits".

It was also pointed out that teachers often make preparatory visits to museums and galleries in order to arrange school visits. Mr Britton said: "We feel it would be reasonable to ask whether teachers visiting museums and galleries for this purpose could also be exempt from the proposed charges".

NEWS

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S AND NOTES

BANNED PLAY

Councillor Philip Corbishley, Roman Catholic chairman of the Wimbledon Theatre Board, says that Kevin Laffin's play, *It's a Two-foot-six-inches-above-the-ground World* is "crude, disgusting and vulgar filth for filth's sake". It is not what is wanted in Wimbledon, so he and two other members decided against its presentation without consulting the 11-man board. The play is about a Roman Catholic and the Pill, and some people will accept that Councillor Corbishley's religious views in no way influenced his decision.

Earlier this year the Wimbledon Theatre Board decided that the American musical *Hair* was a threat to the virtuous citizens of Wimbledon, and banned it. Valiant efforts have been made for many years to save this South West London theatre, but if the present bunch of censorious fuddy-duddies continue to direct its affairs, the outlook is not very promising.

THE RIGHT TO AFFIRM

The sudden death in London of Trevor Hatton at the early age of 39 recalls a court case of a few years ago when he made a brave stand for the right to affirm. The accused was George Clark who, like Trevor Hatton, was actively involved in the work of the Committee of 100. The chairman of the London Sessions, instead of accepting Hatton's request to affirm asked him if he believed in the truth of the Bible. When he replied that he thought parts of it were probably true the magistrate refused to let him affirm and insisted that he take the oath. When Hatton refused to do so he was not allowed to give evidence. This turned out to be a blessing in disguise for George Clark whose conviction was subsequently quashed on appeal, on the ground that Hatton's evidence might have been vital. It was a salutary warning to magistrates and judges who, since then, have been noticeably more ready to accede to requests to affirm.

In recent years Trevor Hatton was warden of a students' hostel in London, and an active member of the Prison Reform Council.

GREETINGS

The festive season is with us again, and no doubt there will be the annual orgy of clerical whining about Christmas without Christ, and the growing tendency to regard it as a time for merriment. Despite the rising cost of living and other problems there will be plenty of gaiety. Tinsel and paper decorations will bring some colour into slum dwellings. Voluntary workers and hospital staff will do what they can to bring some cheer to the sick and lonely. Somehow, very poor parents will obtain something extra for the table on Christmas day. Sadly, the more fortunate forget how the underprivileged live on the other 364 days of the year.

We wish all *Freethinker* readers, friends and contributors a very happy Christmas and New Year.

PUBLICATIONS

TITLE	AUTHOR	Price	Post
Humanist Anthology	Margaret Knight	10/6	1/6
Rebel Pity: The Life of Eddie Roux	Eddie and Win Roux	45/0	2/0
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
The Cost of Church Schools	David Tribe	4/0	6d
A History of Sex	G. L. Simons	9/0	1/0
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	8d	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
James Maxton and British Socialism	V. S. Anand and F. A. Ridley	4/0	6d
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	20/0	2/6
100 Years of Freethought	David Tribe	42/0	2/2
Catholic Terror Today	Avro Manhattan	12/6	1/6
Materialism Restated	Chapman Cohen	5/0	1/4
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	8d	4d
Man His Own Master	Archibald Robertson	2/6	8d
The Dead Sea Scrolls	John Allegro	5/0	1/0
Age of Reason	Thomas Paine	3/6	4d
Rights of Man (paper)	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	R. G. Ingersoll	1/0	5d
Thomas Paine	Chapman Cohen	1/0	5d
Morals Without Religion	Margaret Knight	18/0	1/2
The Practice and Theory of Bolshevism	Bertrand Russell	6/0	1/0
Why I am Not a Christian	Bertrand Russell	3/0	6d
Impact of Science on Society	Bertrand Russell	6/0	1/0
Mysticism and Logic	Bertrand Russell	6/0	1/0
Authority and the Individual	Bertrand Russell	7/0	1/0
Political Ideas	Bertrand Russell	6/0	1/0
The Conquest of Happiness	Bertrand Russell	9/0	1/2
Marriage and Morals	Bertrand Russell	8/0	1/2
Bertrand Russell's Best	Edited by Robert E. Egner	15/0	1/6
Humanism	H. J. Blackham	5/0	1/0
Comparative Religion	A. C. Bouquet	8/0	1/4
William James and Religion	Gabriel Richard Mason	1/0	5d
What is the Sabbath Day?	H. Cutner	1/3	6d
Human Rights	Peter Archer	3/0	5d
Marriage and Divorce	Various	9/6	1/4
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BOOKS

FROM COLUMBUS TO CASTRO: THE HISTORY OF THE CARIBBEAN, 1492-1969

by Eric Williams. Andre Deutsch, 90s.

When the House of Lords in 1807 debated the abolition of the slave trade, the bill described the traffic as "contrary to the principles of justice, humanity, and sound policy". One noble peer objected to the words "justice and humanity" on the ground that they cast a reflection on the slave traders. He therefore moved an amendment deleting those words. But the Lord Chancellor pointed out that the amendment would remove the basis of a British appeal to other countries to co-operate in abolition. Another peer said that omission of the words would lend colour to the suspicion in France that British abolition was dictated by the selfish motive that her own colonies were well stocked with Negroes. The Lords voted for the original version of the bill.

Typical of Eric Williams' thought and writing, this piece of history comes from his earlier book, *Capitalism and Slavery*, published in Britain in 1964, 21 years after it had appeared in the United States. Now in this massive history of the whole of the Carribean, Dr Williams puts King Sugar and his slaves in a longer perspective.

This book, 18 years in the making while Dr Williams remained (as he still is) prime minister of Trinidad, is a splendid achievement which at once sets a new standard for British historians. They needed to have it set for them. For too long men like Coupland of Oxford mistook imperial sentiment for intellectual integrity. As a consequence, generations of schoolboys and students were taught that the emancipation of the slaves came about because Christians in Britain resolved to lead the world in a moral crusade.

Moral and material elements commonly get mixed up in a political controversy, as in relation to South Africa today. This happens particularly in England where it is easy to perceive the moral element but hard to recognise the force of economic vested interest. Some of the famous "Clapham sect", the pressure group working for the abolition of slavery, had East Indian interests, and "perhaps their detestation of West Indian slavery was sharpened by a sense of the unfair discrimination of the sugar duties in favour of the West Indies and against the growing sugar plantations of India". In general, it is today undeniable that in the 19th century free trade paid Britain, although the demand for it by business men was merged in the chorus demanding liberal democracy in a society freed from state controls. Freedom was defined as the absence of legal restraint—not the presence of social justice. Free trade helped to create a climate of opinion that set the slaves free—without making them free men in more than the legal sense.

From the slave trade in its heyday Britain drew enormous profits. The trade kept the wheels of industry turning. It was part of the triangular trade which filled the outgoing ships with manufactured goods for Africa, especially guns; filled them with slaves on the next stage of the voyage; and then again filled them with sugar or cotton to take home on the third stage. The slave trade stimulated ship-building and gave seamen jobs. It raised Liverpool and Bristol to prosperous cities. It nourished new industries based on the processing of colonial raw materials. It

FREETHINKER

yielded large profits which were ploughed back into industry hungry for capital. No wonder the West Indian colonies were among the most valuable the world has ever known.

Britain was the leading nation but by no means the only one to gain wealth from this sort of empire-building. It is the main merit of Dr Williams' book that, for the first time, there are brought together the operations of all the other six European nations involved, at one period or another, in colonialism in the whole wide Caribbean area—France, Holland, Spain, Portugal, Denmark and the United States.

Reference to the United States, which annexed Cuba in 1898, brings us to the 20th century. The end of formal empire has failed to make any great change in these islands, with the notable exception of Cuba. On the contemporary scene Dr Williams is not as frank and forceful as he is consistently in all the other chapters, and he handles Cuba with almost diplomatic caution. Whether or not all the islands will ever form a happy federation is just speculation which cannot be very hopeful in the light of earlier failure.

More interesting perhaps is the fact that Dr Williams goes along with those who see the West Indians as people in search of a cultural identity of their own. Is the time at hand when they might cease to be "apt apprentices" and become innovators? The process admittedly requires something like a psychological revolution, a deeper insight into the true meaning of the Caribbean historical experience. This need has already renewed the contact the English-speaking West Indians have long had with American Negroes. Harlem is a source of inspiration which spreads far beyond New York. Who knows what more than the concept of Black Power it can contribute to the future of Trinidad or Jamaica? Meanwhile, the Caribbean cries out for a common market, a rational economic system of exchange between the territories, and a growth of industries owned and operated by the Caribbean peoples themselves in their own interests. But their lack of political sophistication means that progress in this direction will be slow.

JULIUS LEWIN

SAVAGE LUXURY

by Brian Davies. Souvenir Press, 35s.

Seal hunting has been called "the world's cruellest and bloodiest hunt". Yet all over the world, and particularly in West Europe, women of fashion continue to wear seal-skin coats and garments decorated with attractive bits of seal pelt, obtained by killing harp-seal cubs before they are many days old. "Civilisation", of course, depends upon cruelty. Our diet, unless we eat the more rational vegetarian fare, relies on selective breeding of animals, often under the horrible conditions existing in modern intensive farming methods. To talk of seal killing in isolation and mount a campaign to stop the hunt may seem like straining at a gnat amidst all this mass of slaughter.

Undoubtedly few people would eat meat if they had to go into the field or stall and kill the animal themselves. But it is probably truer that practically no woman would wear a sealskin coat if she had to join the hunt which still take place annually on Canada's Gulf of St Lawrence.

This book describes the efforts of one man, backed by a small group of keen supporters to stop this hunt. A lot of Canadian citizens agree that the early spring hunt is savage,

REVIEWS

sadistic, tortuous and inhumane. Many of the cubs were actually "skinned alive". They had been clubbed, but not always in the right spot, and brain damage was not enough to kill the cub at the time the hunter cut the pelt away from the body and flippers. The official view of what happened was far different from Mr Davies' observations on the ice. He took reporters and photographers from the *Daily Mirror* and *Paris Match* on to the ice with his party in successive years, and succeeded in mounting a considerable barrage of public complaint against the Canadian Government for permitting this hunt to continue. When Mr Davies was questioned by a Government committee, his lawyer was appalled by their double-dealing and near-blackmail form of questioning. One unsympathetic member of a committee who was interrogating Mr Davies described the publicity as an "international black eye" to Canada.

In 1970 there was to have been legal suppression of the hunt, but owing to a deliberate misinterpretation, and a loophole in the law, the savagery continues to decimate whitecoat seal cubs. Mr Davies says these animals are most appealing, and entirely reliant on their mothers, whose pathetic misery at the sight of their murdered cubs is clearly revealed by photographs in the book.

Europe is the centre of the sealskin trade, and Brian Davies hoped that pressure of publicity here would help stop the hunt. He has not been so lucky as he hoped. Like all businesses, this one depends on supply and demand; until there are no women demanding sealskin coats, the supply from the hunt will carry on. Propaganda must be directed against those who buy these items of *haute couture*. I have just received a catalogue of luxury furs from Harrods: Alaskan sealskin coats, midi style, are priced at £1,600. Eager placard protesters will need no reminding of the proximity of this famous store to Knightsbridge Station!

A pamphlet *Humane Killing of Seals*, by W. Nigel Bonner concludes: "The use of light clubs may result in suffering unless the blow is very accurately placed. Prior to the general ban on hunting whitecoat seal pups in the Gulf of St Lawrence, Canadian regulations required the use of a club at least 34 inches long and having a diameter of not less than 2 inches for at least half its length. A similar standard would seem appropriate for use in Great Britain". Apart from the misleading statement about the "ban" in Canada as mentioned above, Mr Davies has shown the ineffectiveness of this method sufficiently. Surprisingly, opposition to seal killing is accused of "sensationalism" in this pamphlet, which remarkably, is published by the National Environment Research Council.

In *Savage Luxury*, Brian Davies also describes a visit to Alaska, where another species of seal—the fur seal—is slaughtered. This hunt he calls, "ugly, in the extreme, and as far as the vital needs of human society are concerned, totally unnecessary". He writes of the situation as he found it when the seals had been rounded up on the shore and driven towards the killers:

I watched as two animals received blows on soft parts of their body and collapsed to the ground in agony, their teeth snapping and eyes bright with pain. Quickly, the men gave killing blows. Again, a pause in killing and then clubs were striking again. One seal, rearing back and opening his mouth in an enraged snarl, was struck full in the face, and coughing and spitting, bit savagely at the wooden club. Another terrified animal seeing an opening charged for the sea. One of the hunters chased him and

struck at him with his club, and hit him across the back. The animal fell, then, to my absolute horror, the man stood watching the animal as it lay in agony for some ten to fifteen seconds before finally administering the killing blow.

Think about this if you are visiting Harrods soon.

The only argument Brian Davies could find remotely in favour of the seal hunt, was the employment it provided in an area of Eastern Canada where unemployment is high. But the hunt only provides a short period of work, and when the hunter's expenses are deducted, the pay does not appear so good. Many of the hunters admitted they did not enjoy the job, and he thinks it would not tax the initiative of the Canadian Government much to provide alternatives. Mr Davies alternative is to stop the killing and encourage tourists to come and watch the arrival of the seal herd; one of nature's most attractive phenomena. Work involved would amply replace any loss the hunters would suffer.

DENIS COBELL

THE GOD BENEATH THE SEA

by Leon Garfield and Edward Blishen. Longman, 35s.

The authors retell some of the stories of Greek mythology dealing with the origin of the gods and the creation of man. For anyone who does not know these stories, this is a good book to start on; anyone already familiar with them will find this an outstandingly interesting interpretation, treating the myths in an adult way. It is written in poetically heightened, sensuous prose, and illustrated with striking impressionistic—sometimes horrific—black and white drawings by Charles Keeping.

This book suggests interesting comparisons with the parallel Jewish myths accepted by Christianity. The Christian claim that their God is a higher conception than the Greeks dreamed of is undoubtedly justified. The Greek gods and goddesses are differentiated from men only in their power and pride. Their only concern with man was to punish without pity any insult to themselves. No one could ever have been impelled to an act of charity by contemplation of these deities. Interestingly enough, the Greeks did not believe man was made by the gods, but was either produced by the earth itself or—as in the version Garfield and Blishen use—made by Prometheus, a Titan, an inferior relative of the gods. Prometheus was cruelly punished by Zeus for assisting man, and giving him fire stolen from heaven in defiance of the gods. Thus Prometheus can be compared with Christ, suffering to save mankind, and with Satan giving Eve the fruit of the tree of knowledge.

The Greeks avoided the central moral issue of the Christian-Jewish-Muslim tradition, which arises from the attempt to reconcile the concept of an infinitely powerful, loving god with the world as we actually know it. The Greek gods were neither good nor loving, nor even—as they frequently opposed each other—all-powerful. However, moral dilemma was avoided only by having no moral content, and ultimately the believer was left with only nature myths and hero stories. A great literature, but hardly a great philosophy.

These are merely a few lines of thought prompted by reading *The God Beneath the Sea*. Those interested in the early development of religious thought should read this fascinating book for themselves.

MARGARET McILROY

TELEVISION: DAMES AND PRIMA DONNAS

PETER COTES

Add Dame Marie Rambert to the television's list of Bright Young Things. Following Sir Neville Cardus and Lord David Cecil a few weeks ago, when they held sway in two better-than-usual conversational features on BBC-2, we had the Senior Dancing Dame in a lively programme, *Recollections of Marie Rambert*.

"He gave me shape, he gave me character, he made me cry", cooed Madame about one of her distinguished teachers, and on Nijinski and Diaghilev she was equally forthcoming. Confessing that she was in love with the former, she concluded: "My life is one catalogue of mistakes".

The Mercury Theatre was, of course, her proudest achievement, and she did us proud for close on 60 minutes with tales of her tiny theatre. It's a pity that so many over-exposed "personalities", callow high priests of pop art, so frequently seen taking over (at their trendiest), the *Late Night Line Up programme*, lack the character and appeal of "Mimi" Rambert, now in her eighties. I recall seeing under her banner, such Rambert artists as Markova, Ashton, Turner, Hyman, Gould, and Gore, dancing original ballets with a rare grace and éclat, on that postage stamp

stage in the 1930s. The others I know about; their triumphs, marriages, and the tragic loss at an early age of Harold Turner. But whatever happened to Walter Gore?

* * * *

Ad-Lib (BBC-1) is a news-based "chat" forum, the aim of which is for presumably intelligent people to sit round a table to discuss matters of some current importance. There is a tendency creeping in of late, from some of those present, to behave like television prima donnas. It was depressing to note in a recent programme in this series how much hot air was engendered, how little light cast on the subject under discussion. "Aspects of Science" was the subject being debated, and the three contributors patently failed to agree about anything (which was fair enough), or to communicate (which was not so fair). The "subjects" so aware of the camera were George Porter, Sebastian de Ferranti, and Theodore Roszac. From scientists one expects better than posturings and attitudinizing. Only the chairman, Professor Porter (a Nobel prize winner), ever entered into the spirit of an educational programme which wasn't...

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Roman Catholic Opposition

Mrs Renée Short, MP (Lab., Wolverhampton NE) said that population growth is one of the biggest problems facing us today, and that it is essential that all of us should understand the danger to our environment from the continuing rapid growth of population before it is too late. Mrs Short said she was proud to have played her part in getting the Abortion Law Reform and Family Planning Acts on the Statute Book during the period of the last Labour Government.

She continued: "Those of us who played an important role in helping to get this legislation on the Statute Book were subjected to an unprecedentedly virulent campaign during the last General Election mounted by sections of the Roman Catholic Church. Fortunately I survived the onslaught, but many of my Parliamentary colleagues did not. Yet the Abortion Act has brought relief to thousands of women and girls who would otherwise have been compelled to carry an unwanted child to term, often at the risk of their own health, and often conceived in circumstances of horror which few men appear to understand or have sympathy with.

"From time to time when the Press has nothing better to do, and aided and abetted by those Catholics who are still fighting a rearguard action against the Abortion Act, we get rashes of stories in the Press about abuses of various kinds. Of course there are difficulties because there are sharks in every walk of life, including the medical profession, and some of them have seen that there are rich pickings to be made out of the misery of certain women."

Mrs Short said that sex education should begin at home and in the school. She praised the BBC for the films they made for use by teachers: "It is unfair and cruel not to give children the help and guidance they need as they become ready for it".

WE THREE KINGS OF ORION ARE

(Continued from page 403)

for the remaining trappings of the traditional Nativity scene. The birthplace is Auriga, the Stable, with the Ox and the Ass on either side—Taurus, and Ursa Major, the old Ass of Typhon. Not far away is Cancer, the Crab, known to Eratosthenes and other ancient astronomers as the Asses and the Manger. The Egyptian word "apta" meant crib as well as manger, hence the infant Horus would be exhibited in either, in the streets and temples.

The modern trend towards a "demythologised" Christianity has been deprecated in orthodox circles. But a "history" which is impossible and unacceptable on earth becomes natural and true, yet need lose none of its old magic, when transferred to its real home in the heavens.

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