

A BAD YEAR FOR CIVIL LIBERTY

'CONSCIOUS REJECTION OF LIBERAL VALUES' — NCCL REPORT

The last year has been a bad one for civil liberty in Britain, according to the annual report of the National Council for Civil Liberties which was published last Monday. It describes a number of cases dealt with by the NCCL to illustrate the faults and failures of the administration of justice. It also records the Council's campaigns on such issues as the right of privacy, the rights of boy entrants and young servicemen, children's rights, race relations and immigration, censorship and academic freedom. The Report is also in part a roll-call of injustice, and deals with the harassment of unpopular minorities, the continuing failure of the legal aid scheme, denials of bail, and the failure to establish independent investigation into public complaints against the police. This ever-growing list suggests that "we are faced with a conscious rejection of liberal values" which "are fragile when the public, concerned about crime and public disorder, demands more law and less freedom."

Legal Restraints on Freedom

In his introduction to the Report, Malcolm Hurwitt, chairman of the NCCL, says that the continuing increase in the Council's work is a measure partly of the way in which the NCCL has become known and recognised as the principal protector of civil liberties in this country. It is also, unfortunately, an indication of the need of the NCCL's assistance which is experienced by those who are in a minority because of their skin colour, the length of their hair, political opinions or way of living. "Some campaigns we have won, some we have lost, and some are still being fought. The battles of the coming year will clearly include immigration control, police powers and, improvements in the administration of justice.

"One of the continuing issues will certainly be that of privacy and it is unique amongst our campaigns in that it is not fought on behalf of a minority but on behalf of everyone.

"Those middle-of-the-road liberals who strike an attitude without personal commitment, are unaware that the growth of intolerance has already made us subject to more legal restraints on our freedom than existed 100 years ago. The most common attack on civil liberties is not open and head-on, but consists of nibbling away at the edges and an attack on one section of the community is a step in the entanglement to us all."

The Report says that one of the problems for civil liberties is that even a slight shift towards intolerance may cause potential victims to over-react. "Frustration and despair can all too easily lead to the use of violence as an instrument of protest and ill-considered rhetoric which polarises opinion and increases mutual distrust. The NCCL's task is to appeal to thoughtful opinion which will not be intimidated by waves of public intolerance, silenced by threats from authority or uncritical of extremist excesses."

Recent developments indicate that the time has come to re-examine public order law in the light of the threat

it poses for civil liberties, the Report continues. The tactics of prosecution in political cases have included the use of catch-all charges carrying penalties of varying degrees of severity. A defendant may find himself facing one or two charges at committal, but with a much longer list shortly before he comes to trial. "This enables the prosecution both to intimidate and to engage in a kind of bargaining, which will exchange guilty pleas on one count for the dropping of other charges."

Constant Threat

The prosecuting authorities have some 60 laws to choose from in dealing with behaviour likely to occur through active protest. Many of these powers have been used in recent times and seems likely to become even more fashionable in the future. Prosecutions for sedition are extremely rare but, if the authorities were to respond to the law-and-order lobby by using this reserve power, no political activist could engage in protest without the constant threat of prosecution and imprisonment.

In the section surveying the Council's work during the past year it is reported that contacts with prisoners showed that conditions in prison and remand centres were appalling. "Prison rules made rehabilitation almost impossible, and their arbitrary enforcement was creating an ever-increasing climate of bitterness and discontent. Sentences and parole were causing more problems than they solved."

Looking to the future the Report states that the NCCL will concentrate on the fair administration of justice and the more immediate threats posed by impending legislation on drugs, immigration control and industrial relations. An increase in activity on prison reform and equal rights for all servicemen is forecast.

There are sections of the Report dealing with censorship, academic freedom, the police and servicemen. It is obtainable from the NCCL, 152 Camden High Street, London, NW1, price 13p.

THE ROAD TO SEXUAL MATURITY

JAMES HEMMING

To expect sexual maturity in the nation's adults without educating to attain it is as pointless as supposing that skilled mathematicians will grow on trees. The educator's aim, therefore, should be to nourish appropriately the growth of the sexual component at every stage of development, so that the individual may reach, by adulthood, the capability of sexual fulfilment at the mature level.

One of the errors of the past has been to limit sex in education, or even exclude it totally, whereas it interpenetrates the whole of life and, therefore, of education. It comes naturally into literature, music, art, history, geography, and even science through biology, anatomy, physiology, anthropology, bio-chemistry and genetics, not to mention psychology and sociology. To bowdlerize sex from the curriculum was like trying to teach zoology without any reference to animals. Whatever such a curriculum represented it did not, and could not, educate for life.

Such ideas are now commonplace but, by the standards of even a quarter of a century ago, they are revolutionary. The idea that a rewarding sexual life is in every way desirable and healthy for both sexes, right through adult years, has only reached general acceptance within the past decade. Equally recent is the realisation that sex education extends far beyond the imparting of information about the procreative process; it also embraces emotional development, personal sensitivity, social responsibility and other qualities which are at the root of sexual maturity.

Before outlining the process of sexual development and the way education may serve it, there is one psychological red herring that must be dealt with. This is the hypothesis that to repress human sexuality is itself productive because the inhibited energy can be transformed into a creative output by the process of sublimation. At its extreme, this hypothesis holds that creative vigour in a society is the result of repressed sexuality, and that to accept human sexuality as something to be freely—though responsibly—expressed is to threaten the very energy upon which civilisation depends.

Stumbling Blocks

This once-popular hypothesis is clearly contrary to the facts. Markedly creative personalities throughout history have *not* been notable for sexual inhibition in their lives, while the historical periods of overflowing creativity—the golden age of Greece, renaissance Italy—were as sexually lively as they were lively in every other way. The grotesque sexual excesses of a bored and purposeless society are not the cause of social decadence but its symptoms.

This is not to suggest that people who choose to lead celibate lives are at a disadvantage. Different people adopt different means to concentrate will and purpose and, for some, celibacy may be the means. What does not bear examination is the assumption that to repress sexuality is to reap a harvest of bonus creativity. But, of course, the other extreme view is equally invalid. Bed is not the road to life. It is all a matter of getting sexuality in proportion and in perspective. This is the extended role of sex education today.

The stumbling blocks along the way—the enemies of the healthful process—are lack of self-confidence, unnecessary guilt, ignorance, illogical fear, egocentricity, rigidity, impoverished trust in others, and diminished social interest.

All these are psychological influences that tend to trap the individual in immature fixations of one kind or another. To foster personal maturity, to prepare young people to be successful, fulfilled partners and parents is what sex education in the main is about.

During the first years, the child is totally dependent on his immediate relationships, particularly relationships with his father and mother, for the attainment of three perceptions, for the lack of which his whole sexual development thereafter may be jeopardised. One is a positive, assured concept of his own value. This is the foundation for confidence to relate to others with sincerity and depth. Another is an attitude of delight and acceptance towards his own body. Ideas that his body is indecent in any of its parts or functions can corrupt his sexual perceptions later on. The third basic perception is an attitude of trust towards others. The foundation in experience for acquiring these primary concepts is, obviously, a loving, accepting, encouraging home.

The Schools' Job

The period from about three to about ten can be treated as one phase so far as sex education is concerned. The period is marked by the extension of the social environment beyond the home, the rapid expansion of language and the ability to use it, and an evermore wide ranging curiosity. All this has implications for sex awareness. One might say that, at about seven, the child really enters the communication network that society is.

The schools' job in sex education during this period arises logically from the facts and situation of the children's development. Amid the mass of stimuli surrounding the child, the school has to offer the steady security of valid perceptions, and valid information, within the context of a warm, friendly, stimulating and challenging community life. It has not only to meet, but to anticipate, the natural curiosity of children of this age, so that a perspective on the nature of things is gradually built up. The great thing is to avoid confusion and false tracks. As Piaget and his co-workers have shown, the child is constantly striving to make sense of his own world at his own level of understanding. The child will gradually move on from the simple to the complex and, as he does so, what we have to treasure is the cognitive integrity of the child's mind. The school has the supreme task of clarifying the child's perception of things—including sexual things—at a child's own level, and from the motivation of the child's own curiosity.

A particular instance of this is the opening up of the child's sense of wonder about, and involvement in, the whole range of nature. This, of course, includes the facts about procreation, as they arise in stories, from the study of animals, and in communicating about life. The young child's pragmatic absorption with the world around him leads, *if the situation is open*, towards all he needs to know in relating himself to life. This will include, at the appropriate stages, ever more precise information about procreation and birth, through opportunities to express curiosities and to have questions answered.

Towards Sexual Fulfilment

Equally important for ultimate sexual maturity are the nourishment of feeling and imagination in preparation for the great upsurge of emotional growth that comes with

Dr Hemming is an educational psychologist and author. This article is based on a paper he read at a recent conference on sex education of school children which was organised by the Royal Society of Health.

adolescence. Similarly, education of the three to ten year olds should constantly develop self-confidence and social capacity, without which adolescence can catch the individual unprepared, and may drive him into retreat as a personality at the very time when he should be growing in individual and social competence.

All these aspects have to be taken into account since they are all components in sex education, seen as preparation for responsible sexual fulfilment in adult years. The best assurance that an individual will be ready for marriage in his twenties is an absorbed, active, socially involved life at three years of age, at four, at five and so on through the years.

Many infant and junior schools are fully awake to the importance of a total, satisfying educational experience at every age, but not all are sufficiently alert to bring swift help to the children who are already falling behind in personal and social development. It is in the nature of things that every school has two main tasks: to nourish the continuing growth of children who are well founded as personalities, and to rehabilitate those who are stumbling and stuck, already caught up in life-styles that will lead them towards egocentricity and isolation rather than towards generous, happy relationships with other—the *sine qua non* of sexual fulfilment. High marriage risks can already be spotted in our primary schools. We ought to do more about this than we are doing.

It is vitally important, before puberty sets in, that the child shall be clear, and untroubled, about the so-called "facts of life", and that he, or she, sees them in a context of wonder, involvement and love. The climate to be preserved is one of joyful expectation, Menstruation and the first wet dream should be anticipated with full knowledge and welcomed as evidence of growing up. But we should be careful of implying to the child that there is any "right" time for these things to happen. They may come sooner or later, and we must make it very clear that it does not matter which it is. It should never be said that a child is "late".

The need to clear the ground of uncertainties during this phase does not mean that we should make sex education seem separate or special *vis-à-vis* education as a whole. If communications within the school are free and open, and if the school is interacting as it ought to be with the wider world beyond the school, then appropriate sex knowledge and appropriate sex feeling will come in naturally from many sources: from studying how other people live, from reading, from writing and talking about family life, from biography, from poetry and so forth.

The task of the school, however, goes beyond acceptance. It also has the responsibility of doing something to offset the disproportionate commercialisation of sex in our era. It can do this by carefully bringing home that relationships between the sexes are personal and precious. This is how young people feel naturally when sex first touches them as a personal reality.

Sex in adolescence

The depersonalised, mechanistic, sensation-seeking travesty of sex-feeling, to be found among a proportion of adolescents and adults today, is an induced attitude, partly

arising from receiving uncritically the values of commercialised sex, and partly arising from a terror of commitment. The more we can build up a positive, personal feeling about sex before the full impact of adolescence hits the growing child, the better we arm him, or her, against degrading human sexuality to the level of mere sensation.

During adolescence, sex moves into the centre of the stage. This is precisely why ignorance and anxiety about sexual function should, as far as possible, be removed before the onset of puberty. Dealing with the personal, emotional, social and moral aspects of sex is quite enough for the young people to handle without other complications. The actual situation they face today is of recent origin. On the one hand, there is the emancipation of society from prudery and, on the other, a generation of young people who are taller, heavier, fitter, and maturing earlier than at any time since before the industrial revolution. Consequently, the option of fudging sex education—the technique of the past—is no longer open.

What this involves for sex education in secondary schools may be summed up under six heads:

(a) The acceptance by the staff of the sexual reality in the lives of their pupils.

(b) The acceptance and education of the adolescent's expanding emotional and social capacities.

(c) The inclusion of the sexual content of subjects, or projects, where it comes in naturally: in literature, history, geography, biology, humanities courses, art, and elsewhere.

(d) The discussion of sexual matters both as they arise in subject areas and as they arise in personal experience.

(e) Opportunities to gain relevant information, and to satisfy uncertainties about sex, love and marriage, including detailed information on contraception.

(f) Consideration of personal responsibility in the context of human relationships, love and marriage.

(g) A well-developed network of counselling and care to provide ready help for individuals in doubt or in difficulties.

At this point we come to the real crunch in the whole issue of adolescent sex education: what should our attitude be to the possibility of pre-marital sexual relationships among older teen-agers? The ideal set out in *Half Our Future* (1963) was "chastity before marriage and fidelity within it". But does not the extolling of chastity, as implied in this quotation, arise from a view of sex as somehow contaminating? Which is exactly what we must avoid if a high quality of sexual fulfilment within marriage is our ultimate aim.

When sexual relationships were governed by taboo, the question of quality was hardly ever raised. Sex within marriage was regarded as "good" and sex outside marriage as "bad". This cannot continue to be a basis for sexual morality in an age when sexual fulfilment is regarded as good in itself. The fundamental question at the heart of sexual morality today is not about sex versus abstinence, but about tender, passionate, considerate, personal sexual relationships versus egocentric, trivial depersonalised sexual outlets.

(Continued on page 109)

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 sought and sold). For information or catalogue send 5p stamp to Kit Moutat, Mercers, Cuckfield, Sussex.

EVENTS

Brighton and Hove Humanist Group, Salisbury Hotel, King's Road, Brighton. Sunday, 4 April, 5.30 p.m. Fanny Cockerell: "The Feminine Feminist".

Humanist Holidays. Easter Holiday at Belgravia Hotel, Bournemouth, is now fully booked. Details of other holidays from Mrs. Mephram, 29 Fairview Road, Sutton, Surrey. Telephone: 642-8796.

Leicester Secular Society. Secular Hall, Humberstone Gate, Leicester, Sunday, 4 April, 6.30 p.m. Richard Clements: "Robert Owen, Social Pathfinder".

CONWAY HALL, Red Lion Square, London, WC1

FRIDAY, 30 APRIL, 7.30 p.m.

The National Secular Society and
South Place Ethical Society present

DEREK WILKES Tenor

MARIE-HELENE GEORGIO Soprano

SHEER PLEETH Pianist

Tickets 40p from

NSS, 103 Borough High Street, London, SE1, and
SPES, Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London, WC1

NEWS

DEMANDS FOR FREE FAMILY PLANNING

A Labour peer and the Women's Liberal Federation called for free family planning as part of the National Health Service last week.

Lord Kennet, a junior Minister in the Labour Government, told a conference in London of Medical Officers of Health that population growth must be limited by free contraception on demand. It could be made every medical officer's duty to see that contraceptive services were available in his area.

He did not think the family doctor was always the best person to give contraceptive advice to a young girl about to embark on her first affair. "The family doctor is in some ways Daddy's representative, and I feel that many unwanted pregnancies are due to precisely this difficulty." There were plenty of reasons for "thinking now in order to be able to put something well thought out, based on proper research, into effect in 20 or 30 years' time when it is going to be needed."

Mrs Margaret Smith, the wife of a Congregational minister, told the Women's Liberal Federation conference at Blackpool that while she deplored the necessity for such a service, "we feel that this is better than the birth of even more unwanted or 'fatherless' children, or shotgun marriages which so often break up, causing even more misery."

Renée Short, MP, told a conference of Labour women at Scarborough last Sunday that women have a right to be delivered from the tyranny of their own fertility. She said: "In the present crisis of rising birth rates all over the world, one can say that Government and people have a responsibility to see that advice, help and means of preventing unwanted births are freely available to all."

CIVIL WAR

News of the civil war in East Pakistan makes grim reading with at least 10,000 civilians reported to have been killed on the first day of the conflict. Twenty-four years after the partitioning of India on the basis of religion the bitter lesson has to be learnt that religion is not a sound foundation for statehood.

After several years of military dictatorship, Pakistan held elections on 8 December last for a Constituent Assembly which was due to meet on 5 March. Of the 162 seats allocated to East Pakistan, 160 were won by the Awami League, led by Shaikh Mujibur Rahman which advocates the maximum autonomy from the Federal Pakistan Government. West Pakistan, with a slightly smaller population, had 138 seats, a substantial number of which were won by the party of Z. A. Bhutto.

If the duly elected representatives of the people had been allowed to meet as a Constituent Assembly it is clear that autonomy for both parts of Pakistan would have resulted. President Yahya Khan, the military ruler of Pakistan twice postponed calling the Constituent Assembly, held talks with Rahman while the army (dominated by West Pakistan) was moved into East Pakistan. And so by refusing to call the Constituent Assembly, and declaring the majority party illegal, it is clear that the path of conflict and violence was deliberately chosen by Yahya Khan and a bloodbath became inevitable. Bhutto is reported to have said after the fighting began: "Pakistan has been saved at last by the grace of Allah."

The few East Pakistan regiments supported the elected

AND NOTES

leaders of their country and are fighting against the Federal Army. Pakistan was liberally supplied with arms by Britain and the United States as part of a defence alliance (which includes Turkey and Iran) to prevent Communist aggression. Now that these arms have been turned by a military dictatorship against the majority of its own people, it would seem the time has come to stop supplies, and thus help to end the present carnage.

INHERITANCE

Whilst it is important that those with physical or mental disabilities should be given every help and encouragement to live the most satisfying life possible, "this cannot be interpreted as support for their unlimited right to the joys of parenthood," said David Tribe, president of the National Secular Society, in a press release issued last Monday. He was commenting on Dr George Discombe's article in the *British Medical Journal* on the inadvisability of people with genetic defects having offspring.

Mr Tribe continues: "However great community help may be, disability brings inevitable hardships to its victims and should not be passed on from generation to generation. Admittedly genetic inheritance is complex and cannot be precisely predicted, but a strong probability of unfortunate consequences should be regarded as a certainty where family relations are concerned. Apart from misery to individuals, society, already burdened by a population explosion, must consider the engenic results of breeding. No rights are absolute.

"The position of inherited disabilities is however a fluid one and must be reassessed constantly in the light of new medical treatment which can effect complete cures which were undreamt of in the past."

THE VICTIMS

The *Children's Guardian*, organ of the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children, reports that children in Belfast are suffering greatly and family life is under much strain because of violence in the community. The Society's inspectors and visitors are faced with the aftermath of the disruptions of families who lost their homes, and whose members have been killed, maimed or imprisoned. Additional problems occur in marriages between Protestants and Catholics. These families are usually regarded with disfavour by both sections of the community, and pressure is often exerted to divide and break them.

Poorer and less educated people who live in drab and impoverished surroundings are in an even worse situation. They find it more difficult to get jobs and are poorly paid by outside standards. Children have an extremely poor diet, and are continually hungry. They are often seriously deprived of the stimulation necessary for mental and emotional growth in the important early years. The schools are over-crowded, and many children in large families are unable to start school full-time until they are seven.

The NSPCC has started playgroups for children from particularly deprived environments or families. In this way they provide them with opportunities for play and self-expression. But one playgroup leader found it was necessary to feed the children on arrival at the group because they were hungry. It has been noticed that some of the

children spend a great deal of their time erecting barriers across the floor pretending to shoot and throw petrol bombs.

The *Children's Guardian* says many of the children in the poorer areas are affected in two ways. First, by the burnings, shootings and tensions. Secondly, they are experiencing the daily grind of real poverty, and the lack of opportunity to make the best of themselves.

(Continued from page 107)

The Choice

Is such a change in evaluation tolerable? It should be, because it is unavoidable. The old-style moralists, whose dominant aim was to keep young people from getting into bed with one another, turned a blind eye to the developmental facts. Male adolescents in their late teens are at the height of their physical virility, and many young women of the same age have reached the stage when they are fully ready for the deeper commitment and experience of physical love without, necessarily, being ready to select a partner for life. The actual choice before virile, healthy young people is not sex or no sex but natural sex or a substitute for it. A substitute in the majority of cases—certainly among young men—means fantasy coupled with masturbation. People who make a choice *against* natural sexual relationships for young adults make a choice *for* masturbation.

The only realistic alternatives to sincere, pre-marital relationships are either very early marriage, or years of fantasy and masturbation prior to marriage. Both are unsatisfactory if our aim is responsible sexual maturity, and enduring happy marriage. Early marriages are particularly vulnerable to failure. On the other hand, years of masturbation and fantasy train young people in what we do *not* want: sex as a titillation of sensation devoid of personal mutuality. The great weakness of sex substitutes is that they lack any developmental value. Every genuine sexual relationship teaches the partners something; the outlets of fantasy and masturbation teach nothing.

Prudish sex taboos have given way to commercialised sex titillation but neither set of values is capable of shaping sex creatively in the modern world. Instead we have to establish, through the right kind of education, the values of humanised attitudes to sex. We need values that are free from fear and guilt but which are sensitive and responsible.

One of these values is that we are responsible for one another's feelings, so that we have no justification for entering into sexual relationships lightly or casually, since physical love can reach profound depths of feeling.

A Moral Responsibility

Another is that it is wrong to procreate children unless we have waiting for them the warm, secure, stimulating environment without which their start in life, and therefore their whole life, is at risk. From this arises the absolute responsibility of ensuring that no unwanted children are conceived. Care with contraceptives is today a moral responsibility.

We still have some way to go. When young people are asked about the sex education they received at school, they frequently comment that it was too little and too late. What we need in our schools—in *all* our schools—is an educational climate in which sex is fully accepted as a human reality, so that the way is open continuously to develop knowledge, understanding and responsibility as the years pass. And responsibility in sexual behaviour, let us notice, is not an outcome of obscuratism and taboo, but of understanding and relationship.

BOOKS

THE POLITICAL QUARTERLY IN THE 1930s

Edited by William A. Robson, Allen Lane The Penguin Press, £3.15.

There are at the present time two great nations in the world, which seem to tend towards the same end, although they started from different points: I allude to the Russians and the Americans. Both of them have grown up unnoticed; and while the attention of mankind was directed elsewhere, they have suddenly assumed a most prominent place among the nations; and the world learned their existence and their greatness at almost the same time . . . Their starting point is different and their courses are not the same; yet each of them seems to be marked out by Heaven to sway the destinies of half the globe.

Who would guess when this passage was written? It appears at the end of the first volume of Alexis de Tocqueville's *Democracy in America*, first published in 1835 when the author was 30.

I was reminded of this prophecy when I considered the omissions from this collection of excellent articles published in *The Political Quarterly* during the 1930s. Under the wise editorship of Professor Robson the journal has flourished. It was founded in 1931 with some hesitation and with the crucial aid of a loan of £1,000 from Bernard Shaw. Until 1958 Leonard Woolf partnered Professor Robson in the editing. The best way to describe this quarterly is to say that its articles were longer versions of the kind which gave the *New Statesman* its character under Kingsley Martin in the 1930s. Here was an unorganised group of British socialists who applied reason and humane good sense to the political questions of the day. To those who have been led to believe that the 1930s were a decade marked by ignorance or apathy or folly, here is the necessary corrective.

Reading this book, I wondered why a century after Tocqueville wrote, British socialists had evidently remained unaware of the huge importance of Russia and America. Why did it take another decade as well as a good second world war to make plain who the giants were? After all, these socialists were realists. They were not taken in by Stalin's purges; nor were they willing to appease Hitler. They supported the idea of collective security through the League of Nations to keep world peace because, for one thing, they feared a second world war would destroy the very fabric of western civilisation. (Incidentally, hardly anyone realised that aggression was by no means easy to define or detect.) Some of them saw clearly enough the weaknesses of the Labour Party. The gem of this collection is the essay in which R. H. Tawney used his pen to dissect mercilessly the causes of Labour's downfall in 1931. If you did not know that this article appeared in 1932, you would think he wrote it either in 1951 or in 1971 after Labour had suffered two more defeats for the very reasons he enumerates.

Tawney was no Marxist, but he realised that the ills of the capitalist system of society (which he analyses in his classic book, *The Acquisitive Society*, published just 50 years ago) could not be cured one by one. "Onions can be eaten leaf by leaf", he writes here, "but you cannot skin a live tiger paw by paw; vivisection is its trade, and it does the skinning first".

Of the 17 contributors to this volume, only John A. Hobson and G. D. H. Cole, like Tawney, saw capitalism as a system standing in the way of social progress, though

FREETHINKER

they were not Marxists. Professor Robson claims that these like-minded writers—among them Bertrand Russell, Keynes, and Richard Crossman—were "trying wherever possible to formulate and advocate public policies based on philosophic principles or theories and also on a firm foundation of expert or specialised knowledge". To make good this claim, however, is it not essential to expound your theory or philosophy, especially in relation to the means and the prospects of fundamental social change? Only by doing so can you offer today a credible alternative to the younger generation. Seeing the Labour Party's failure, they tend to embrace Marxism of one variety or another as a new theology. If they cannot somehow apply it to Britain, they are content to argue that it fits the global picture, while predicting and awaiting the breakdown of capitalism.

Another weakness of British socialist thought appears in an uneasy and rather superficial outlook on imperialism. Its true significance, not least in relation to the British economy, was masked in the 1930s. Perhaps that explains an astonishing remark in the original prospectus. It announced that *The Political Quarterly* "would aim to do for British questions what *The Round Table* was doing for imperial politics". The comparison is absurd. *The Round Table*, a conservative quarterly founded in 1910 by men from Milner's kindergarten in South Africa, devoted itself to defending empire as such and to concealing its racial ugliness from English-speaking readers. Leonard Woolf would turn in his grave if anyone was really in danger of taking seriously the comparison suggested.

JULIUS LEWIN

THE FOUNDER OF CHRISTIANITY

by C. H. Dodd. Collins, £1.75.

The *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, in its article on Jesus Christ, used to advise intending biographers of Jesus to abandon the attempt, as the material for such an undertaking certainly did not exist. Lives of Jesus nevertheless appear from time to time, constructed out of what their authors assume to be historical in the gospels, and their own imaginations. A new work of this kind, *The Founder of Christianity*, by Professor C. H. Dodd, presents a Jesus stripped of every vestige of divinity; a Jesus as he might appear to a reverent rationalist, or perhaps a Christian atheist of the type of Dr John A. T. Robinson, who contributes a eulogistic foreword.

Nineteenth century New Testament criticism, says Dr Dodd, reduced what could be accepted as fact almost to nothing. In the present century scholars have felt the discarded material well worth studying as evidence at least for the faith of the early Church. Dr Dodd, however, insists that the gospels are historical as well as religious documents, not least because the Evangelists themselves say so. His conception of historical evaluation is so naive that one wonders just which Bible critics he can have encountered. Not the great freethinking scholars, it is evident.

REVIEWS

His principal authority is, of course, the New Testament. For the rest, the much-disputed passages concerning Christianity in Pliny and Tacitus are presented as unquestionably genuine. From Josephus he offers us, not the famous "He was Christ", but the even more obvious interpolation about the John the Baptist, which sticks out of its context like the proverbial sore thumb. Dr Dodd has devoted a lifetime to New Testament studies, and has an impressive list of academic appointments, but if he knows the dubious nature of such evidence he gives not the slightest hint of it.

Such a momentous story as that of Jesus, he thinks, needed more than ordinary language for its telling, hence the liberal use of symbolism and imagery. The miraculous must therefore be rationally interpreted. Thus: "If Jesus is said to have cured blindness, it is a 'sign' that he brings spiritual illumination . . . if he feeds a multitude on an impossibly slender allowance of loaves and fishes, it is again a 'sign' of the nourishment of the soul with the life of Christ himself".

The failure of Jesus to keep his promise to return in the lifetime of his hearers, while embarrassing for Christians, also poses a problem for those who argue that the gospels were written in the second century, since they would hardly include a promise known to have been broken. Dr Dodd calls it "imaginative symbolism", not meant to be taken literally. Jesus meant that the Kingdom of God had already arrived; a hope had become a reality. "The Last Judgment is that which the people passed on themselves by their reaction to the presence of Jesus." Although he did not intend to, the author has shown that a late dating for the gospels is possible after all.

With the Resurrection Dr Dodd has to admit defeat. He cannot accept it literally, yet "what actually happened . . . does not admit of an answer". The empty tomb would not necessarily indicate resurrection. The main evidence, accepted as always without question, is the testimony of those who saw Jesus alive after his death. The appearances, he says, "were sporadic, elusive, evanescent, yet leaving in the minds of those to whom they happened an unshakable conviction that they had indeed, for a short space of time, been in the direct presence of their living Lord". Such a forceful personality as that of Jesus, the author seems to imply, might have induced hallucinatory visions of him in those who had known him.

Dr Robinson calls this "a book for the student or layman who knows nothing about the subject", as indeed it is. But those who do know something are not likely to find its argument convincing.

R. J. CONDON

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SUCCESSFUL NSS DINNER

David Tribe, who presided at the 65th annual dinner of the National Secular Society in London last Saturday, opened the proceedings by welcoming the large number of guests who came from as far afield as the United States, Spain, Northern Ireland, Birmingham, Bradford-on-Avon, Aldridge, Andover, Cheltenham and Brighton.

The first speaker was Tom Ponsonby, general secretary of the Fabian Society, who proposed a toast to the guest of honour, Dame Margaret Cole. Mr Ponsonby paid a warm tribute to Dame Margaret's achievements as an educationist, historian, research worker, wife and mother. She had profoundly influenced generations of Labour politicians.

"Stand up and be Counted"

Dame Margaret Cole responded, saying that though she had never been connected with the National Secular Society she was in full agreement with its aims. She was an atheist, and very happy to be one. Dame Margaret recalled her great pleasure as a young woman in realising she did not have to be a Christian. Christianity was a burden she shed, as Christian in *The Pilgrim's Progress* shed his burden of sin. The central doctrine of Christianity was grossly immoral—a father giving his only son, in itself a revolting idea, so those who believed in him should have everlasting life while the majority of mankind perished. She felt the time had come for unbelievers to stand up and be counted.

Dame Margaret referred to Robert Owen as a founder of the secularist movement, and hoped that all present would take part later this year in the celebration of the 200th anniversary of his birth.

Avril Fox, who proposed a toast to the National Secular Society, said she had a slight feeling of doing so under false pretences, "for I am not really a secularist. I hasten to add that I am not a Christian, or Moslem, or Hindu, or indeed any of the great conformist sects. I am a pagan. I believe that when the great world cults discarded the ecstasies of Dionysus they threw out the baby of religion with the bath-water of corruption. I also believe that we shall be compelled to rescue that baby and reinstate her with honour."

Value of the NSS

Avril Fox recalled that she spent her early adult years in the service of politics, but over the years as she painfully gained experience in living, the conviction grew that the political sphere exhibited the symptoms and that the disease lay deeper. "And I finally concluded that the disease might be called paternalism, and the only radical cure was enlightenment. The real battle seems to me not to be joined on a class or economic front, but between those great opposing forces, paternalism and enlightenment.

"As I look back over the long history of your remarkable organisation, I see that from time to time certain valuable members have defected from the ranks because they felt the political arena was more important. But always, I am glad to say, there has remained a number of people who clearly felt that more valuable things could be done outside the ranks of the great political 'isms'. And for 105 years this organisation has steadily, doggedly,

throughout all vicissitudes, refused to tie itself to any political bandwagon, but has relentlessly and courageously fought for causes which radically affect the lives of ordinary millions now.

"The Society has taken up such valuable issues as manhood suffrage and then universal suffrage, the right to affirm, the availability of contraception, sex education, anti-censorship, Sunday freedom and marriage law reform. It has always been in the vanguard. And we all know of the present valuable campaign for real sex education and the abolition of religious propaganda in Schools."

Avril Fox concluded by saying there was no doubt in her mind about the value of an organisation like the NSS. "Anyone who has spoken to an MP of either of the two main parties on Sunday observance laws, sex education, or a free family planning service, knows the embarrassed response. 'Well, of course I agree with you, but the party dare not come out openly on your side . . . can't afford to offend important sections of opinion, you know . . .'. The National Secular Society has often come out boldly, and still does, where politicians fear to tread."

The editor of the *Freethinker*, responded on behalf of the NSS.

MISS SPOTLESS

Adapted by Oswell Blakeston from a tailpiece by Honore de Balzac

I was spared the customary death by drowning on account of my having a wonderful white coat, and I was given the name of Miss Spotless. I found a home with the wife of a clergyman who thought I might belong to that tribe of Sacred Animals whose ranks already include Balaam's Ass.

She used to give evening parties for which she sent out cards of invitation inscribed "Tea and Bible Readings"; and of course she tried to teach me the deadly knowledge of the daughters of Eve. She succeeded by the Protestant method which consists of boring you with such lengthy moralising that, in order to avoid hearing them you accept martyrdom. So I learnt never to allow myself to be seen making my toilet, and then my mistress could tell her friends that I was as good as a mechanical cat made in Birmingham. "And that", she'd say, "is surely the ne plus ultra in fine manners."

The vicar paid little attention to me except to point out that cats lick first of all the edges of a saucer of milk and then move in circles around the diminishing pool because they are conscious of Eternity and describe a circle as its symbol. But he was never unkind to me, and I had a sufficiency of stroking and cuddling from his wife.

So you might say that I was well set up for an enviable life with chicken bones and cream and chocolate and plenty of that neat Herring Juice which is the port wine of English cats. How, then, how was it possible that I threw it all away one night because I heard a rascal singing at the window? Oh, maybe you could understand, or even forgive, a single indiscretion; but how can I explain that once I'd allowed myself to be seduced by the rumple-haired freethinking serenader, I never returned to the security of the vicarage.

Yes, I cannot explain why I was so fortunate; but it did happen, I did learn in one lesson that there comes a time when a cat has to choose between life and religion, that one cannot be simultaneously a disconsolate Miss Spotless and a radiant Puss in Highlaced Boots.