

FREE THINKER

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CELEBRATION OF THE *FREETHINKER'S* 90th BIRTHDAY

'CARRYING ON THE AGE OF VOLTAIRE'—BRIGID BROPHY

"At an age when many publications have decided to retire or have already died the *Freethinker* remains as youthful and vigorous as ever", said David Tribe presiding at the paper's 90th birthday celebration in London on 14 May. Readers, contributors and friends were present, and Mr Tribe introduced and narrated a programme of readings based on reports and speeches which were made during the trial for blasphemy of G. W. Foote, founder and first editor of the *Freethinker*. The readers, Laurence Beck and Moira Kuebart, were both excellent. Foote's words were delivered with assurance, and conveyed the resolution and courage he displayed when he faced his accusers 88 years ago. Mr Tribe said the *Freethinker's* contemporaries may all have vanished, but it carries on undismayed.

Maintaining a Balance

He continued: "The detailed image of the paper from year to year is largely a reflection of the personality of its editor and cross-section of its contributors; but certain broad features of editorial policy endure. The paper aims at that combination of news and views which has been a trusted formula of weekend periodicals this century and last. Different editors have had different opinions about the importance of review sections but the *Freethinker* has always tried to cultivate good writing as well as clear thinking; and from its beginning it has contained work by writers (e.g. Ernest Newman) who have gone on to be internationally known critics. There has also been an effort to maintain a broad-visioned balance between narrowly 'sectarian' freethought views and overall social comment.

"Some things the paper is not. It is not trendy, or even trend-setting. What it attempts is an analysis of the significant elaboration of ideas and institutions which, however unfashionable or unpopular they may be at the moment, seem likely to influence future developments in society. Nor is the paper gossipy. It is not concerned with personal intrigues and vendettas inside the churches or the movement—though naturally it is not unaware of them—but has more important matter to deal with. At the same time it is not so mealy-mouthed and 'ecumenical' that it shrinks from such comment on opponents and friends as it feels necessary in the interest of principles and policies.

"We are more concerned to influence people than to win friends. While the *Freethinker* is not flippant it tries not to be solemn and believes that, in the words of a slogan much quoted in early issues, very often 'laughter is the best medicine'".

Mr Tribe introduced Brigid Brophy the distinguished novelist, essayist and critic. Miss Brophy said: "At the celebrations, earlier this month, of the 150th birthday of *The Guardian*, the guest speakers were the Prime Minister and the Federal Chancellor of West Germany. Tonight we are, happily, to be addressed by the editor of the *Freethinker*. But by way of outside contributor to its 90th birthday the *Freethinker* rates merely me. This is gravely unfair. The *Freethinker* carries quite as many misprints

per page as *The Guardian*! It is probably true that it hasn't quite so many readers as *The Guardian*. But that is a matter which must be remedied by us, the readers it does have—who must instantly increase our numbers: preferably not, in this overcrowded island, by propagation but by propaganda.

"I conceive it our urgent duty to persuade our acquaintance to subscribe at once to the only paper in British journalism whose very name commits it, simultaneously, to freedom and to *thinking*—the two qualities which our national life is most desperately short of. When they subscribe, our friends will get a very topical paper (it even runs to scoops, like David Tribe's recent disclosure that some British citizens still have to pay tithes): but a paper whose topicalness is illuminated by a sense of history.

A Sense of History

"Drawing on its own great, 90-year-old tradition, it has an excellent habit of digging out Victorian thinkers whom conventional history has obscured. And thanks to its sense of history at large, the *Freethinker* is not, as less responsible journals are, under the impression that the Christian God was disproved last week and that, as a result, civilisation will collapse next week.

"The *Freethinker* knows that the Christian god was an imposter in the first place, and that any intellectual credibility he ever possessed had vanished by the eighteenth century. All the nineteenth century could do was patch together a reconstruction, and that against strong free-thinking opposition. The god who Mr Malcolm Muggeridge tells us has just been demolished by the present generation of hippies and junkies was in fact a Victorian-gothic fake.

"Once you realise there was no such thing as an unbroken Christian tradition from 1 AD till last week, you can't be panicked by our present comparatively godless state. There's nothing frightening about sharing something so traditional and so deeply civilised as the atheism of Lucretius. Thanks to its sense of history, the *Freethinker*

(Continued foot of next page)

THE RELEVANCE OF RELIGION TODAY

JAMES O'HANLON

In considering the relevance of religion today we would first make clear what we mean by "religion". We use the term in the sense of reverence for the gods or fear of God, a being of whose reality we have no more knowledge than of the Great Panjandrum.

This reverence for a god or gods goes back to the early stages of human development. In the first place, man had many gods—gods of the storm, of the sky, of the forest and of the flood—but, in the course of time, this polytheistic worship evolved into the worship of one god, or montheism. Out of this montheistic conception arose the various religious systems of past and present ages. The evolution of man's thinking, however, did not stop at the idea of a single god. Having reasoned the many gods out of existence, man, as he developed, went further and reasoned the one god out of existence. Today an increasing number of people are reaching the stage arrived at by Laplace, the famous French astronomer, when, in reply to Napoleon's query as to where God came in his system, he said: "Sire, I have done with that hypothesis."

We would state it as an axiom that the greater the ignorance of mankind the greater is the hold of religion on its thinking. The more civilised people become or the more learned and cultured they become, the less do they subscribe to religious beliefs. This is the reason for the general apathy today toward religion. Our present age is undoubtedly a technological one. As such, it means that it is an age in which reliance must be placed on scientific truth, not on fanciful conceptions. An age which believed that Icarus, in the course of a flight with his father, fell into the sea because he soared so high that the sun melted the wax of his wings would not be capable of constructing the spacecraft in use today. So too, those who exploit this technological age must disregard those stories of religion concerning a heavenly abode beyond this earth. This idea was surely disposed of a few years ago by the then Soviet premier, Nikita Krushchev. "As to paradise in heaven", he said, "we have heard a lot about it from the priests. So we decided to find out for ourselves what it is like there and we sent up our pioneer, Yuri Gargarin. He circled the globe and found nothing in outer space. It's pitch dark there, he said; no garden, nothing like paradise." There we have the true spirit of this modern age, an age concerned with facts, not fantasies fit only to beguile juvenile minds.

Basically False

When we assert that religion has no relevance in this modern age, we do not wish to imply that it might have relevance in some other age. In the past, owing to the state of man's ignorance to which we have already referred and owing also to the means at hand for enforcing its will and moulding thought, religion has had the appearance of being relevant. We maintain, however, that in any age religion has no relevance because it is basically false. In inculcates reverence for gods where no gods exist. Purporting to reconcile the way of the gods to man, religion claims to convey their intentions by means of revelation. But a revelation, having been made, must stand for all time. Once a revelation of truth is claimed to have been made, it cannot be modified subsequently without relinquishing its title to be truth. That is why the claims of religion having been enunciated, they must remain con-

stant in a changing world and, so remaining, their irrelevance must become more and more apparent as knowledge and experience grow. Here the essential difference between science and religion is clearly revealed. For religion is static in that, once having made a pronouncement, it cannot alter it, whereas science proclaims only that which is known and can rightly change its point of view in the light of increased knowledge.

The lesson of our modern age is that progress is dependent on the recognition of scientific truth. In the course of his evolution, man has made many mistakes, but, insofar as he has been able to recognise the cause of such mistakes, he has been able to rectify matters and make progress. His scientific development would not have been possible if he had persisted in his error and refused to modify his activities in the light of added experience. Man's philosophical development has not been as rapid as his technological development. Despite his remarkable achievements on land and sea and in the air, he is still bemused by religious concepts which belong to the infancy of his existence on this earth. Inevitably, however, with the increase of knowledge the impact on his thinking must be the greater. Our age accentuates the irrelevance of religion. It is only logical to assume that increase of knowledge will accentuate the irrelevance of religion to the point that it ceases to have any place in the realm of serious thinking.

(Continued from front page)

cannot be panicked, either, into the other-than-Christian expressions of irrationality. Though it comes in a convenient compact format rather like that of pop papers, it does not tell its readers what the stars foretell for them. And though its house-style is rather like that of the underground Press, neither does it celebrate the arrival of the age of Aquarius.

"It is just carrying on, with extreme liveliness, the age of Voltaire. Wielding Voltaire's weapons of reason and ridicule, the *Freethinker* is at present heroically combating the phenomenon technically known as *The Backlash* (a technical term you might think comes from the pornography of sado-masochism but the backlashes would never forgive you if you did). The *Freethinker* is carrying a torch for the right of children to enlightenment: enlightenment in the total sense of a complete and unbiassed education, which of course includes sexual enlightenment—the sort of sexual enlightenment which Maurice Hill and Michael Lloyd-Jones pleaded for in their pamphlet on sex education, and the sort of enlightenment which is going to be prosecuted in the prosecution of *The Little Red School-book*.

"If reason prevails, the *Freethinker* will have been a great force in the victory. And indeed if reason prevails the 180th birthday of the *Freethinker* will be celebrated by a self-disestablished and self-unfrosted Archbishop of Canterbury, and perhaps even a voluntarily abdicated monarch. Meanwhile, professing myself a free drinker as well as a freethinker, I wish my favourite weekly a happy next 90 years."

The editor of the *Freethinker* also made a speech in which he paid a tribute to those who have served on the Board and managed the paper's affairs.

POPULATION: THE CHOICE BEFORE US

LADY WHITE

Figures recently published by the Family Planning Association show that only 157 local authorities out of 233 are providing some form of family planning service. Of these, only 51 provide a complete service, either directly or using the FPA as agent. We welcome Sir Keith Joseph's statement on 23 February that the Government is to encourage local authorities and hospitals to increase their services.

I am quite sure that the majority of women regard abortion as a very unpleasant last resort. With adequate contraception it can be avoided and it is up to us to agitate until we have the fully comprehensive birth control services to which we are entitled and which were encouraged, but not unfortunately guaranteed, by the Labour Government's National Health (Family Planning) Act, 1967.

We do not have any official population policy in this country. There is a good deal of emotionalism about it, particularly when immigrant statistics are bandied about. Let us be clear on one thing. More people, on balance, leave Britain each year than come in. The net annual outflow, as it is called, to mid-1970 was about 77,000 people.

A few weeks ago Enoch Powell, true to form, made a great fuss because the Registrar-General gave up-dated figures for births where one or both parents were from the new Commonwealth and therefore probably non-white. The first estimate in 1969, which is admitted to have been a guestimate, gave a rate of 35,000 births a year. The latest figures, based on an actual count, give about 38,000 a year where both parents are probably non-white plus about 10,000 where one parent was. As the total live births in England and Wales for the same period was 793,000 we can see things in perspective, a feat of which Mr Powell is incapable. Furthermore, all the evidence shows that after a peak in the mid and late '60s the immigrant birth rate is falling.

The Need to Stabilise

Most experts seem to believe that what we should aim at in Britain is stabilisation—that is to say, we should maintain our present numbers but not increase them. This would be best for ourselves and an example to the rest of the world. This stabilising process seems to have been achieved in Japan and in one or two other countries, such as Hungary and Yugoslavia. What it involves is that we should aim at a rate of 14 births each year per thousand of the population. Our present rate in Britain is just over 16 per thousand. The average family would have to be two children only, or just marginally more, to allow for some early deaths. One trouble is that many parents, if they can afford them, like large families. Three or four children make a better family than one or two.

So if many people quite rightly want more than two children, but we aim to keep the average size of family down to two, it means that more people should forgo having children altogether. This is not at present a fashionable point of view, but as someone who has been happily married herself, but without children, I can vouch for it as a perfectly reasonable proposition. But there is one extremely important condition. It is that the wife as well as the husband should have a thoroughly satisfying job. Otherwise the woman will be frustrated and unhappy. If women have the opportunity of work which is really absorbing and uses their talents and energy, they can be very satisfactory aunts and godmothers and enjoy young society without adding to the population problems of the world.

It is to these world problems that we must now turn. Our statisticians assure us that whatever we do the world population is going to double itself by the end of the century, in 30 years' time. This is because nearly half the present population of the world consists of children and young people who will all become of child-bearing age before the end of the century. The increases in population will be all the more difficult to cope with because they will be so unevenly spread. One of the worst areas, of which we in this country do not hear very much, is South and Central America where, if things go on as they are, the miserably poor people there will double in numbers in the next 20, not 30 years.

Even if we set an example in this country by intelligent birth control, how can we influence world population trends? It is not only everywhere a most delicate and personal subject, but any attempt by the richer countries to preach to the poorer countries is sharply and bitterly resented as racialism—the whites trying to keep the blacks, browns or yellows down—or as neo-colonialism.

Increased Pollution

Yet if nothing is done the human race may be facing disaster. It is true that food supplies can be increased by new heavy bearing strains of cereal crops—the Green Revolution, as it is called—which has indeed revolutionised food supplies in Asia and Mexico; by pressing on with desert irrigation as in Israel and Egypt; by preserving the food which is grown and not allowing it to be devoured by vermin; and no doubt in the future by tapping the resources of protein in the sea. But it is significant that the man behind the Green Revolution, Nobel Prize winner Dr Norman Borlaug, said that all the whole agricultural science of the world can do is win mankind a breathing space. He added that if we cannot reduce the human rate of growth, then the species will destroy itself.

It is the increase in population which causes increased pollution. This is a problem for the highly developed countries like our own, Western Europe, North America and Japan. We are not likely to starve because of excess births, but before we have finished we may well asphyxiate or poison ourselves—or even set ourselves on fire. It is said that Lake Eric, one of the Great Lakes of North America, is the only expanse of water in the world known to be registered as a fire hazard, it being so appallingly polluted that it is regarded as combustible.

What can we do? We can use our aid not only to increase economic well-being but to support international effort on population control. I understand that Norway actually insists that ten per cent of its aid should be spent on just this. We must in particular support the United Nations Fund for Population Activities, to which Britain contributes, and which, I am glad to say, is one of the few things which the present Government has not cut but has, in fact, said that it will increase. We should welcome the suggestion made by Dr David Morse, who headed the recent UN mission on family planning set up by U Thant, that the headquarters of the proposed UN World Population Institute should be in London, and should press our own Government to make it clear that they would favour this. We must heed the words spoken last October in Copenhagen by Robert Macnamara, President of the World Bank: "The population problem will not go away. It will be resolved in one way or another, either by sensible solutions or by senseless suffering".

FREETHINKER

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

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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 5p stamp to Kit Mouat, Mercers, Cuckfield, Sussex.

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EVENTS

Humanist Holidays. Summer Centre in the Lake District is now full. Youth Camp being planned for 24 July until 1 August in Salop. Details: Marjorie Mephram, 29 Fairview Road, Sutton, Surrey (telephone 642 8796).

North Staffordshire Humanist Group, Cartwright House, Broad Street, Hanley, Friday, 28 May, 7.45 p.m. Kenneth Buckle: "The Treatment of Offenders".

The Progressive League. Spring Holiday Conference: "At in Society", Lodge Hall, Pullborough, Sussex. Details from Ernest Seeley, 38 Primrose Gardens, London, NW3.

South Place Ethical Society, Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London, WC1, Sunday, 23 May, 11 a.m. Lord Sorensen: "The Heart of Humanism".

Worthing Humanist Group, Burlington Hotel, The Pier (West), Sunday, 23 May, 5.30 p.m. Tea Party and Annual General Meeting.

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NEWS

WHERE HONOUR IS DUE

G. W. Foote, the *Freethinker's* founder and first editor who served 12 months' imprisonment for blasphemy, was only one of many freethought pioneers who suffered at the hands of the followers of gentle Jesus. Although his incarceration was a grim experience, Foote was still in his early thirties and he emerged from the prison cell to carry on the fight until his death in 1915.

Nearly a century before Foote's imprisonment another freethinking writer and editor, Peter Annet, was sentenced to imprisonment for one month in Newgate, to stand twice at the pillory (once at Charing Cross and once at the Exchange) with a label inscribed "For Blasphemy" attached to him, 12 months' hard labour in Bridewell, and to pay £100 security for his good behaviour for the rest of his life. When the sentence was passed, and enforced, Annet was in his 70th year.

Peter Annet was born in Liverpool in 1693, and trained for the Dissenting Ministry. He became a Deist, and tried to earn his living as a schoolmaster. He was well known as a public speaker, and his earliest pamphlet *Judging for Ourselves, or Freethinking the Great Duty of Religion* consisted of two lectures. In this pamphlet he attacked Christianity; he lost his job and came to London. More pamphlets followed including *The Conception of Jesus as the Foundation of the Christian Religion Considered*, in which he attacked the Incarnation as "a legend of the Romanists".

In his *Short History of Freethought*, J. M. Robertson describes Annet as "practically the first who sought to reach the multitude; and his punishment expressed the special resentment aroused in the governing classes by such a policy". J. B. Bury in *A History of the Freedom of Thought* associates Annet's name with that of Thomas Paine: "It was doubtless in consequence of the enormous circulation of the *Age of Reason* that a Society for the Suppression of Vice decided to prosecute the publisher. Unbelief was common among the ruling class, but the view was firmly held that religion was necessary for the populace and that any attempt to disseminate unbelief among the lower classes must be suppressed. Religion was regarded as a valuable instrument to keep the poor in order. It is notable that of the earlier rationalists (apart from the case of Woolston) the only one who was punished was Peter Annet, a schoolmaster, who tried to popularise freethought and was sentenced for diffusing 'diabolical' opinions to the pillory and hard labour."

In 1761 Annet started a journal known as *The Free Enquirer*; only nine issues were published. He strongly attacked the Bible and was hauled before the courts. At his trial before the King's Bench during the Michaelmas Term of 1762 it was stated that he ridiculed the Holy Scriptures in *The Free Enquirer*. He must have known that the chances of a light sentence were slim. Only nine years previously a Deist lecturer and writer, Jacob Hlive, was sent to the pillory three times and to prison for three years on a similar charge.

AND NOTES

Annet left prison broken in health but he managed to start a small school in Lambeth where, it was stated, "he taught his pupils very slight respect for the Old and New Testaments". He was preparing a volume of his lectures for publication when he died on 18 January, 1769.

CHURCH NEWS

Delegates attending the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland, which opened at Edinburgh on Tuesday, were informed that the Church is facing a membership crisis. Statistics show an average annual decline of nine per cent. Total membership has dropped by 116,659 in the last ten years. It is estimated that if the accelerating decline to 1980, the average loss will increase to 19,000 a year. This would bring the membership to below a million.

Two of Britain's Free Churches, the Congregational Church of England and Wales and the Presbyterian Church of England, decided at their annual assemblies last week to merge. Discussions are to take place at local level, but it is expected that the merger will take effect in about 12 months' time.

JUSTICE IN SPAIN

Fourteen students of Valencia university have been arrested and charged with Communist activities. Senor Garciano Gono, the Spanish Minister of the Interior, said last week that the arrests were the most recent development in the Government's drive against "subversive activities". He added that the suspension of Article 18 of the Constitution last December before the trial of 16 Basque separatists had enabled the police to "break up subversive organisations". Article 18 corresponds to the British Habeas Corpus Act.

On the day following the Minister's announcement 150 people attended Mass in one of Madrid's Roman Catholic churches. The Mass was in commemoration of the 26th anniversary of the death of Adolf Hitler. No action has been taken by the civic or Church authorities.

SEX EDUCATION — THE ERRONEOUS ZONE

MAURICE HILL and

MICHAEL LLOYD-JONES

Foreword: BRIGID BROPHY

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BOOKS

THE RISORGIMENTO AND THE UNIFICATION OF ITALY by Derek Beales. George Allen and Unwin, £3.

In this scholarly and well documented book Derek Beales presents a brief summary of the historic process that led to the reunification of Italy between 1860 and 1870. He also quotes a number of contemporary documents the most important of which (and certainly the most Macchiavellian in its political cynicism is a letter from Count Cavour to Victor Emanuel, King of Sardinia and later the first King of Italy. In this letter Cavour reports his conversation with the French Emperor Louis Bonaparte (Napoleon III) arranging for the declaration of war against Austria in 1859. It was this carefully planned war that led to the unification of Italy. But surely Mr Beales makes a rather sweeping statement when he refers to Cavour's as being the most successful political career in the nineteenth century. What about Bismarck?

Although the individual documents are interesting and informative, I confess the multiplicity of disconnected appended documents is somewhat confusing. A straightforward narrative quoting the documents would have been more readable and less disjointed. The theme that runs through this erudite work is the political unification of Italy. This fairly lengthy procedure may be said to have started with Napoleon's "King of Italy" (1808-14) and ended with the capture of Rome by the Italian army in 1870. This event marked both the end of the Papal States and, with the insignificant exception of San Marino, the end of the era of political disunity that dated from the fall of the Roman Empire. Italy's position was summed up in a cynical epigram by the Austrian Chancellor Metternich: "Italy—merely a geographical expression".

Simultaneous to this campaign for political unification there was a spectacular revival of Italian language and literature. This had been foreshadowed by the eighteenth-century Italian writer, Alfieri, who (in a letter included in this volume) discarded the then fashionable French language and set himself to develop the Tuscan dialect into the literary language of modern Italy. The political aspect of the campaign was marked by many vicissitudes, particularly after the unsuccessful Roman revolution of 1848. There were many colourful figures and events, probably the most conspicuous of these being Garibaldi's spectacular expedition of "The Thousand" which conquered Naples and Sicily in 1860. This process is usually summed up in the expressive term "The Risorgimento", or the Resurrection of Italy.

I must honestly state a certain measure of disagreement with this narrative; not factually, but with the whole conventional academic view of the historical importance of the reunification of Italy in the nineteenth century. I think that the primary importance of the Risorgimento was social and cultural, rather than political. It is surely as a land of outstanding literary and scientific achievement; as the fertile mother of genius; of Dante, Leonardo, Michelangelo, Bruno and Galileo that Italy is great. The Italian political record was not impressive in the nineteenth century under Count Cavour or in the twentieth under Mussolini. In both cases Italian politics were the jackel politics of scavengers devouring the leavings of her more powerful military neighbours.

FREETHINKER

It emerges clearly from this book that Cavour, the major architect of modern Italian political unity, only succeeded in expelling Austria from the peninsula by playing off the great powers against each other—often in the most cynical manner as illustrated by his interview with Louis Bonaparte. Without the benevolent neutrality of the ubiquitous English Fleet, the active assistance of the French Army in 1859 and the German in 1866, the political Risorgimento would never have freed Italy from Austrian rule and she would never have become a "Great Power".

During the entire struggle the Italian Army never won a battle against a European opponent. As one Russian diplomat caustically remarked at the time: "Italy had to lose battles in order to gain territory". Incidentally, this rather ignominious record has been repeated in the present century; Mussolini's Roman Empire managed to beat the Ethiopians in 1935, but it crashed as soon as it came up against a major power. A Swiss critic of the Mussolini regime said that the Italians love easy victories. (He also pronounced what is surely the classic epitaph of Italian Fascism: "Forty million prisoners condemned to perpetual enthusiasm".)

Although I feel its political importance has been exaggerated, the Italian and social importance are both indisputable. Culturally, it restored a great language and literature to their appropriate place in modern Europe. In the social sphere it marked a tremendous step forward in anti-clerical and secular values on the doorstep of the Vatican. This process of declericalising an Italy that had been dominated by the Jesuits in the early years of the century was started, and then carried to victory, by the great men of the Risorgimento; Garibaldi, Mazzini and even the worldly wise Cavour.

This process—which suffered a setback with the Mussolini-Vatican Concordat of 1929—has again been revived, and now appears to be on the threshold of completion. It is a far cry from the epoch of the French Revolution, when a feudal and clerical Italy commenced her Risorgimento, to the modern secular democracy of today. It is this process of enlightenment, rather than its dubious politics, that constitutes the permanent greatness and undying glory of the Italian Risorgimento.

F. A. RIDLEY

AN ESSAY ON THE PRINCIPLE OF POPULATION and A SUMMARY VIEW OF THE PRINCIPLE OF POPULATION

by Thomas Robert Malthus. Edited with an Introduction by Antony Flew. Penguin, 35p.

Now that discussion of family planning is at last fashionable, even if little is yet being done about it, it is timely that there should be a re-issue at a popular price of the writings which remain the chief intellectual base of the birth control movement. It may seem a long way from the Rev Thomas Malthus' coy references to "preventive

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checks" on to *The Little Red Schoolbook*, but there is a clear progression. The freethought movement can feel proud to have been in the front line of this advance.

Apart from his division into "preventive" (foresight) and "positive" (actual distresses) checks, Malthus spoke of vice, misery and later of moral restraint as ways whereby the population was kept down. At the same time freethinkers like Jeremy Bentham were expanding "moral restraint" (celibacy and late marriage) to include artificial contraception. At first this policy had the practical aim of reducing the poverty of large families and reducing ill-health in constantly breeding wives. It is really the discovery of antibiotics in the twentieth century that has demonstrated just how valid was Malthus' thesis that populations have the capacity for geometric increase while food-production tends to rise arithmetically; so that curbing the population explosion has become one of the primary objects of contraception. Another, in an age of psychological research, is the desire to prevent *unwanted* children, whether in or out of wedlock.

In a painstaking Introduction and notes Antony Flew has put Malthus and his views into historical perspective. I detected only two obvious mistakes—the spelling of Wallace's second name and the apparent confounding of William Cobbett and Richard Carlile—and one tantalising reference that called for elaboration. This was J. M. Keynes's observation: "If only Malthus, instead of Ricardo, had been the parent stem from which nineteenth-century economics proceeded, what a much wiser and richer place the world would be today". I should also have liked some reference to Bentham's *Situation and Relief of the Poor* (1797), Carlile's *Every Woman's Book* (1825) and other pioneers of family planning, though just tribute is paid to the work of James Mill and Francis Place. But Professor Flew has excellently covered, in small compass, a number of interesting facts, some well known, others not, and most of them forgotten by accident or design.

Among these are Malthus' questioning of eternal punishment, his unlikely influence on the Protestant double-barrel William Paley and the Tory Prime Minister Pitt the Younger, his key role in both Darwin's and Wallace's elaboration of the theory of evolution, and the particular venom he aroused in Marx and Engels. In their estimation he overlooked the potentialities of science and "labour power" and distracted the masses' attention from the real cause of their plight, capitalist greed. To this day, when the Soviet Union wants a population increase for political reasons she does not confine herself to administrative measures at home but at the same time sends apostles round the world denouncing Malthusianism as a bourgeois delusion. (This reaction and Catholic Action may suggest how foolish it would have been for the freethought movement to become, as it has constantly been urged, a mindless cog in the Communist Party or Labour Party machine, and what valuable work it has been able to do from a position of sturdy independence.) But Malthus and freethinkers have not said the last word, and his latest editor gives a valuable warning against taking his mathematics too literally and ignoring issues other than birth and death rates and food production.

DAVID TRIBE

THE FREETHINKER 1970

Edited by David Reynolds and Bill McIlroy.

G. W. Foote, £2.

It is a remarkable fact, a tribute to the devotion of individual freethinkers and to the abiding appeal of freethought, that the *Freethinker* has reached its 90th birthday. This fact seems the more remarkable when we reflect that our paper has survived the upheaval of two world wars, the strains and stresses of inflation and economic instability, the growth of radio and television, the collapse of journals with wider circulations and greater financial backing. Throughout its long history the *Freethinker* has had an intimate and mutually advantageous association with the National Secular Society ever since the paper was founded by G. W. Foote, a largely and unjustly neglected figure today—yet the *Freethinker* has been more than a kind of house journal for the NSS in particular, or the freethought movement in general. The *Freethinker* has not hesitated to speak out against abuse and injustice when supposedly kindred journals have failed to notice their existence. It has stood on its own feet; and sometimes it has stood alone. Its demise would be a disaster for the freethought movement and a tragedy for civil liberties in Britain.

Never perhaps has there been a greater need for the *Freethinker* than today, when civil liberties and the rule of law are being undermined or openly scorned throughout the world, when totalitarianism and trivialisation seem the great twin tormentors of contemporary culture, national and international. There is even a shibboleth among some "progressives" that the hypocrisy of the churches and the moral and intellectual harm of religious doctrines are both sacred cows and untouchables.

The bound volume of the *Freethinker* for 1970 is excellent value for money: it provides a feast of stimulating articles on a wide range of social, historical, literary and philosophical questions; and this food for thought is attractively garnished with photographs and rather saucy cartoons. Throughout the year the journal was ably edited by David Reynolds (the youngest editor in the *Freethinker's* history) and his successor Bill McIlroy; they both deserve a medal for their sterling work in maintaining the currency of freethought. Without wishing to indulge in invidious comparisons, I detect certain general differences in the style and emphasis of the two editors; David Reynolds had longer and even recondite articles, and a lively sometimes abrasive, correspondence column. (Personally I rather enjoy the recondite and the heady wine of debate, but that is a personal weakness.) Bill McIlroy immensely expanded the reviews section and resurrected *News and Notes* from an unjust limbo. Sometimes he serves sugar plums and sometimes acid drops; always our appetite is whetted for more.

It is proverbially impossible to please everyone; and it is surely both desirable and inevitable that each editor should import his own style and give his own flavour to the *Freethinker*. Like the NSS, the *Freethinker* is old, yet perpetually renewed by those who serve it. Let us at least unite in raising our champagne glasses to the *Freethinker's* contributors and readers, distinguished and unknown, past and present, who have given succour to "the best of causes" in the unending battle against superstition.

MARTIN PAGE

CHILDREN'S WELFARE

MARGARET McILROY

The National Council for Civil Liberties Children's Committee has produced the third pamphlet in its series on the rights of children, containing separate statements on *Children in Residential Care*, and *Adoption*. The first of these is somewhat disappointing for, while it lays down a number of useful principles, and implies—doubtless with truth—that these are sometimes violated, it gives no indication at all as to how frequent such violation is.

The principles put forward are sound. Their most sweeping proposal is that residential nurseries should be abolished, and that where babies cannot be fostered they should be cared for in mixed-age homes. The practical difficulties are great, as any mother who has had to attend to the round-the-clock needs of a small baby while getting older children to school on time will appreciate. But the benefits could be significant to the older children as well as to the babies.

The Committee asks for more freedom for the children in homes, mentioning a number of points, such as the child's right "to do as he likes in his spare time . . .", "the tolerance of non-conformity" . . . and "the tolerance of a degree of risk and the avoidance of over-protectiveness (which has more to do with protection of staff than of the child)". Mothers, warned by psychologists, usually deliberately curb their tendency to over-protect the children they love, and it is not excess of love that prompts staff to keep their charges under their eye when their mates are playing in the street or attending football matches.

The Report does not mention one of the most glaring weaknesses in the child-care service; the way in which the over-protected product of institution life is likely to be thrown almost entirely on to his own resources at an age when more fortunate young people are still living at home, or know that they will be welcomed home at any time if independent life becomes to difficult for them.

Omit Religion from Adoption Procedures

The Report on *Adoption* makes a number of generally accepted points, as well as some that are highly controversial. It underlines the necessity for the adopted child to know he is adopted, and suggests that adopters should be required to give a formal undertaking to the court about this, and that it should be made easier for adopted children to find out about their origins. It states that "religion ought to be omitted from adoption forms and procedures".

The Committee makes one statement whose consequences they can hardly have considered fully. "We hope", they say, "that in the future it would be possible even for the identity of adopters to be known to the natural parents". Nothing could be more calculated to upset the adoptive relationship, and even to dry up the supply of adoptive homes, than to expose adoptive parents and their children to the risk of harassment by possibly unbalanced natural parents. Nor would it be fair to the natural mother to subject her to the temptation to haunt the child in its new home.

The Report makes a number of suggestions for improvements in the practical help given to adoptive and natural

parents. The Committee does not perhaps realise the extent to which these things are already being done by the better adoption agencies. The pioneering Independent (formerly Agnostic) Adoption Society is successful in involving over 50 per cent of natural fathers in making plans for their children, and regularly provides the support of a skilled social worker from well before the birth to the finalisation of the adoption, and assisting mothers who decide against adoption. The IAS also regularly conducts discussion groups at which prospective adopters, adoptive parents (some with teenage adopted children, and some with natural children also) and sometimes adopted adults, meet.

This Society's work disproves the Report's generalisation that when a "mother is considering adoption, it should not be social workers specialising in adoption who help and advise the mother". There may indeed be some adoption workers so narrow in their approach as to be unable to advise a mother on the alternatives open to her, but they cannot be very good adoption workers.

Waiting Period

The NCCL Children's Committee disagrees with the Houghton Committee's recommendation that the natural mother should relinquish the child finally before it is placed with adopters, and makes the useful point that the mother's consent should be to a placement with particular adopters about whom she can be given appropriate information. However, most of those involved in adoptions are agreed that the present law, which allows a last minute withdrawal of consent by the mother, is most unsatisfactory. The problem arises because the three months during which the baby has to be in the care of the adopters is not an excessive period for ensuing that all goes well so far as the baby and adopters are concerned. On the other hand, three months is far too long to allow the mother to retain the right to reclaim a baby which is satisfactorily placed. Adopters should not be subjected to the strain of knowing that a baby can be arbitrarily removed from them after a period of over three months, as at present.

The NCCL is doing a splendid job in keeping these important issues before the public.

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