

FAMILY PLANNING: PROGRESS IN BRITAIN BUT WORLD POPULATION MAY DOUBLE

Michael Schofield, psychologist and Health Education Council Research Fellow, told a conference in London last week that young people are overwhelmingly in favour of sex education. "It seems to me", he said, "that if we do make a mistake, we are more likely to go too slow than too fast, and we are more likely to be too timid than too frank. We might be going too fast for the aldermen and the bishops, but are we not going too slow for the kids?" The theme of the conference at the Royal Festival Hall was New Frontiers of Birth Control, and it was organised by the Family Planning Association to mark the progress family planning has made in Britain during the last 50 years. The International Planned Parenthood Federation published an important new booklet to coincide with the conference. It is entitled *Family Planning in Five Continents*, and summarises the family planning situation and population growth rates in each country of the world.

Not Available

Two thousand million people in the developing world now live in countries which have an official policy on family planning, but most of them are still not within reach of clinic services. Although contraceptive services are more widely available now than ever before, the world's population is growing at two per cent a year and will double by the year 2005 unless there are significant declines in fertility.

The fastest growing region in the world is Latin America, which is increasing at a rate of 2.9 per cent annually. Africa and Asia follow closely behind at rates of 2.5 per cent and 2.1 per cent respectively. However, in absolute numbers Asia, which contains about three-fifths of the world's population, is adding the most people to the world. Europe, North America and the Soviet Union are the slowest growing regions with constant growth rates of about one per cent during the last two decades. Kuwait is the fastest growing country, with an annual rate of increase of 6.6 per cent. The German Democratic Republic is the slowest growing country, since its population is declining by .1 per cent annually due to a high proportion of old people.

Whereas only five governments had national family planning programmes ten years ago, today family planning has been integrated into the health services of 49 countries, and an additional 50 governments have given financial support or public approval to private family planning activities. Family planning services are now available—either through private doctors and organisations or through government health services—in 140 countries, of which 36 are in Africa, 36 are in America, 33 are in Asia, 27 are in Europe and eight are in Oceania.

However, in 25 countries (15 in Africa, two in America, six in Asia and two in Europe) family planning services are not available from any source. Today, nearly 60 million people live in countries in which there is no access to family planning, while in many other countries family planning services are extremely limited. In several countries the expansion of family planning services is restricted

by laws which forbid the importation or limit the distribution of contraceptives. Many private associations are forbidden to publicise information about contraception, which hampers their efforts to help women most in need of family planning.

Education and Training

Voluntary family planning associations are working in 103 countries to inform and educate all sectors of the public about the practice of family planning and the urgency of reducing population growth rates for the future welfare of the individual and the community. Many voluntary associations provide all or most of the family planning services, while in the 49 countries where there is a government programme the associations are responsible for publicity, education and training programmes. Associations have played a valuable role as innovators and standard-setters, and many governments rely heavily on their expertise and experience.

The IPPF booklet shows a new trend towards greater education for young people to prepare them for their future roles as adults, parents and citizens. Responsible parenthood, sex education and population education programmes have been initiated in 46 countries, and additional programmes are being planned in many more. Since 55 per cent of the world's population is under the age of 25, and in developing countries this proportion is even greater with about 45 per cent of the population under the age of 15, the need for special programmes for youth is especially urgent.

Most of the population data included in the booklet is from the latest United Nations sources, although in some cases figures from local censuses or surveys are quoted to give more up-to-date information. Population statistics for many countries remain unreliable due to the lack of recent, if any, censuses.

Despite the tremendous advance in family planning in the last ten years the situation is still far from satisfactory

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GEORGE GROTE AS A FREETHINKER

ERIC GLASGOW

George Grote, the historian of Greece, advocate of liberal democracy in Britain and champion of the University of London, died in 1871. Grote is scarcely remembered as an abstract or philosophical thinker. But he is remembered as an early supporter of Parliamentary Reform which he began to advance in 1821, and which he advocated even more strenuously on the very eve of the great Reform Act of 1832. He was one of the major upholders of the principle of the secret ballot for voting in public elections; he died a year before the Ballot Act of 1872 reached the Statute Book.

As an active politician, George Grote was precipitated into the House of Commons by the Reform Act of 1832. He was a Radical MP for the City of London from 1832 until 1841, but was never very much at home there as the rather restricted colleague of men like Sir William Molesworth, Charles Buller, and J. A. Roebuck. He was too far in advance of his own times for that, and too much of the academic and the theorist to possess in a sufficient measure the successful politician's capacity in the exercise of the "art of the possible". At any rate, he left practical politics in 1841, and retired from the family banking business in 1843. He was free to devote himself to his literary discovery of the seeds and the elements of liberal democracy in ancient Greece.

History of Greece

So it is that George Grote is still primarily remembered not as the practising politician or even as the political theorist, but as the patient, dedicated author of his *History of Greece*. He did not begin to write the *History* until he had reached his fiftieth year, but it was published, in a total of 12 volumes, between 1846 and 1856. It was no slim or superficial topographical guide to the surviving relics or features of Greece, but a work of scholarship and learning. It could have little direct connection with modern Greece, as that State emerged out of the Greek War of Independence (1821-1829). Grote's *History of Greece* ended with the events of the year 301 BC. As such, however, it was an impressive, majestic and lasting tribute to all the liberal virtues, and manifestly superior to contemporary books on the same subject.

Yet it may well be that we tend to permit the importance of Grote's *History of Greece* to overshadow or even exclude his other achievements. It may even contrive to dominate, for example, Grote's part with J. S. Mill and Henry Brougham, in the foundation of University College, London (1828), and so, by inference, Grote's later roles, as Vice-Chancellor of the new London University, from 1862 until his death, and as a trustee of the British Museum, after 1859. All of those activities—as historian, or as missionary of culture and a reasonable enlightenment—did, however, have the common motivation arising out of Grote's consistent belief in the principles of free inquiry, democratic government, and the unrestricted range of reason. His care for the non-religious character of University College even extended to his refusal, in 1866, to accept the Unitarian, James Martineau, as the Professor of Philosophy there, on the grounds that no minister, of any religious denomination, could be eligible: an action which seemed to go against his own commitment to open investigation and the acceptance of reason, no matter where the latter might lead.

Respect for Truth

It is evident that George Grote was dedicated to the pursuit of free inquiry, and that those deeper aspects of his studies and his reflections should never be concealed by his activities, as a politician, or even as a definitive historian of Greece. Perhaps it is right that Grote's beliefs in religion and philosophy should not be distorted or exaggerated. No doubt it was Grote's role as a freethinker—which he had inherited from his father, and which had placed him in the circle of Jeremy Bentham and James Mill—which determined his attitudes in politics, literature and education.

It was a role securely based on Grote's massive intellectual powers, belief in the importance of reason, respect for truth, faith in the creative possibilities of freedom, and a deep sense of moral responsibility.

Because of his inability to accept the dogmatic accretions of Christianity George Grote could not find an acceptable haven in any institutionalised religion. He was not aggressive in his repudiation of Christianity, and he gave much practical expression to his virtue of charity towards all of those who worshipped, as he always did, at the altar of truth and human betterment. It was a worthy career which ended a century ago. Of its moral austerity, there can surely be no better proof than the fact that it was Gladstone himself—the embodiment both of liberalism and the Victorian conscience—who offered George Grote, in 1869, the peerage which he would not accept.

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in many parts of the world. The sale of contraceptives is forbidden in Catholic Spain and Communist Romania; advertising of contraceptives is seriously restricted in France; there are no organised family planning activities in many African countries. The first step in most countries is the formation of a voluntary association; government interest and the adoption of policies usually come later. Many governments have been primarily concerned with maternal and child health, but eventually they have to face the problem of the impact of population growth on economic development.

A LIBERAL CHRISTIAN'S VIEW OF SEX

JOHN NICHOLSON

John Nicholson is the son of a Congregational minister and a member of the Congregational Church. He is a freelance writer and editor. We publish below excerpts from Mr Nicholson's submissions to Lord Longford's Committee of Enquiry into Pornography.

I ask you to take note of this letter in the course of your deliberations. The view that it puts forward on the sexual material that you will be looking at stems, not from attitudes of the past, but from attitudes of the present and future. I know that what I have written expresses to a large extent the belief of thousands of caring people in this country that our progress towards a natural and beneficial sexual environment should not be hindered any longer by those evils of the past, sex guilt and prudery.

It is relevant to point out that the traditional public front of the churches on sex is beginning to crumble. Already a Nonconformist minister publicly declares that "The Church must stop giving to the Western bourgeois view of sex the ultimate accolade of the immutable law of God", and another Nonconformist minister is saying to young couples "By all means make love to each other. My wife and I did before we were married".

As eminent people you are proposing to study sexual material, and publicly recommend where a line of censorship should be drawn to protect the outward susceptibilities and inward fibre of this nation against influences which you feel to be bad. You are going, in fact, to play metaphorical "Oranges and Lemons" with our present society, and at some stage you are going to say "Here comes a chopper to chop off your head. Chop!"

Prudery and Piety

This is history passing by. Some of us don't even know the origin of the words we sing, and we can't affect what happened in the past. But it can affect us, and does, to a disturbing extent. Look, here come a group of early Christians. Some of them are saints, who believed, in the words of one, that "Women are an evil of nature". All of them together evolved the following nonsense. All in us that is sexual is part of the sin in us that it is our duty to overcome. No erotic pleasure whatever is ever sinful unless it arises out of full intercourse in one position only between husband and wife. Even this pleasure may not be completely free from sin, especially if it is not specifically aimed at achieving conception. Now I am against censorship really, but I do wish society had blue-pencilled that lot. This, after all, was the start of all that THING about sex. Take sin, sin, sin, sin, sin. Add guilt, guilt, guilt, guilt. Mix with scientific ignorance and ascetic credulity. The heady concoction that resulted stoned the Church for centuries on its own, and when it found the right partner in Victorian prudery it stoned a whole society for generations. Is pot quite so bad? Here come the pillicking Middle and Renaissance Ages. Chaucer's bawdy pilgrims, priests fondling bared breasts at court, popes with children, Shakespeare's witty sex allusions. I feel like waving that lot on with a grin of encouragement, don't you? Nice warm touches of humanity in ages that still regarded cruelty and violent death as entirely normal. Here it comes, the worst thing of all: Victorian prudery. A great black cloud of distortion sexually crippling a whole society. Perhaps the most artificial evil that humanity has ever foisted on itself. Several figures can be seen dimly

in the darkness. An eminent doctor declaring "Any man ought to be horsewhipped who supposes that women can have sexual feelings". A factory master who has six children but who has never given his wife an orgasm in her life. The prostitutes and mistresses to whom his society take their secret custom. Ladies dressed for sea bathing in a manner so irrelevant to the circumstances that words can hardly express one's feelings about it.

Is not prudery the greatest pornographic influence of all time? What is one of the largest groups of psychiatric patients today among Christians? Women with sex guilt. And it was the editor of an evangelical family magazine who told me that. He cares that the churches must change their seemingly built-in anti-sex attitude. So do the authors of the latest report from the Methodist Church on this subject (Censorship 71). How I yearn for a time machine to enable me to travel back and say 'CHOP' when prudery first started to distort the lives of men and women. For those of us who do not have the good fortune to be young there are problems to be looked at. As far as we sexual liberals are concerned the greatest immediate problem is to convince people like some of yourselves that the blinkers of prudery should be thrown away in discussion of the material before you. We believe that most of the present outcry against "the growing scandal of pornography" is the conditioned reflex of prudery against explicit sex and nakedness, rather than a reasoned response to the possible demerits of some parts of this explicitness. Does sexually explicit material deprave and corrupt? Whether it be conventional or kinky, corny or cruel, several talented investigating teams have found virtually no correlation between it and depravity and crime. All right, so the Moors murderers did have quite a shelf full of the stuff. But were not Bibles to be found in the homes of Bishops and Archbishops who sent their fellow Christians to incredibly painful deaths for merely holding different opinions on religious matters!

Commercial Sex

Now despite my opposition to censorship I believe, as you do, that a welter of ill-considered sexual material impinging on society will tend to blunt people's tender attributes just as prudery did. But the present outcry against all the sexual openness that is now breaking through into our previously sex closed society seems totally unrelated to the real need, which is surely to separate things out, and to see how we can encourage the good openness and discourage the bad will fall by the wayside anyway. But it is clear that we are not doing it properly. We are so topsy-turvy that all too often it is the least desirable openness that marches ahead, while the most desirable openness does the falling by the wayside, unable to make headway against the legislation of prudery. Isn't it crazy that we are a society in which we are opening up faster on the commercial sex side than we are on the ethical sex side? Despite hold-ups in quite the wrong places, we are coming around again to being a sexually explicit society, with every opportunity to make it a better one than previous ones have been. It would be a tragic anachronism if prudery still played any part in fixing our standards. For the first time in sexual history we have the opportunity to combine scientific knowledge with human needs. And we are taking it, although in our naturally imperfect human way.

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NEWS

FREETHINKER

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

The *Freethinker* can be ordered through any newsagent, or obtained by postal subscription from G. W. Foote and Co. Ltd. at the following rates: 12 months, £2.55; 6 months, £1.30; 3 months, 65p; USA and Canada: 12 months, \$6.25; 6 months, \$3.13.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

The *Freethinker* is obtainable at the following addresses. London: Collets, 66 Charing Cross Road, WC2; Housmans, 5 Caledonian Road, King's Cross, N1; Freedom Press, 84b Whitechapel High Street (Angel Alley), E1; Rationalist Press Association, 88 Islington High Street, N1; Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, WC2; Freethinker office, 103 Borough High Street, SE1. Glasgow: Clyde Books, 292 High Street. Brighton: Unicorn Bookshop, 50 Gloucester Road (near Brighton Station).

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.

Minority Rights Group's latest report—on the Southern Sudan and Eritrea—just out, price 30p from MRG, 36 Craven Street, London, WC2.

EVENTS

Ashurstwood Abbey Secular Humanism Centre (founded by Jean Straker), between East Grinstead and Forest Row, Sussex. Telephone Forest Row 2589. Meeting every Sunday, 3 p.m.

Humanist Holidays. Summer Centre in the Lake District is now full. Details of future activities from Marjorie Mepham, 29 Fairview Road, Sutton, Surrey. Telephone 642 8796.

The Progressive League, Halden House, Dunchideock, Exeter, 7-14 August, Summer Conference. Details from Ernest Seeley, c/o Progressive League, Albion Cottage, Fortis Green, London, N2.

Rationalist Press Association. Annual Conference at St Peter's College, Oxford, Friday, 3 September—Sunday, 5 September. Subject: "Rationalism—an Answer to the Problems of the 1970s"; speakers: D. J. Stewart, Colin Campbell, Christopher Evans, Leslie Sklair. Fees: Resident, £8, Student members of the RPA, £5; Non-resident, lectures and meals, £4.50; lectures and coffee, £1. Return coach fare London-Oxford, £1.50. Applications and payment to the General Secretary, Rationalist Press Association, 88 Islington High Street, London, N1 8EW. Telephone 226 7251

London Young Humanists, 13 Prince of Wales Terrace, London, W8, Sunday, 1 August, 7.30 p.m. Anna Bramwell (secretary, Young Members' Group, The Monday Club): "The Dilemma of a Conservative Under a Liberal Establishment".

London Young Humanists. A team of volunteers will be tidying the graves of Charles Bradlaugh and W. S. Ross ("Saladin") at Brookwood Cemetery on Sunday, 15 August. Details from the organiser: Nigel Sinnott, 5 Kew Gardens Road, Kew, Richmond, Surrey. Telephone 940 3794.

REWARD OF EXCELLENCE

Margaret McIlroy writes: A teacher, Christopher Searle, is at present awaiting the decision of Mrs Thatcher on his appeal against his sacking by the Governors of Sir John Cass Church of England School, for arranging the publication of a book of poems by his pupils. The book, *Stepney Words*, contains 82 poems by about 70 different contributors, aged 11 to 15, dealing with a variety of themes—loneliness, the Stepney environment, old age, birth and death, and race relations are prominent.

The poems vary greatly in quality. Few show great poetic talent, but the collection is well worth reading, partly for the glimpses into the minds of adolescent pupils, partly as showing the sort of work that can be drawn from average children by a teacher far above average.

Some of the poems have a splendid vitality:

Let it flow Joe.
Let your feelings speak for you
Let the people know what you know.

(from "Let It Flow Joe", by Paul Ritchens);

When I swing to and fro
I feel like I'm flying through the clouds
The gusty wind flying me
Higher and higher into the clouds.

(from "The Swing", by Kathleen Leigh).

Clearly some interesting sex education has been going on when we have poems like "Birth" by Gill Miles:

I lie in wait, for what, I do not know.
I sense danger, not horrific, but hurtful.
Everything around me seems to move,
Frightening me as I lie, sweating.
I find myself hurtling down a dark tunnel,
It's a tight squeeze at first but eventually I make it.
Crying with pain, I emerge.
I have been born.

And Colin Gordon's

The young woman looked down,
She looked into the eyes of a child,
Her child.
She thought.
She thought of responsibility,
Her responsibility.
She thought of the future.
She had no job, no parents, no husband, few friends . . .
Worse than having no husband, she had no father for her baby.
She thought of the baby's illegitimacy, the few hours of pleasure she had had
And the burden she must carry for the rest of her life.

Many more are worth quoting. There is Lynn Saunder's "Death in a Churchyard", about a widow looking at her husband's grave:

She was thinking of what a good man he was,
How he had slaved during the war,
Keeping the family together,
Not letting them part.
Then the knock on the door,
The cold knock
Telling of his death.
He was finished.

There is Peter Goodman's piece about a lonely boy in the park imagining he is George Best:

AND NOTES

Yes, it's Best with the ball
he shoots from fifty yards
yes it's there what a goal
then I stop and say
what's the use if I've got no friends
if I've got no ball
I might just as well go and bury myself . . .

There is James Went on an old man:

I am old. I need rest . . .
My muscles are getting stiff.
Sometimes I get rheumatism in my legs
I'm getting very old. I need rest.

There is Peter Kett in "A Pakistani Man Thinking About the Flood":

But what has happened in Pakistan
And to my parents,
For I know not what has happened
To them . . .
Thousands dead and drowned.
Why?

Such pieces, in which a young person imagines the feelings of someone very different from himself, show how English lessons can help to educate the emotions and to develop sympathy and respect for others.

Mr Searle has taught well. In addition he has given many of his pupils the excitement of seeing their names in print. He has nourished their self-esteem, by making their work seem important—not just a series of dull exercises to be forgotten as soon as marked.

The shattering thing is that school governors should want to dispense with a teacher who can inspire this kind of work, when they should be congratulating themselves on having the services of such a man. There are, inevitably, many teachers unable to inspire anything more than boredom in teenage pupils. As a contributor (unnamed) to *Stepney Words* comments:

My classroom is dim and dull
My teacher sits there thinking.
She's so dim and dull
That she just sits there thinking.
The world is dim and dull
My life is not worth living.

This is exactly how the situation appears to many secondary school pupils, and one doesn't know whether to be more sorry for the pupils or the teachers involved.

What conclusion, therefore, can pupils draw from the sacking of the rare inspiring teacher, by school governors who express no dissatisfaction with the dim and dull? Do the governors wish pupils to conclude that their opinions, dreams, hopes count for nothing? Do they wish pupils to conclude that the way to get on in life is to be a conscienceless conformist, the bosses' yes-man? This, indeed is what *The Little Red Schoolbook* suggests—one hopes wrongly—is the objective of most educational establishments. Do the Sir John Cass governors want to make this dismal exaggeration look true? These governors seem intent on demonstrating to pupils their lack of concern with life and inspiration in education, their satisfaction with teaching that never gets out of a rut, and their revulsion from anything thought-provoking and inspiring. The spirit that gave Socrates the hemlock still walks to stultify education.

A POLICEMAN'S LOT

Lord Widgery, the Lord Chief Justice, stated last week that the Judge's Rules for the interrogation of suspects are hampering the police in their work. There can be little doubt that his statement is a prelude to the rules being changed in favour of the police. Although the rules do not have the force of law they provide some guidance for the police. They say, in effect, that unless evidence is collected in broad accordance with the rules, it will not be accepted in court.

The object of the rules is to protect the innocent citizen and any proposal to alter them will be regarded with serious misgivings by those concerned with the defence of citizen's rights. A Gilbertian character informed a London audience in 1880 that "a policeman's lot is not a happy one", and magistrates and other local worthies have echoed that sentiment ever since. Fortunately there are now organisations not afraid to draw attention to the other side of the coin and speak out in defence of those who find themselves in custody simply because their form of dress or hair style offend police tastes.

A suspected person cannot be kept at a police station unless he is charged and brought before a court. He has the right to communicate with relatives. These rules are broken every day and it is strongly suspected that harassment, violence and framing of suspects—particularly in drug cases—is widespread. Spokesmen for the Police Federation blandly deny such assertions but, despite all kinds of obstruction by the authorities, enough cases have come to light to justify suspicion about police behaviour.

DEMONSTRATION

Action Bangla Desh, a British organisation deeply concerned by the events in East Bengal, is organising a mass rally in Trafalgar Square, London, on Sunday, 1 August, at 2 p.m. The purpose of the demonstration is to draw attention to the activities of the West Pakistan army in East Bengal, and to promote the idea of an independent State, Bangla Desh. There have been several demonstrations in recent weeks, but they have been largely attended by Bengalis and consequently had little effect on the British Government. So the organisers of Sunday's demonstration are urging as many non-Bengalis as possible to attend this particular rally.

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BOOKS

SEERS, PSYCHICS AND ESP

by Milbourne Christopher. Cassell, £2.25

Man, it has been said, needs a myth to live by. Whether the craving for inexplicable wonders is innate or a habit induced by religious indoctrination in infancy, all too often disillusion with traditional creeds is followed by belief in illusion of another kind, the so-called paranormal. Interest in ghosts, poltergeists, spiritualism, astrology and extra-sensory perception is aroused and maintained by newspaper reports of strange happenings, and by large numbers of affirmative and uncritical books on every aspect of the subject. A rational approach is rare, and especially welcome when it is as entertaining as this one. Milbourne Christopher is a professional illusionist in the tradition of Houdini and Maskelyne, who were unmasking the frauds of spiritualism while some of the world's greatest scientists were making asses of themselves. In *Seers, Psychics and ESP* he examines the occult in the light of his own considerable experience in the art of deception.

Of all the famous mediums in what might be termed the spectacular years of spiritualism, only Daniel Dunglas Home was never publicly exposed. That was because he never performed in public. He cultivated the rich and influential, becoming a perpetual guest whose needs and expenses were met by his hosts. Christopher reveals that Home was caught out more than once when producing "spirit" hands. On one occasion he was seen to offer his foot to Napoleon as the spirit hand of Queen Hortense. Home's celebrated feat of levitation before "unimpeachable witnesses" is shown by the author to be capable of a very simple explanation. People expect tricks from a magician; they expect miracles from a medium, and in that frame of mind are easily deceived.

Home performed many miracles with his feet. Eusapia Palladino was another foot artist. No other medium produced so much and such varied phenomena at a single seance; her performances left her physically and emotionally exhausted. Eusapia was always ready to undergo scientific examination, at a price and under her own conditions. Her downfall came when she had the misfortune to be tested by a committee consisting, unknown to her, partly of stage magicians. Two of these un gallant fellows, dressed entirely in black, crept into the darkened seance room and put their heads close to the medium's feet. There they had a perfect view of her method of producing raps and elevating a table. A compulsive fraud, Eusapia even cheated at croquet. Today she and Home are revered by spiritualists as pioneers and teachers. Some of their phenomena were genuine, they tell you.

Precognition, telepathy and clairvoyance, together now called extrasensory perception, have been the subject of experiments for nearly 90 years. The most famous of all investigators of ESP is Dr Joseph Banks Rhine, late of Duke University in the USA, who is popularly thought to have conclusively demonstrated its existence. His first published report, however, throws considerable doubt upon his fitness for the task. Intrigued by reports of a horse which could read minds and answer questions, Rhine pitched a tent outside its barn and studied the equine marvel for days. It never occurred to him to study its owner, who had trained the animal to respond to almost imperceptible signals. Fooled by a simple fairground trick,

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Rhine solemnly certified that the horse was psychic! A doctor of biology, he ought to have known that the horse, an animal which looks sideways, could not have seen the letters of the alphabet it was supposed to be picking out with its nose.

Eagerness to believe, together with inadequate precautions against cheating by participants in card-guessing games, and faulty evaluation of genuine results, account for all of Rhine's apparent ESP successes. He has been criticised before, notably by D. H. Rawcliffe in *The Psychology of the Occult*, but he still hopes ESP will become an established fact. Retired from Duke, he carries on his work with funds supplied by sympathisers.

Dr S. C. Soal, a British investigator of ESP, has been one of Rhine's severest critics, but his own methods have left much to be desired. In card-guessing experiments there were no special precautions against fraud by those taking part. Soal, like Rhine, had complete faith in his collaborators. He even paid for high scores; not surprisingly they were forthcoming.

Ghosts and poltergeists are rationally explained in this book. Astrology, firewalking, dowsing and other aspects of the occult are discussed on a do-it-yourself basis. Dowsers or diviners have often been tested, but with no more successes than would have been obtained by chance. One practitioner, on a test, found varicose veins in a wooden leg. With fortune tellers, Christopher remembers what their clients do not, their failures as well as their successes. Some of the latter are not so hot, either. A forecast that President Kennedy would be assassinated or die in office beat odds of only seven to three against, based on the experience of this century.

The author concludes that there has never been the slightest evidence in favour of the paranormal. One prediction can safely be made—there never will be.

R. J. CONDON

EVOLUTION IN RELIGION: A STUDY IN SRI AUROBINDO AND PIERRE TEILHARD DE CHARDIN

by R. C. Zaehner. Clarendon Press, £1.90.

The nineteenth century idea of universal human progress has taken a long time a-dying. Among its progeny, it seems, we must number not only classical Marxism but the evolutionary mysticism of the Hindu Aurobindo and the Catholic Teilhard, in an extraordinary conflation of ideas explored in Professor Zaehner's new book. Both Aurobindo and Teilhard accepted, indeed fervently endorsed, the theory of evolution. Both were concerned with the social progress of man, culminating in collective salvation, as opposed to the traditional Christian concept of individual salvation. Both sympathised with Marxism, which for them represented the political equivalent of the individual mystic's fusion with the divine being. Both emphasised that the spiritual redemption of man was to be found in the realisation, in human society, of the "cosmic consciousness". It hardly needs to point out the similarities

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to Marxism: the subsuming of the individual in the collective "consciousness", the central role of progress and evolution, acquiring its own dynamic and internal momentum, and above all the optimism which infuses the entire process, which makes a happy outcome inevitable.

The contrast with traditional religion could hardly be greater, and it was small wonder that Teilhard fell out with the Catholic Church or that Aurobindo, whilst remaining a Hindu, repudiated the ossified caste structure of his faith in its entirety. Rejecting, as they did, the formal structures of the respective faiths, the problem was to find a suitable mode of "ascent from the kingdom of matter to the kingdom of spirit", as Professor Zaehner puts it, through man—who was to be the bridge between the two. And here the two mystics return, almost inevitably, to what they know; for Teilhard, the way of salvation is the Church, for Aurobindo the Vedanta (the traditions of Hindu mysticism) holds the key.

So we are entitled to ask just what is new in this "evolutionary" approach, if at the end of it all old-style religion reasserts itself. For Teilhard, I suspect, the dabbling in Marxism proved fatal to his orthodoxy, which was of course already suspect. Secularist Marxism shifts the entire focus of attention and concern on to *human* affairs and *human* needs. What is lost is the distinctive concept of a transcendent God. Thus Teilhard can write: "It is not I who laboriously discovered the All; it was the All which showed itself to me, imposed itself on me through a kind of cosmic consciousness". Elsewhere, he writes that ultimately "each ego would find that it coincided with the fullness of Being". All this is worlds away from the rigid monotheism of theologians such as Barth and Buber, who emphasise instead the inconceivable remoteness of God. Teilhard is frankly a pantheist who veils his mysticism with an uneasy cloak of quasi-scientific, and truly dreadful jargon lavishly spiced with liberal optimism.

Professor Zaehner differs from his mentors in not regarding the triumph of "evolutionary" religion as inevitable. As a Catholic convert, he looks forward to the growth of a "super-consciousness" within the Church, manifesting itself through Teilhard's decidedly totalitarian concept of a fully "socialised" and "totalised" human existence. Yet this is not bound to happen; it depends rather on our learning to love each other "without a trace of egoism". So, in point of fact, the mixture is as before. But where Professor Zaehner does have a point, I think, is that Christianity has considerably "humanised" the original Jewish deity, Yahweh—not just in the trivial sense of the incarnation, but by presenting him in much less terrifying a form than the sternly retributive figure of the Old Testament. For Jesus is clear that his God is a god of love, and many people, even today, find that to be presented with the Jesus of the New Testament is to be compelled to believe—however unsure the logical or historical grounds for that belief. So in Christianity, therefore, we reach the apex of an evolutionary process deriving from the birth of Judaism. The Fall of Man represents the rise of individual self-consciousness, and the Jewish concept of the Kingdom of God is the *earthly* triumph of collective consciousness. But true spiritual awareness is achieved only in Christianity, or rather in its radical, "evolutionary" form of the Church militant. A similar emphasis on the ultimate "unity" of conscious believers is found also in the Vedanta. Unity,

for Professor Zaehner, is the theme of all "higher" religion and reflects the tendency in natural evolution, as he somewhat eccentrically thinks, to the smoothing out of differences between the evolving species.

I ceased to follow Professor Zaehner at the point where he plunges headlong into metaphysics; "evolution, we can say, is the alienation of God from himself". And the serious criticism that can be levied against his book, and the work of Aurobindo and Teilhard, is that all three display supreme indifference to the difficulty of establishing some sort of logical basis for their ideas. To point to facile parallels between the development of religion and the evolutionary process just will not do, nor will it suffice to take as axiomatic the outmoded notion, borrowed shamelessly from classical liberalism, of universal progress. For there are at least two distinct senses in which we might say that a given process such as evolution has an "end result" or "final goal". We might mean descriptively; it so happens that the "end result" of evolution is man (but it could equally well have been something else). Or the end result might be pre-determined—a kind of conscious goal towards which the evolutionary process was striving. At no time, so far as I could tell, does Professor Zaehner draw this distinction. And the result is that he is guilty, quite simply, of begging the question. It has to be *argued* that there is somehow an organic connection between natural evolution and the growth of the higher religions—not simply *assumed* by invoking obscurantist metaphysics. Actually, Professor Zaehner seems to be employing a bizarre version of the old argument from design, regrettably accompanied by a distinct falling-off in the standards of argument from the days of the medieval schoolmen. So much for evolution!

PHILIP HINCHLIFF

THEATRE

THE DEVIL'S DISCIPLE. Shaw Theatre, London.

A few years ago the English stage stared at disaster. Everywhere theatres were closing down as the developers or bingo callers moved in. Then the dissolution stopped and now, miraculously, new theatres are being built. One of the beneficiaries is the 15-year-old National Youth Theatre, heroically directed by Michael Croft during all the years of difficulty and homelessness. In a magnificent auditorium that forms part of the new St Pancras Library complex and, with its geographical associations and in tribute to our major modern dramatist, is happily called after Shaw, a permanent home has been found. Though everyone is welcome, the theatre is especially intended for young people. In the summer they perform themselves. For most of the year a highly professional Dolphin Theatre Company puts on the plays, but it will concentrate on Shakespeare and other textbook dramas, while a National Youth Theatre Schools Association encourages participation in seminars and rehearsals.

An appropriate play to launch the theatre is Shaw's own *Devil's Disciple*, which he described to Ellen Terry as a "melodrama" ranking as "the most monstrous piece of farcical absurdity that ever made an audience shriek with laughter". This was of course an exaggeration. History the play, which is set in Puritan America at the height of the War of Independence, may not be; but as General Burgoyne says, "History, sir, will tell lies, as usual", and

(Continued on back page)

LETTERS

Rich and Poor

It could be my fault that your reviewer of *Rich Against Poor* (*Freethinker*, 17 July) criticises me, very mildly indeed, for saying and doing the very things which obscure the truth about world poverty and how it can be effectively eliminated. I hope you will let me explain that neither in this book nor in my earlier *From Gandhi to Guevara* have I thought of giving aid and comfort to those who advertise the kindness and generosity of the rich, the ruling classes in the international system.

I agree with your reviewer more than he thinks. After 100 pages on the process of "anti-development"—"digging down to the foundations of the system whose working impoverishes, oppresses and destroys the overwhelming mass of the people while it enriches, exalts and provides security for the rich . . ."—I summarise on pages 187 and 188 my theory of true development; both here, and towards the end of my chapter on "The Development Process" I discuss the role of the poor in the war against poverty and oppression.

The sentence about swords and ploughshares could look like a pacifist proposal. Actually, it occurs in a paragraph about the transformation of the economy, politics and technology of imperialist war which will occur after a successful proletarian revolution in the rich countries. The exploited and oppressed majority in the rich countries are up against the same enemy as the peoples of the Third World. The workers in the industrialised countries can give substantial aid to the revolutionary poor elsewhere. Nowhere do I indicate any support for what is now called "Aid". My discussion of the "Aid Relationship" and outline of the three ways in which people in countries like Britain can join the war being waged by the poor were intended to rule out support for existing policies.

I may have been at fault for not being more explicit. But the question still remains: How much are people in Britain prepared to do to give the due priority to understanding, reporting correctly and actively supporting the struggle of the poor and oppressed? To "be kinder and more generous" is not the answer.

C. R. HENSMAN.

Robert Owen

I was surprised to find in a review of Robert Owen's *Life* (*Freethinker*, 10 July) not a word about his attitude to religion, nor of his senile enthusiasm for spiritualism. While everything in the review was, in my opinion, worth saying, it seems that the omissions were very remiss for the *Freethinker*.

In the autobiography Owen has one of the strongest condemnations of "all known religions": "In all the religions which have hitherto been forced on the minds of men, deep, dangerous, and lamentable principles of disunion, division and separation have been fast entwined with . . . all the dire effects which religious animosities have." He repeatedly spoke and wrote on this theme throughout most of his life.

Then, in old age, he turned to spiritualism, and in the same book assures the reader that at a single seance there were present the following spirits: the Duke of Kent, President Jefferson, Benjamin Franklin, Shelley, Byron, "several of the old prophets", and "eight of my deceased relatives".

I am still wondering how the *Guinness Book of Records* has missed this one!

PAT SLOAN.

THEATRE

(Continued from previous page)

Shaw's lies are more entertaining. A sort of combination, in its plot, of *A Tale of Two Cities* and *Barnaby Rudge*, its dialogue has the cynicism and wit of the best of later Shaw. In a strong cast Wynne Clark as a pious, loveless matron, Ronald Hines as the shrewd and languid Burgoyne, and Tom Bell as the devil-may-care smuggler with a heart of gold (the "devil's disciple") are outstanding. Ralph Richardson records Shaw's somewhat heavy preludes to the acts. Equally heavy, if ingeniously constructed, is the set designed by Christopher Lawrence. Fittingly Michael Croft himself directs, making full use of a somewhat confined stage. Altogether a most auspicious advent.

DAVID TRIBE

A LIBERAL CHRISTIAN'S VIEW OF SEX

(Continued from page 243)

In our seemingly never ending struggle of humanity versus the Church, humanity lost in the last century and the early part of this in the matter of masturbation guilt. In the environment of prudery humanity hadn't a chance to avoid being maimed by the psychological barrage let loose by the Church on this subject. But humanity won in the matter of contraception. Despite the fiercest possible opposition from Christian leaders we broke free from indoctrination, and the birth rate dropped rapidly in the early part of this century, particularly among the parish clergy, as our forefathers decided to make up their own minds on this issue. Leading their members firmly from behind, the churches one by one declared their approval of contraception; the Roman Catholic Church will surely follow the same course before too long. Humanity is winning, too, in the matter of abortion.

Sex Education

Is it not the time we stopped bringing up boys and girls to be in conflict with each other and with themselves? For instance, many current sex guides for the young still warn girls against the selfish desire of boys to explore them under their clothes. It would be more natural to explain the pleasures and stages of mutual fondling as approximate sexual equals. Take the outcry against children getting hold of sex material too easily. Now even our sexually explicit society should draw lines round the erotic diet of the young, but I am certain that the present outcry comes more from the prudish side than from the explicit side. It shows little genuine concern for the sex lives of the youngsters, but much grown-up embarrassment at the idea of adult modesties being shocked by simple sex and nudity getting known in the family circle. It would indeed be a traumatic experience for many adults. In turning to VD, which the churches adopted as the divine punishment on those who disobeyed their "Thou shalt not", we are on the same pruddish bandwagon as the "no contraceptive advertising" brigade. It became necessary for the purposes of prudery in the last century for VD to be pushed out of sight. Only in 1970 did it become legal for notices about VD treatment to be posted in generally public places. VD is a disease now, not a sin.

The needs of homosexuals of both sexes could be helped, too, by the stand you take on the public display of sexual matters. Homosexual clubs find it difficult to advertise their existence, homosexual aid organisations find their work still hampered by public attitudes which are against the integration of homosexuals into society. Because these barriers exist the term "permissive society" is a cruel misnomer in the eyes of homosexuals who are still unable to be themselves.

Tension between old and new is clearly inevitable for a long time yet. But I believe that the nearer the new that you can bring yourselves to draw your line, the less the tension will be. I say this, not because I think that upsetting the older element doesn't matter as much as upsetting the younger element, but because I am sure that the more towards the new you draw your line, the more you will realistically convince the older element, who are far more adaptable than you might think. A large proportion of older people will follow your lead forward to the new society. Young people will never follow your lead backwards to the old.