

LAW COMMISSION PROPOSES CHANGES IN MARRIAGE CEREMONY

Whilst not agreeing with all its recommendations, the National Secular Society has welcomed the Law Commission's Working Paper on the Solemnisation of Marriage in England and Wales. In a statement on the Working Party's report the NSS declares its support for the proposal that there should be standard civil preliminaries for all marriages, regardless of where they are celebrated, and that discretion to allow a marriage before the full period of notice has elapsed should be exercised uniformly. The NSS has requested the Commission to re-examine its decision against a universal civil ceremony, and to consider the view that the advantages of this reform more than outweigh any objections. The Society urges that facilities and accommodation should be greatly improved. It points out that a recent survey of register offices in Essex revealed that the average number of guests which could be accommodated was 21. The ideal register office should accommodate at least 100. The NSS also recommends that the Archbishop of Canterbury's special licence should be abolished.

Banns Unnecessary

Michael Lloyd-Jones writes: The most important part of the Law Commission's Report is its recommendation that there should be uniform civil preliminaries for all marriages. This proposal entails the acceptance of one recommendation put forward by the NSS and should, logically, result in the acceptance of them all.

The Report concludes that it is impossible adequately to reform the present system unless uniform civil preliminaries are made compulsory in the case of all marriages, and obviously there can be no place for banns in such a system. In any case banns is no longer an effective safeguard: "The historical justification for banns is, of course, that their publication will give adequate advance public notice of the couple's intention to marry which will enable anyone knowing of an impediment to come forward. In social conditions which prevailed in this country before the present century this may have been sound. Today, with the growth and increased mobility of the population and the increase in urban living, it clearly is not. Unless the banns happen to be published in a church regularly attended by the parties and their friends and relations the chances of any impropriety coming to light are remote."

The Report therefore proposes that publication of banns should cease to be a requirement of civil law.

The law allows for three kinds of ecclesiastical preliminaries to Church of England weddings: banns, common licence (issued under the authority of the Bishop of the diocese, enabling the parties to marry in the Church of England, subject to certain residential qualifications, without waiting for banns to be published), and Special licence (granted by the Archbishop of Canterbury, enabling marriages to be solemnised according to the rites of the Church of England at any convenient time and place).

As the Report makes clear, with compulsory civil preliminaries both banns and common licence would disappear (though banns might be retained by the Churches

as an ecclesiastical requirement). The Report, however, does not recommend the abolition of the special licence: "We would see no objection to the retention of the Archbishop's special licence but this would not be essential if the legislation were amended so that the Registrar General's licence could be used as a preliminary to a marriage according to the rites of the Church of England".

The Report recommends that "registered buildings" (i.e. places where marriages can be solemnised other than register offices, or churches or chapels of the Church of England, should be restricted to buildings of "public religious worship".

This leaves the Registrar General with the "difficult and embarrassing task of deciding (subject to review by the court if his decision is adverse) whether a particular place is a place of public religious worship. But as long as religious marriages continue to be legally recognised we see no alternative to leaving him with some such role . . . Hence, although we invite views, our provisional conclusion is that, if religious marriages are retained, so must the present role of the Registrar General and the courts in deciding what is a religion".

Optional Extra

The main NSS proposal, that there should be a compulsory civil ceremony allowing for a religious ceremony later for those who want it, is rejected by this Report. On the other hand it is acknowledged that this would be "the simplest and most effective method of meeting criticisms" of the present arrangements. It is recognised that this step is the "logical sequel" to the Commission's proposals that civil preliminaries should be universal, and that it would "produce uniformity throughout the whole marriage formalities". It is even stated that this would have the support of some churchgoers. "But", the Report continues, "it is our impression that it would be likely to arouse strong

(Continued on page 301)

ANOTHER IRISH HERETIC: JOHN TOLAND, THE FIRST PANTHEIST

NIGEL SINNOTT

This is the first part of an article on John Toland of whom an anonymous writer in "A Critical History of the Celtic Religion" (Edinburgh, 1815) wrote, "O Toland! Mighty friend to Nature's laws: Thou great support of Truth; and Reason's cause!"

There are many enigmas in Irish history, but one of the strangest must surely be that at the close of the seventeenth century a Gaelic-speaking, Roman Catholic son of Ulster should grow to become a champion of the English Whigs, a "deist, philosopher, diplomat, political controversialist, secular and Biblical scholar, and linguist".¹

He was born, according to his own account, on 30 November, 1670, into an Irish-speaking family living on the Inishowen peninsula, Co. Donegal. The child was probably born in the parish of Clonmany² and he was baptised into the Catholic faith as Janus Junius Toland. There is, however, another version of Toland's birth, namely that he was born in France of an Irish father and a French mother, and did not come to Inishowen until about the age of 11.³ The second theory might indeed explain his decidedly un-Gaelic baptismal name, but the truth of the matter is obscured by the fact that Toland may have been illegitimate, for which there is much circumstantial evidence, perhaps the son of a priest.⁴ Toland, despite superficial appearances, is not French, but a Gaelic-Irish name: *O Tuathaláin*.

On going to school the young Toland soon divested himself of "Janus Junius" to avoid the ridicule of his fellow pupils and assumed the name John. At about the age of 16 he broke with the Catholic Church, and with help from the Bishop of Derry, Dr Ezekiel Hopkins, he went to Glasgow in 1687, quarrelled with the Archbishop, and proceeded to study under the patronage of the Presbyterians who applauded his part in "pope-burning and rabbling the episcopal clergy"⁵ (J. G. Simms). He received a certificate from the city magistrates on 30 July, 1690⁶ to the effect that his conduct had been that of "ane trew protestant and loyal subject". Toland received his MA (Edinburgh) degree ("which was commonly granted to Glasgow students who were not prepared to take the oath of allegiance"⁷) on 30 June (Old Style), 1690—the day before the Battle of the Boyne was fought back in Ireland.

From Glasgow Toland went to London, where Dr John Williams, a dissenting minister suspected of unitarianism, raised money to send him, in 1692, to Leiden, in the Netherlands, where he studied under Friedrich Spanheim the younger, and enjoyed the liberal atmosphere of the city. He eventually decided against becoming a Nonconformist minister, and on his return to England made up his mind to study at Oxford.

Great Learning and Little Religion

In 1694 Toland arrived at Oxford to work in the Bodleian Library and write "an Irish dictionary and dissertation to prove the Irish a colony of the Gauls"⁸. Here, at first, he was faced with "their antiquaries and linguists who saluted me with peals of barbarous sounds and obsolete words, and I in turn spent upon them all my Anglo-Saxon and Old British etymologies, which I hope gave them abundant satisfaction"⁹.

In the words of Edward Lhwyd (or Lhuys), the famous Celtic scholar, Toland's year at Oxford was spent "railing in coffee houses against all communities in religion and monarchy"¹⁰. Lhwyd also described him as "a man of fine parts, great learning, and little religion". The Irish dictionary never materialised, but Toland did compile lists of Irish words and their Breton (Armorican) and Latin equivalents. Thus, in the words of Simms, "he can claim to have anticipated Lhwyd in the study of comparative Celtic linguistics"¹¹. He also investigated Druidism, of which there were (and are) many interesting relics in his native Inishowen.

On leaving Oxford (with an enduringly low opinion of universities in general) Toland went to London, and came under the aegis of John Locke, the philosopher, who had recently written a book entitled *The Reasonableness of Christianity*. Influenced by this, Toland created a sensation by publishing his own first book in 1696, at the age of 25. It was entitled *Christianity Not Mysterious; or, a treatise shewing that there is nothing in the Gospel contrary to Reason, nor above it: and that no Christian doctrine can be properly call'd a mystery*. Sir Leslie Stephen described this book as "the first act of warfare between Deists and orthodox, which occupied the next generation"¹². Certainly it attracted the literary fire of Episcopalian divines such as Dr Peter Browne—later Bishop of Cork—who denounced him as "an inveterate enemy of revealed religion".

Biography of Milton

On his return to Ireland in 1697 Toland found that the *odium theologicum* directed against his book had followed him across the Irish Sea. The book was condemned by the Dublin Grand Jury—who did not actually deign to read a copy, and on 9 September, 1697, the Committee of Religion of the Irish House of Commons ordered that it should be publicly burned by the hangman in two places in Dublin,¹³ and that the author be arrested. Toland decided to seek safety in flight, borrowed some money, and took the first ship back to England, where he was eventually given the job of writing a biography of Milton. Toland stirred up another literary hornets' nest in 1698 with his *Life of John Milton*. He particularly incensed the "Charles I, King and Martyr" brigade by demonstrating that *Eikon Basilike* was written by Dr Gauden,¹⁴ and not by King Charles. His further comments, comparing *Eikon Basilike* with "suppositious pieces under the name of Christ, his apostles, and other great persons", wrangled with the Rev. Offspring Blackhall, who in a sermon to the House of Commons denounced Toland's "impudence" for doubting any of the works of Christ and his apostles. Blackhall made the mistake of adding: "He (Toland) must mean those now received by the whole Christian church, for I know of no other"¹⁵—whereupon Toland proceeded to chop the eminent clergyman off at the knees by publishing a 22-page catalogue of extra-Biblical apocryphal pieces in *Amyntor* (1699)! This work has been described as "one of the earliest examinations of scriptural canon by an Englishman"¹⁶ (my italics).

In 1701 Toland was a member of the diplomatic mission which went to Hanover to present the Act of Settlement

(Continued at foot of next page)

ON FREEWILL

WINIFRED M. ROUX

For some 2,000 years, since men began to enjoy arguing, the contradiction of determinism and freewill has engaged philosophers. In South Africa, where I live, it is of interest to recall that both Luther and Calvin believed in predestination with men as puppets of a vengeful God. Their views were later modified and came closer to the Aquinas concept of free will and indeed it is difficult to see how a church can be reconciled with rejection of freewill.

As with so many philosophical disputes the argument is made irresolvable by extreme doctrinaire statement of both sides. In the universe we recognise a structure of determinism but are aware that within this frame we have free choice. Corliss Lamont has a comparison: "Human life can aptly be compared with chess. Players are free to make an immense variety of moves but they are limited by the rules which represent law or determinism and they must use certain instruments, the different chessmen".

The frame of necessity includes awareness of causation. "Freedom is the knowledge of necessity". said Engels. The law of causation states an if-then relation: if A then B. But in natural science we can know only probabilities and on any chain of events that seems determined there may impinge events of another, unrelated, chain to destroy the if-then sequence. The very if-then does imply the if as a conditional conjunction, that is the if implies contingency.

A Chance Happening

Corliss Lamont has written: "My favourite example of contingency is the catastrophe of 14 April, 1912, when in the middle of a calm night the White Star liner *Titanic* hit a huge iceberg in the North Atlantic. Approximately two-thirds of passengers and crew met their death. From the nature of the case we can be sure that there was on con-joint initiating cause acting simultaneously on the *Titanic*

sailing from Southampton and upon the iceberg drifting south that impelled them to their ocean rendezvous. It was obviously a chance happening. Yet, even if a team of scientific experts had been able to trace back the two causal streams and ascertain that the collision had been predestined from the very moment when the *Titanic* departed from England, that would not upset my thesis. For the space-time relation of the iceberg and the *Titanic* was itself a matter of contingency, since there was no relevant cause to account for that relationship".

However, the determinists are not silenced. Professor Gardner Williams of the University of Toledo comments: "It seems obvious that the meeting was jointly caused by the natural forces in the two series. It was 100 per cent predetermined. It was an accident only because nobody foresaw or intended it".

There is too the time-flow argument. Determinism destroys the time-flow argument. Determinism destroys the time-flow of happenings for if there were no contingency everything would have happened already and the future would be the past. This thought is difficult for the layman and seems to attribute a greater degree of determinism than most determinists would claim.

More homely is the argument from our intuitive awareness that we do in fact choose between this and that. Even those who profess to believe in absolute determinism do think about issues and make decisions. In short, it appears that whatever philosophy we profess we do believe in moral responsibility only if reward or punishment can influence future conduct.

A good deal of philosophical argument is fun for philosophers. But I often feel that I come out of the same door as I went in.

(Continued from page 298)

(which he defended in his *Anglia Libera*, 1701) to the future King George I. Here he met Leibnitz, and befriended the Electress Sophia, who secured Toland's introduction to her daughter, Sophia Charlotte Queen of Prussia, whose *Imo*, "a letter against Popery", Toland edited and published in 1712. For the Queen, Toland also wrote *Letters to Serena* (1704), which has been called "the intelligent woman's guide to Rationalism".¹⁷ In it he contradicted Descartes and Spinosa and asserted that motion was an intrinsic property of matter, and that therefore the universe did not require an external force or source of motion. This led Toland to coin a new word for the English language, "pantheist",¹⁸ which he first used in 1705 in *Socinianism Truly Stated . . . to which is prefix't Indifference in Disputes: recommended by a Pantheist . . . to an Orthodox*. In pantheism, god pervades the entire universe, and the universe is God. The term implies disbelief in the traditional Christian idea of the personality and transcendence of God.

NOTES

¹ Mossmer, E. C., 1967, "Toland John" *The Encyclopaedia of Philosophy* 7: p 141.
² Swan, H. P., 1948, *Romantic Inishowen* (Dublin), p 148.
³ Heinemann, F. H., 1949, in *Review of English Studies*, pp 346-349, gives the evidence for the "French" theory of Toland's birth.

⁴ (a) Stephen, L., 1899, "Toland, John" *Dictionary of National Biography* 19: p 918.
 (b) McCabe, J., 1920, *A Biographical Dictionary of Modern Rationalists* (London), p 802.
⁵ Simms, J. G., 1969, "John Toland (1670-1722), a Donegal Heretic", *Irish Historical Studies* 16: p 305.
⁶ Anon., 1815 b.: "Abstract of the life of the Author", in Toland, J., *A Critical History of the Celtic Religion* (Edinburgh), p 3.
⁷ Simms, loc. cit.: p 305.
⁸ Lhwd, E., quoted by Simms, loc. cit.: p 307.
⁹ Simms, loc. cit.: p 307.
¹⁰ Quoted by Simms, loc. cit.: p 307.
¹¹ Simms, loc. cit.: p 307.
¹² Stephen, loc. cit.: p 918.
¹³ Stephen, loc. cit.: p 919. The order was carried out on 11 September. The author of the "Abstract" (1815 b: p 10) says that the book was "presented" by the Grand Jury of Middlesex, but "this measure had no other effect than to promote the sale of book, mankind being naturally prone to pry into what is forbidden to them".
¹⁴ Anon. 1815 b, loc. cit.: p 15. Thomas Wagstaff replied in defence of the royalist theory.
¹⁵ Quoted by Simms, loc. cit.: p 312.
¹⁶ Mossmer, loc. cit: p 142. He presumably means a writer in English.
¹⁷ Simms, loc. cit.: p 315. Joseph McCabe (1920, loc. cit.; and 1948, *A Rationalist Encyclopaedia*, p 584) gives the date of *Letters to Serena* as "1694" and "1606". Both are incorrect.
¹⁸ *The Oxford English Dictionary* 7 (1961 ed.), p 430. The Irish word is *Pandiach*.

FREETHINKER

editor: WILLIAM McILROY

103 Borough High Street,
London, SE1

Telephone: 01-407 1251

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.

EVENTS

Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London, WC1, Saturday, 18 September, 5 p.m. A meeting of those interested in forming an organisation for the study of the history and bibliography of the rationalist, humanist, freethought, secularist and ethical movement.

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. Details of future activities from Marjorie Mephram, 29 Fairview Road, Sutton, Surrey, Telephone: 01-642 8796.

Humanist Holidays. Long weekend in Holland; either four days from 21 October or three days from 22 October. Cost of flight from Southend to Amsterdam and bed and breakfast: £21 or £18. Can be arranged if 12 people apply immediately to Marjorie Mephram, 29 Fairview Road, Sutton, Surrey. Telephone 01-642 8796.

North Staffordshire Humanist Group, Cartwright House, Broad Street, Hanley. Friday, 24 September, 7.45 p.m. The Rev. Philip Smith: "The Church 1971-2000?"

Welwyn Garden City Humanist Group, Backhouse Room, Handside Lane, WGC, Thursday, 23 September, 8 p.m. Shelly Fawcett: "Art and Industry".

South Place Ethical Society, Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London, WC1, Sunday, 26 September, 3 p.m. Annual Reunion. Guest of Honour: Michael Lines.

Sutton Humanist Group, Friends' Meeting House, Cedar Road, Sutton, Thursday, 23 September, 8 p.m. Tony Bamford for, and Michael Lines against "The Common Market".

NEWS

AN ODD IDEA OF LIBERTY

The organisers of the puritan jamboree at Westminster Central Hall last week must be feeling very pleased with themselves. The meeting, hardly likely to have rated more than a few column inches in the national dailies, was turned into a highly successful publicity operation for the Whitehouse-Muggeridge brigade by members of the Women's Liberation Movement and the Gay Liberation Front. The combination of WLM hysteria and GLF naïveté resulted in behaviour of the kind which is usually associated with Mosleyite louts.

The *Freethinker* has frequently condemned those latter day Grundys who so enjoy being shocked by books, television programmes, films and plays that they are prepared even to travel abroad to suffer for purity's sake. We know that many of those who claim they are concerned about our morals are simply acting in defence of the status quo, and are prepared to censor, repress and discriminate against those whose values and outlook are different to their own. Nevertheless, they have the right to make their views known and, if they so wish, to spend their money organising events like the Festival of Light. And, while they should be challenged, questioned and exposed, there is no excuse for organised barracking and shouting down their speakers.

Libertarians should speak out and campaign for women's equality; for the right of people to sleep with members of their own sex and/or the opposite sex; for the right to publish without fearing the reaction at Scotland Yard. But those who went to the Central Hall meeting in order to disrupt and wreck it, only succeeded in demonstrating that some members of Women's Lib and Gay Lib are as intolerant and repressive as those censoring prudes who try to impose their standards on others, and initiate prosecutions against publications like *OZ* and *The Little Red Schoolbook*.

COAL TO NEWCASTLE

The decision by America's Jesus Freaks to visit Belfast is a classic example of taking coal to Newcastle. The only question on which the vast majority of the Ulster population, Protestant and Catholic, are in agreement is that Jesus is the greatest. There are more churches, chapels and mission halls in Belfast than in any other city of comparable size and population in the United Kingdom. Attendance at places of worship in Northern Ireland is far higher than it has been in Britain for generations. The Ulster faithful assemble, often several times a week, to sing praises and pray to the prince of peace for guidance. This holy exercise accomplished, they take to the streets to bash their fellow Christians. And, although the trouble erupted only three years ago, hatred and viciousness were never far below the surface in that pious, puritan corner of the United Kingdom.

The majority of the new Jesus Freaks are probably amiable and pleasant young people. Perhaps when they realise that the most numerous and devoted followers of Jesus are to be found in places like Ireland, South Africa and the Deep South states of the USA, it may occur to them that they are wasting their time in the service of an intolerant, vindictive fanatic.

S AND NOTES

REPEAL OF OBSCENITY LAWS URGED

The present British obscenity laws are not stopping pornography. They are helping to spread it by giving it publicity it does not merit. This was the theme of a conference of artists, authors, photographers, scientists and members of the Freedom of Vision Society, held recently at Ashurstwood Abbey, Sussex. The Society wants the Government to do away with the 1959 and 1964 Obscene Publications Acts as they are failing to fulfil the purpose for which they were intended, namely to stop the trade in imported purient pornography. As the defence provisions of the 1959 Act, involving the opinions of experts, are ineffective, the Acts are being used to suppress publications which should be protected.

The Society is asking the Government to make the repeal of the Acts a Government measure. It points out that of the three Obscene Publications Acts, two have been Government proposal. Thus precedent does not require this to be a Private Member's Bill.

Dr Geoffrey Barker, a psychiatrist, told the Conference: "The Obscene Publications Acts seem to promote a type of material which without these Acts would have less appeal—although the material is possibly of limited therapeutic value. I support the proposal for their repeal recommended by the Arts Council's Conference, to which I gave evidence".

Eric Smith, a publisher's editor, said: "I would like it to be possible for responsible publishers to be able to produce both factual information and fantasy about sexual and behavioural matters for publications to those who want it without let or hindrance. At present the obscenity laws only make it possible for much of this information to be provided in a furtive backstreet or illegal mail-order manner. This puts the bona fide publisher at a disadvantage. Is it too much to hope that a 'Penguin Pornography' paperback series might render unnecessary the existing multi-million pound under-the-counter trade".

THE EASIEST ROOM

Belief in "the easiest room in hell" has been part of Roman Catholic thinking for centuries. Limbo was a half-way house where, presumably, the temperature was tolerable and the pitchforks had fewer prongs. It was reserved for those who lived their lives without the alleged benefits of baptism or Christianity. Now the Jesuits, traditional defenders of this belief, are beginning to question it. A Jesuit contributor to their journal *La Civiltà Cattolica* writes that the belief is cruel and unreasonable. True, but if all those Christian beliefs which are cruel or unreasonable were discarded, what would remain?

No official Church announcement about Limbo has been made since the eighteenth century, and it is likely that the hierarchy would be obliged if the Jesuits refrained from stirring it up at the present time. With problems such as priestly celibacy, defiance of Church teaching on birth

control, the decline in conversions and other difficulties, Church leaders have enough worries in this world without speculating about the hereafter.

Indeed there has been a strange reluctance on the part of all the Christian churches to discuss heaven, hell and other eternal abodes. Gone are the days when clergy and lay preachers described the joys of heaven and the horrors of hell with overwhelming conviction and certainty. Now the more sensitive Christian cannot believe that anyone deserves to suffer endlessly, and the more shrewd prefer to give the impression that only the most fundamentalist, Bible-punching ignoramus believes that "Soon we must through darkness go, To inherit bliss unending, Or eternity of woe".

Fortunately, in the United Kingdom at any rate, people take little notice of what is declaimed from the pulpit every Sunday. But if the Anglican, Roman Catholic, Methodist and other churches have officially rejected the doctrine of bliss or blisters, they forgot to pass on the good news to the *Freethinker*.

THE CLARENCE, WHITEHALL, LONDON, SW1
(One minute from Trafalgar Square)

Friday, 8 October, 8 p.m.

A public lecture by the former President of the National Secular Society

DAVID TRIBE

**PRESIDENT
CHARLES BRADLAUGH, MP**

A presentation will be made to Mr Tribe

Everyone welcome

Organised by the NATIONAL SECULAR SOCIETY

(Continued from front page)

opposition from the majority of ministers both of the Church of England and of other denominations, and from the general public."

It is true that some clergymen of various denominations might object to this reform. But once it is made clear to them that it would not prevent couples from having a religious ceremony afterwards if they wanted one, it is hard to see how such objections could be maintained. The same is true of members of the public.

In any case there are signs that the clergy would not be as opposed to this reform as might be supposed. A good indication of the trend of authoritative Church opinion can often be gained by reading the preface to *Crockford's Clerical Directory*. The preface to the 1969 issue advocated that civil marriage should be legally compulsory, with an additional ceremony by the Church, if desired.

Many of the arguments advanced against pornography seem to me to be fallacious and rooted in prejudice. As a free thinking radical Methodist local preacher I am firmly against all censorship, and believe that the present restrictions on pornography should be lifted. My advice to Lord Longford . . . live and let live.

—Geoffrey Kenyon in the *Methodist Recorder*.

BOOKS

PRESIDENT CHARLES BRADLAUGH, MP

by David Tribe. Elek, £4.00.

The title of this big book refers to its subject's relationship to many bodies, especially, of course, the National Secular Society; but it also indicates its author's belief that if one of Bradlaugh's main causes had triumphed and England become a republic he would have been its first President—and would have made an "excellent" one. The first of these statements is probably true; about the second one feels more doubt. No one knows, as Tacitus pointed out, what a man will do with power until he has actually attained it; and there is a great deal in Bradlaugh's known character, his authoritarianism and power of vituperation, for example, which might well have flawed his performance. This, however, is as maybe; what the historian observes is how completely this man, who was once so widely known and so admired and hated that one Press obituary prophesied that "his place in the history of the nineteenth century will be perhaps more distinct than that of any other single figure" fell into oblivion almost before his bones were cold.



David Tribe

The main reason for this is, of course, the nearly complete disappearance from the public interest of the main causes for which he fought. Bradlaugh, as a radical, and a radical embittered in early youth by the scandal of his dismissal from his job as a direct result of tale-bearing by a "Christian" minister, espoused many worthy causes, which Mr Tribe faithfully chronicles; but his main battles were over four issues—atheism, the right of Members of Parliament to affirm instead of taking a Christian oath, republicanism, and birth control and family planning. Of these, the battle over the second was decisively won before

FREETHINKER

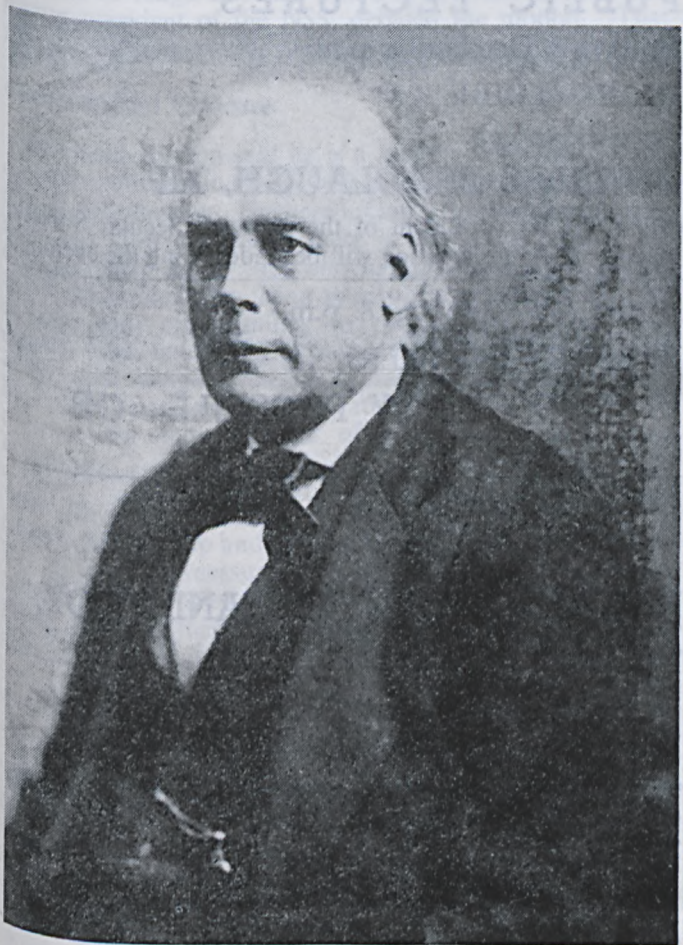
Bradlaugh died; the first and the third are now no longer live issues—unless the recent little flutter over the Queen's income can be taken as a stirring of republicanism! The fourth cause is, indeed, full of vitality today; unfortunately Mr Tribe's account of the whole exciting story of the Knowlton Case is not only too short—it is given much less space than the dreary legal details of the fight over the Parliamentary oath—but is also heavily biased against Bradlaugh's partner on this occasion, the elemental force which called itself Annie Besant. Annie Besant was not, of course, an easy character to live with; but it is simply not fair to rely so heavily upon the papers and correspondence of Bradlaugh's daughter Hypatia (who could scarcely have been expected to like Mrs Besant's irruption into her family life) and of Kate Watts, the wife of the man who had lost his position as Bradlaugh's chief aide. Mr Tribe records with pleasure some of the nastier remarks which the faithful passed about Annie (contributing a pretty scurrilous sentence of his own abuse scarcely heard in England since the days of the Puritan tract-writers, and not to be found again until the Communists began calling their opponents hyenas. (One of the least pleasurable traits of the secular "faithful" was the language they used, when in disagreement, about and to one another. Bradlaugh was not immune from this; when reviewing Marx's splendid, if belated, defence of the Commune of Paris he pilloried it as being full of "coarse and useless personalities"—on which he was himself a practising authority.) Mr Tribe fails entirely to recreate the personality of the "passionate pilgrim" who passed through so many stages in her pilgrimage and so leaves almost unappreciated a serious part of Bradlaugh's own emotional life. Is it by chance, or by design, that the photograph of Annie Besant which he has selected for inclusion was taken in her impressive older years and does not at all show the eager beautiful young woman whom Bradlaugh first met at the close of one of his meetings?

This aberration apart, Mr Tribe, who has had access to a quantity of correspondence and documents hitherto unpublished, has produced a long, full and loving account of Bradlaugh's career, covering the army service which made a man of him as it did of Robert Blatchford a generation later (though Blatchford was not allowed to choose a regiment—the Seventh Dragoons—for the pretty colour of its uniform, nor did he become tough enough to lay out, as Bradlaugh did, *five* of his opponents in the 1878 scuffle in Hyde Park); giving details of all his hero's struggles and misfortunes and of the omnibus radical programme on which he fought his first election; describing his particular appeal to "populism, poujadism, and provincialism" and his rapturous reception in the United States; and ending in his early death so soon after the battle of the Oaths had been won. It is not altogether easy reading:

Mr Tribe lacks the gift of arranging his heaps of material in readily assimilable shape or of characterising his performers, with the result that the narrative tends to proceed in jolts and jerks and indistinguishable secularists and anti-secularists to appear and disappear in his pages. He uses, moreover, the English language in a most extraordinary way. I have noted a near couple of dozen cases

R REVIEWS

where he simply does not appear to know what words mean—"Cunninghame Graham, a *pompous* Scottish writer" and "*meandering* factionalism" are just two of the shorter examples. In addition, his pages are peppered with numerals referring to the lump of small-type notes at the end of the book, so that the conscientious reader or reviewer has to keep turning over pages in order to find out whether 156 indicates a source reference (which would have been less irritating at the foot of the page), an afterthought which ought to have been incorporated in the text, or a piece of additional information which should have been in an appendix if it was to appear at all. The back history of Northampton, for example, is given half a page 104 and the other half on page 343, for no apparent reason.



Charles Bradlaugh

These blemishes—part of which may indicate that Mr Tribe had not quite assimilated his material before he started to write—are serious, and liable to put the reader off. It will be a pity if they do; for much patient work has gone into the study, and Bradlaugh, though not to this generation an attractive personality, was for a while an important item on the political scene, and does not deserve to be as forgotten as he is today—or remembered by Marx's retort, as "that huge self-idolator".

MARGARET COLE

THE BACKGROUND OF IMMIGRANT CHILDREN

by Ivor Morrish. George Allen and Unwin, £2.25

Some people who live in Britain actually prefer curry and rice to fish and chips. This is a stubborn fact hard for Englishmen to accept. The persistence of insular prejudices retards the understanding of "cultural pluralism", a term familiar to Americans but not to us.

Mr Morrish, who lectures at a college of education, has written a highly informative and necessary book with the aim of explaining to school teachers about the family background of their coloured pupils. Family is the key word. To the Asians, and even the West Indians, the extended family is an enveloping institution, a social reality central to their whole lives. This network of close relationships comes with the immigrants and they are reluctant to tear it apart or even to loosen it. Readers of this journal may need to be reminded of the character of the Moslem or Hindu religions. Do those of us with a secular outlook on life realise how deep are the roots of the non-Christian religions? Can something be usefully done by humanists to spread our gospel among Moslem or Hindu parents settled in Britain?

These are not rhetorical questions. They were prompted afresh in my mind as I read this book. I suppose there are no short answers, and I would invite humanists to consider such questions. Probably there is little we can do directly if our own skins are pink, not brown. The situation is so delicate that a public meeting in, say, Bradford, to debate religion might possibly provoke a riot. I would guess that Asians who have become humanists would be the best to preach our gospel among Moslems or Hindus. Meanwhile, we can console ourselves with the thought that the generation of coloured children growing up in Britain will surely be much less religious than their parents. But how much less, if they can't escape the family network?

And what of the grip that Asian religions retain in Asia? There are some curious contradictions in the situation that has unfolded as the poor nations try to catch up with the rich nations. In his notable book, *South East Asia*, Guy Hunter points out that for some new nations secularism has a positive, revolutionary value, as indeed it had in some of the earlier European revolutions. It symbolises to them the prestige of science, since it was the development of science which, in the two centuries between 1700 and 1900, opened up the difference in development between two halves of the world. The great objectives which new nations set themselves—to catch up with the West, to abolish poverty and ignorance, to gain equality in world affairs—seem to be attainable by secular means. For it is not the religion of the rich countries, nor their art of philosophy, which is to be envied or emulated, but our material, technical secular achievement.

Mr Hunter goes on to say that an aggressive secularism is rare in Africa and almost non-existent in South-East Asia. He recalls that the established religions did not impede the revolt against colonialism; on the contrary they sympathised and even assisted it. Hence the fact that the programmes of modernisation which followed colonial rule showed, in the main, no hostility to religion.

In these circumstances there are a number of difficult questions for humanists to face if and when we get ready to export our beliefs beyond the frontiers of Europe. Both at home and abroad we ought to survey the wide fresh fields which remain to be conquered.

JULIUS LEWIN

PUBLICATIONS

TITLE	AUTHOR	Price	Post
Why Are We Here ? (poem)	David Tribe	50p	3p
Religion and Ethics in Schools	David Tribe	7½p	3p
Religious Education in State Schools	Brigid Brophy	12½p	3p
RI and Surveys	Maurice Hill	5p	3p
Ten Non Commandments	Ronald Fletcher	12½p	3p
Sex Education: the Erroneous Zone	Maurice Hill and Michael Lloyd-Jones	25p	3p
The Cost of Church Schools	David Tribe	20p	3p
Humanism, Christianity and Sex	David Tribe	2½p	3p
103: History of a House	Elizabeth Collins	5p	3p
Freethought and Humanism in Shakespeare	David Tribe	10p	3p
The Nun Who Lived Again	Phyllis Graham	2½p	3p
The Secular Responsibility	Marghanita Laski	10p	3p
An Analysis of Christian Origins	George Ory	12½p	3p
New Thinking on War and Peace	A. C. Thompson	5p	3p
A Humanist Glossary	Robin Odell and Tom Barfield	17½p	3p
Morality Without God	Chapman Cohen	2½p	3p
Humanist Anthology	Margaret Knight	60p	7½p
Rebel Pity: The Life of Eddie Roux	Eddie and Win Roux	£2.25	12p
The Martyrdom of Man	Winwood Reade	52½p	10p
Rome or Reason	R. G. Ingersoll	5p	3p
Materialism Restated	Chapman Cohen	25p	8½p
Thomas Paine	Chapman Cohen	5p	3p
Religion and Human Rights	David Tribe	3p	3p
Comparative Religion	A. C. Bouquet	40p	6½p
Religion in Secular Society	Bryan Wilson	30p	6½p
Objections to Christian Belief	Various	17½p	5½p
Objections to Humanism	Various	17½p	5½p
Nature of the Universe	Fred Hoyle	17½p	5½p
The Death of God	Various	25p	6½p
The Death of Jesus	Joel Carmichael	25p	5½p
Freud and Christianity	R. S. Lee	22½p	5½p
Human Rights	Peter Archer	15p	3p
Age of Reason	Thomas Paine	17½p	3p
Rights of Man	Thomas Paine	17½p	3p
The Dead Sea Scrolls	John Allegro	35p	6½p
The Golden Bough	J. G. Fraser	£1.00	12½p
100 Years of Freethought	David Tribe	£2.10	12½p
What Humanism is About	Kit Mouat	52½p	10p
Time Smoulders, and other poems	Kit Mouat	60p	5p
Why I am Not a Christian	Bertrand Russell	15p	3p
Impact of Science on Society	Bertrand Russell	30p	6½p
Authority and the Individual	Bertrand Russell	35p	6½p
Political Ideas	Bertrand Russell	30p	6½p
The Conquest of Happiness	Bertrand Russell	45p	7½p
Marriage and Morals	Bertrand Russell	40p	7½p
Commonsense and Nuclear Warfare	Bertrand Russell	40p	7½p
Unpopular Essays	Bertrand Russell	45p	7½p
Roads of Freedom	Bertrand Russell	30p	6½p
Power	Bertrand Russell	30p	6½p
Legitimacy versus Industrialism	Bertrand Russell	37½p	6½p
Freedom versus Organization	Bertrand Russell	37½p	6½p
Bertrand Russell: the Passionate Sceptic	Alan Wood	42½p	7½p
Bertrand Russell: A Life	Herbert Gottchalk	25p	6½p
Catholic Imperialism and World Freedom	Avro Manhattan	75p	12½p
Catholic Terror Today	Avro Manhattan	62½p	10p
The Bible Handbook	G. W. Foote and W. P. Ball	37½p	6½p
The Vatican Versus Mankind	Adrian Pigott	20p	6½p
President Charles Bradlaugh MP	David Tribe	£4.00	24p
Birth Control	Various	20p	3p
Christianity: The Debit Account	Margaret Knight	3p	3p

● Please make cheques, postal orders, etc., payable to G. W. Foote & Co. Ltd.

● The above list is a selection of publications available. Please send for complete list.

● Orders and enquiries:

G. W. FOOTE & CO. LTD.

103 BOROUGH HIGH STREET, LONDON, SE1. Tel. 01-407 1251

DAVID TRIBE'S PRESIDENT CHARLES BRADLAUGH, MP

£4.00 + 20p postage

Bradlaugh emerges more of a giant than ever: a man, as George Meredith said, "neither to be laughed or sneered down or trampled". Not trampled, certainly. Those who tried it, Royals and the rest, got more than they bargained for, and in these pages, you can still hear the resounding whacks.—Michael Foot, The Evening Standard

G. W. FOOTE & CO.

103 Borough High Street, London, SE1

The Clarence, Whitehall, London, SW1

(One minute from Trafalgar Square)

PUBLIC LECTURES

Friday, 8 October, 8 p.m.

DAVID TRIBE

PRESIDENT CHARLES BRADLAUGH, MP

(Mr Tribe was president of the National Secular Society, 1963-1971. A presentation will be made during the evening.)

Friday, 22 October, 8 p.m.

BARBARA SMOKER

IS DEMOCRACY POSSIBLE—OR DESIRABLE ?

Friday, 5 November, 8 p.m.

AVRO MANHATTAN

RELIGIOUS TREASON AND PLOT, PAST AND PRESENT

Friday, 19 November, 8 p.m.

RICHARD HANDYSIDE

THE LITTLE RED SCHOOLBOOK AND RELATED ISSUES

Friday, 3 December, 8 p.m.

MICHAEL LLOYD-JONES

SEXUAL MYTHOLOGY

Friday, 17 December, 8 p.m.

R. J. CONDON

THE NATIVITY MYTH

Organisers:

NATIONAL SECULAR SOCIETY

THE FREETHINKER

103 Borough High Street, London, SE1

01-407 2717
01-407 1251