

MANKIND'S FESTIVAL OF LIGHT

During Christmas we will be regaled with the usual clerical whinings and bleatings about "Christmas without Christ", which is their way of saying that increasing numbers are recognising the fact it is a pagan winter festival. At a time of peace and goodwill the dechristianising of the festival is a most worthy activity. For the idea of Christ has always divided mankind; in his name and for his sake Christians persecuted, tortured and killed. The Christmas Crib rests uneasily on the broken bones of heretics and unbelievers. It has also separated the Christian minority from the bulk of the world's citizens who either ignore or repudiate that particular brand of superstition. Here in Britain we are living in what the more realistic Church leaders describe as "the post-Christian era". And we should be glad of it. The churches will have larger congregations than usual but that will not be a sign of any religious revival. For many of those who attend Midnight Mass and the carol services are attracted by the beauty of the music and surroundings rather than being religiously motivated. Christmas then, is a festival for everyone, despite the attempts that are made to monopolise it for the propagation of Christianity. We hope that *Freethinker* readers—like those who read the *Church Times*, *Catholic Herald* and *The Jewish Chronicle*—will have a happy Christmas and New Year holiday. Robert G. Ingersoll, the famous American rationalist, wrote the *Essay on Christmas* which is published below.

A Family Occasion

My family and I regard Christmas as a holiday—that is to say, a day of rest and pleasure—a day to get acquainted with each other, a day to recall old memories, and for the cultivation of social amenities. The festival now called Christmas is far older than Christianity. It was known and celebrated for thousands of years before the establishment of what is known as our religion. It is a relic of sun worship. It is the day on which the sun triumphs over the hosts of darkness, and thousands of years before the republic of Rome existed, before one stone of Athens was laid, before the Pharaohs ruled in Egypt, before the religion of Brahma, before Sanscrit was spoken, men and women crawled out of their caves, pushed the matted hair from their eyes, and greeted the triumph of the sun over the powers of the night.

There are many relics of this worship—among which is the shaving of the priest's head, leaving the spot shaven surrounded by hair, in imitation of the rays of the sun. There is still another relic—the ministers of our day close their eyes in prayer. When men worshipped the sun—when they looked at that luminary and implored its assistance, they shut their eyes as a matter of necessity. Afterward, the priests looking at their idols glittering with gems, shut their eyes in flattery, pretending that they could not bear the effulgence of the presence; and today, thousands of years after the old ideas have passed away, the modern parson, without knowing the origin of the custom, closes his eyes when he prays.

There are many other relics and souvenirs of the dead worship of the sun, and this festival was adopted by Egyptians, Greeks, Romans, and by Christians. As a matter of fact, Christianity furnished new steam for an old engine, infused a new spirit into an old religion, and as a matter of course, the old festival remained.

For all of our festivals you will find corresponding pagan festivals. For instance, take the Eucharist, the Communion, where persons partake of the body and blood of the Deity. This is an exceedingly old custom. Among the ancients they ate cakes made of corn in honour of Ceres, and they called these cakes the flesh of the goddess, and they drank the wine in honour of Bacchus, and called this the blood of their god. And so I could go on giving the pagan origin of every Christian ceremony and custom. The probability is that the worship of the sun was once substantially universal, and consequently, the festival of Christ was equally widespread.

The More the Merrier

As other religions have been produced, the old customs have been adapted and continued, so that the result is this festival of Christmas is almost world-wide. It is popular because it is a holiday. Over-worked people are glad of days that bring rest and recreation and allow them to meet their families and their friends. They are glad of days when they give and receive gifts—evidences of friendship, of remembrance and love. It is popular because it is really human, and because it is interwoven with our customs, habits, literature and thoughts.

For my part I am willing to have two or three a year—the more holidays the better. Many people have an idea that I am opposed to Sunday. I am perfectly willing to have two a week. All I insist on is that these days shall be for the benefit of the people, and that they shall be kept not in a way to make folks miserable or sad or hungry, but in a way to make people happy, and to add a little to the joy of life. Of course, I am in favour of everybody keeping holidays to suit himself, provided he does not interfere with others, and I am perfectly willing that everybody should go to church on that day, provided he is willing that I should go somewhere else.

GANDHI AND ATHEISM

GORA

The writer, who is one of India's leading atheists, was closely associated with Gandhi. He founded the Atheistic Centre in Andhra Pradesh, and has tirelessly campaigned against religious superstition. Like Gandhi, Gora was imprisoned on a number of occasions during the struggle for Indian independence.

Gandhi's greatness lay in his openmindedness and not in faith in god which he had learnt from his mother. As he his faith in god. Of course, he started with conventional grew with an open mind, he changed the content of god, when fresh facts appeared to him. On 31st, October, 1931, he wrote in *Young India*: "I would say with those who say God is Love, God is love. But deep down in me I used to say that God may be God; God is Truth, above all. If it is possible for the human tongue to give the fullest description, I have come to the conclusion that for myself God is Truth. But two years ago, I went to a step further and said Truth is God. And I came to that conclusion after a continuous and relentless search after Truth which began nearly fifty years ago. I then found that the nearest approach to Truth was through love. But I also found that love has many meanings in the English language at least and that human love in the sense of passion could become a degraded thing also. I found, too, that love in the sense of *Ahimsa* had only a limited number of votaries in the world. But I never found a double meaning in connection with truth and not even the atheists had demurred to the necessity or power of truth. But in their passion for discovering truth the atheists have not hesitated to deny the very existence of God from their own point of view rightly. And it was because of this reasoning that I saw that rather than say God is Truth I should say Truth is God. I recall the name of Charles Bradlaugh who delighted to call himself an atheist, but knowing as I do something of him, I would never regard him as an atheist. I would call him a god-fearing man, though, I know, he would reject the claim. His fact would redden if I would say, "Mr Bradman". I would automatically disarm his criticism by saying, "you are a truth-fearing man and not a God-fearing man". I would automatically disarm his criticism by saying that Truth is God, as I have disarmed the criticism of many a young man."

I have extensively quoted Gandhi to illustrate, firstly, that Gandhi's conception of god was changing from "love" to "truth", for the reasons which he had explained; and secondly, he was not only not averse to atheism but admired atheists on account of their devotion to truthfulness. When Gandhi was prepared to call Charles Bradlaugh a truth-fearing man instead of a god-fearing man, he made his choice that he preferred devotion to truth to faith in god. Though he reasonably took pride in "disarming the criticism of many a young man", evidently of atheistic leanings, he was actually moving nearer atheists when he shifted the emphasis from god to truth in the two propositions, "God is Truth" and "Truth is God". He did not regard the two propositions equal, but considered the latter an improvement on the former as he admitted he "went a step further".

Ever Growing

That was in 1931. As he was openminded, he proceeded further later on. Two of his utterances indicate the growth of his ideas on the one hand and the restraint he imposed on himself for full and free expression. He wrote in *Harijan*

of 30 September, 1939: "At the time of writing I never think of what I have said before. My aim is not to be consistent with my previous statements on a given question, but to be consistent with truth as it may present itself to me at a given moment. The result has been that I have grown from truth to truth".

Then again on 28 July, 1946, he wrote in *Harijan*: "It is one thing for me to hold certain views and quite another to make my views acceptable in their entirety to the society at large. My mind, I hope, is ever growing, ever moving forward. All may not keep pace with it. I have, therefore, to exercise utmost patience and be satisfied with hastening slowly". So Gandhi was more radical in his views than he commonly told. He felt the responsibilities of a leader of millions of people and was content to "hasten slowly". Nevertheless he never minced matters when he was faced with challenges.

Secularism

1946 and 1947 were the years when the communal tensions assumed ghastly proportions in India. Gandhi saw that the method of communal harmony did not work any longer satisfactorily. Therefore, he boldly told at the prayer meeting on the 23 August, 1947, that "religion was a personal matter and if we succeeded in confining it to the personal plane, all would be well in our political life... If officers of the Government as well as members of the public undertook the responsibility and worked wholeheartedly for the creation of a secular State, then only could we build a new India that would be the glory of the world". Gandhi clearly supported secularism, when it helped to establish peace among people. He did not fanatically or sentimentally cling to religious belief.

When I stayed with him at Sevagram Ashram, I and my associates in atheism never attended the prayers and Gandhi did not object to our absence. Later, when he offered to perform the marriage of my daughter, he agreed to drop the mention of god in the form of the ceremony in deference to my wishes.

A Man of Man

The quotes and anecdotes cited above go to show that Gandhi was moving towards atheism. He was a man of man rather than a man of god. He started with conventional faith in god and with an open mind proceeded to serve fellowmen. He was not the man to flinch from leaving faith in god, if he found that it stood in the way of service to the peace and progress of humanity. His emphasis on truth, which is but a social need unlike faith which is sentimental, his support for secularism if it solved the communal differences, and his consent to drop mention of god in the form of my daughter's marriage go to show that his greatness lay in his bold open-mindedness and not in conventional and sentimental faith in god. We honour Gandhi's memory and continue his work, not when we conduct prayers and stick to religion, but when we propagate atheism and establish secularism.

A little while ago the National Secular Society received a packet containing a number of cheques and bills of exchange made out by Charles Bradlaugh. Will the person who sent these please make him or herself known to us, so that the gift may be acknowledged.

CHRISTIANITY AND NERO'S ROME

ROBERT W. MORRELL

In a recent article (*Freethinker*, 20 November, 1971) Philip Hinchliff wrote: "We know that the trial of Paul took place in Rome under Nero . . ." We know nothing of the sort. There are no Roman accounts of the trial of Paul, nor are Christian sources any more forthcoming. We find nothing of Paul's trial in Acts, no reference in Tacitus none in Suetonius, nor in the so-called *Epistle of Clement Romanus*. All we have are late traditions which Hinchliff has now elevated into a fact. As there are also traditions which place Paul's death outside Rome and which consequently contradict each other, it becomes a matter of personal opinion as to which is adopted.

The *Epistle of Clement Romanus* mentions the death of Paul but does not locate it for certain in Rome. It also claims that a vast multitude perished but whether during the reign of Nero is anything but clear. Obviously if a vast multitude perished for their part in the fire of Rome, or alleged part, then we could expect to find some confirmation in the works of other Roman writers of the period. The obvious source is Suetonius, and we certainly find a reference to the fire, what we do not find is any association between the Christians and the fire, all we are told later is that Nero punished the Christians; we are not told why, nor are we given any indication of the numbers involved.

What in fact constitutes a "vast multitude"? Clement, Tacitus and Suetonius are all silent. The population of Rome at this period was considerable, estimated to be way over a million. However, there is evidence from two sources that the Christian population of Rome was very small, in fact there are even some clues in the New Testament in respect of this. Suetonius tells us in his *Twelve Caesars* that Claudius had expelled "the Jews" from Rome because they had been instigated by one Chrestus to cause trouble. This might refer to the Christians as Chrestus was habitually used instead of Christus to refer to Christ. On the other hand it could refer to conflict between Christians and Jews, of which we have considerable information from various sources during the first two centuries of the Christian era. In Acts we are told that almost the first thing Paul did on arrival in Rome was to seek out and talk with local Jewish leaders, who, strange to relate, knew nothing about the Christians other than that they were everywhere spoken about (Acts 21 : 26 and 28 : 17). Just where, then, did the multitude referred to by Clement and Tacitus come from, unless, of course, Nero's officials lumped Jews and Christians together? Dio Cassius confirms Suetonius' story of the expulsion from Rome with, however, a significant difference, in that instead of just Jews he refers to meetings, or, as it has also been translated, "synagogues".

Christian Propaganda

On the surface the reference by Dio Cassius to "synagogues" would appear to confirm that it was Jews and not Christians who were expelled from Rome and also substantiate Philip Hinchliff's assertion that there was no confusion on the part of the Romans in distinguishing between Jews and Christians. Such is not the case. The very early Christian work, *The Shepherd*, written by one Hermas in Rome, shows that the Christians identified themselves as Jews. It also illustrates the danger of looking at the issue from one side only, as Hinchliff does. We can learn far more about what the Romans thought of Jews and Christians if we examine what the Christians thought of themselves, and also the relationship between Jews and Christians seen in the documents that have been

preserved. *The Shepherd* shows that the Christians looked upon themselves as the new Israel, that they were in fact true Jews. The work views the Church as the synagogue on earth, but represented ideally as a tower constructed from material derived from 12 mountains—clearly the 12 tribes. Hinchliff contends that by the time of the Flavians there could be no confusion between Jews and Christians by the Romans, however, this assumes that the Romans viewed the relationship on theological rather than political grounds. The weight of evidence supports that it was the latter which decided their approach, thus when Origen in *Contra Celsum* writes of the period of the Jewish-Roman wars he is happy to note that the Romans gave far better treatment to the Christians than to unauthorised imitators of Judaism. The clear implication here is that the Christians were truly Jewish. This, then, is what the Christian propaganda presented to the Roman world, that they were the new Israel, and in consequence the Romans looked upon them as Jewish. However, like many other imperial races they were aware that Judaism was not a single monolithic unit and so sought to play off one sect against the other. This is evident in a letter recently discovered in a cave at Murabba'at near Jerusalem, the writer, Bar Kosba, leader of the 132-5 Jewish revolt, viewed the Christians as potentially hostile but did not consider them un-Jewish. It also explains why the Jewish insurgents persecuted the Christians for not joining them. In short, to orthodox Judaism Christianity was a heresy within the context of Judaism and not a new religion. I would thus suggest that the Romans were confused but not for the reasons Hinchliff suggests, instead I would maintain that the Christians themselves presented their faith as Jewish. Only at a much later stage did Christianity assume a distinct identity, but this is another tale.

Seeking Martyrdom

Philip Hinchliff rejects the possibility that the Tacitus passage is an interpolation. His reasons for doing so arise from the fact that it is critical of Christianity, however, if we read it in full we note that it is far from being so disparaging as he maintains. In fact the concluding part reveals a distinct sympathy towards the Christians. There is a strange quality associated with the Tacitus passage and when I first read it I was reminded of Livy's account of the Bacchanal conspiracy. There is such a similarity that it could almost be suggested that it was a re-write of Livy, and it is not asking too much to suggest that a Christian who knew his Roman authors could have adapted the passage to make it appear that Tacitus witnessed not only to Jesus but also to the Neronian persecution—that is, of course, when it became popular to show the early years as the heroic age of the faith. We tend to view martyrdom as something to feel sympathy towards, however, many years after the supposed Neronian persecution the Christian writer Sulpicius Severus wrote that the confessors (the early Christians) sought martyrdom with an eagerness akin to the clerics of his day in pursuit of bishoprics. It's an illuminating little comment which sheds a great deal of light upon the development of the Christian attitude towards persecution and martyrdom. In *The Shepherd*, one of the earliest of Christian apologetics, it is looked upon as part of the faith, something to be expected; by the time of Sulpicius it was not so welcome and used as an illustration of past suffering rather than what should be accepted philosophically. It also explains why the desire to create a Neronian persecution should arise.

FREETHINKER

editor: WILLIAM McILROY

103 Borough High Street,
London, SE1

Telephone: 01-407 1251

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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 officer, 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.

Always wanted: books on freethought and kindred subjects. Will call anywhere in the United Kingdom. Immediate settlement and clearance. Nelson's Bookroom, Lydbury North, Shropshire; telephone Lydbury North 219.

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.

Eastbourne Humanist, Group, The New Hotel, Eastbourne, Saturday, 18 December, 7 p.m. for 7.15 p.m. Annual Dinner. Tickets £1.40.

Humanist Holidays. Annual General Meeting and Reunion, Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London, WC1, Friday, 7 January, 6.30 p.m.—9 p.m. Refreshments; admission 20p. Ski party to Norway, 26 February for two weeks. Easter at Bristol (no single rooms left). Whitby, Yorkshire, 19 August—2 September. Details: Marjorie Mepham, 29 Fairview Road, Sutton, Surrey. Telephone 01-642 8796.

Leicester Secular Society, Secular Hall, 75 Humberstone Gate, Leicester, Sunday, 19 December, 6.30 p.m. A meeting.

South Place Ethical Society, Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London, WC1, Sunday, 19 December, 11 a.m.

NEWS

HAIR

The celebration of Holy Communion in St Paul's Cathedral to mark the third anniversary of the London opening of *Hair* produced a predictable storm of protest. No doubt the public relations boys' Christmas will be all the merrier, and the producers' New Year will be very prosperous because of the rumpus. Those silly, short-sighted Christians who have been protesting against the exhibition at St Paul's have learned nothing from the campaigns to ban shows like *Oh! Calcutta!* and books like *Everything You Always Wanted to Know About Sex*. Supporters of organisations ranging from the Festival of Light to the Gay Liberation Front have made asses of themselves, whilst the promoters have gleefully raked in the profits resulting from the extra publicity.

The decision to celebrate the *Hair* anniversary with Holy Communion was hardly appropriate. Certainly it is a notable achievement to fill the huge Shaftesbury Theatre for three years, but surely a more sensible form of celebration could have been devised. After all the *Hair* company must include non-Christian religionists and atheists. Those Christian members of the cast who wish to participate in a symbolic act of cannibalism are perfectly free to do so in their own churches. But the collective celebration of the anniversary could have more usefully taken the form of a concert in aid of charity or some of those organisations which have worked over the years to produce a climate of opinion in which *Hair* could be successfully produced.

MILITARY EYESORES

The Countryside Commission, in evidence to the Defence Lands Review Commission, has called for "substantial reductions" of defence land holdings in National Parks and Heritage Coast areas. The Commission says that arrangements should be made to improve the generally unkempt and untidy appearance which is characteristic of many defence holdings, and point out that two thirds of the derelict structures mapped as coastal eyesores are of military origin.

The Commission refers to the steadily intensifying pressure on the countryside and coastline by an increasingly numerous, leisured and mobile population. It declares: "Without effective planning and management more trespass, traffic congestion and pollution of various kinds are likely to result in conflicts between the public and those who manage rural land, and in unnecessary environmental damage. In the management of countryside and coastal land holdings, therefore, it is in the interests of all landowners and particularly public authority landowners to consider in consultation with the local planning authorities the possible impact of recreation on their land. This may mean zoning of areas or allocation to different uses at different times. A corollary of intensified public access must be increased attention to the removal of potential hazards to life and limb and to an improvement in general aesthetic standards. Land management practices should seek to secure as attractive an environment as possible."

The submissions to the Defence Lands Review Committee include one map and six tables, and free copies are obtainable from the Countryside Commission, 1 Cambridge Gate, Regents Park, London, NW1.

SAND NOTES

NSS RESOLUTION

At its monthly meeting on 8 December the Executive Committee of the National Secular Society noted with grave concern that hostilities have broken out on the Indian sub-continent. The Committee was of the opinion that the suppression of democracy by the military leadership of West Pakistan, followed by unprecedented brutalities by the army on their own citizens, had been the root cause of the conflict. West Pakistan's obstinate refusal to make any concessions to world opinion by releasing the elected leader of East Bengal, so that negotiations could take place, escalated the conflict and resulted in the present outbreak of hostilities.

The Committee passed a resolution stating "that any proposal for a cease-fire between India and Pakistan, which does not attempt to solve the fundamental cause of the conflict, is an attempt to provide a respite for the Pakistani leadership to continue on its present disastrous path. The Committee is pleased to note that Her Majesty's Government has not associated itself with such attempts at the United Nations. However, with the recognition of Bangla Desh by India, the inevitable and just solution of the problem is nearer. The Committee feels that HMG should now abandon its neutrality at the United Nations and recognise the Government of Bangla Desh, thus hastening peace on the Indian sub-continent".

REPORT ON BRAZIL

Brazil is the subject of the latest report published today by the Minority Rights Group, the independent international unit which has previously investigated and reported on minorities in Russia, Ireland, Japan and Africa. Its author, Anani Dzidzienyo, recently returned from Brazil and is now a research fellow at the Institute of Race Relations in London.

The report focusses on prejudice against black people in Brazil, a problem which has rarely previously been investigated amongst Brazil's other issues. The author strongly refutes the usual idea that, racially, Brazil is a "café-au-lait" democracy and is the one country in the world where opportunities are open to all irrespective of racial origin. "At present", he writes, "the black man's position in Brazil can only be described as being virtually outside the main stream of society. He is almost completely unrepresented in any area involving decision-making: with relatively few exceptions he is not to be seen in government, administration, business or commerce, except at the lowest levels where manual labour is required." As in some other countries, "the only areas where he plays a significant, rather than a menial, role are in football and entertainment".

The Position of Blacks in Brazilian Society is obtainable from the Minority Rights Group, 36 Craven Street, London, WC2; price 30p (plus 5p postage).

Another prominent Roman Catholic is complaining because "Our Lady" is now taking a back seat. In his Advent pastoral, Bishop Resticaux of Plymouth deplored the fact that in some churches you have to search around before you find her shrine. And it seems that "hymns to Our Lady are sung more rarely than before, and many people seem to have forgotten the rosary. In fact, among the young there are some who have not yet heard of it."

GOD AND GOTT

NIGEL SINNOTT

The name of John William Gott will, I fear, be familiar only to a handful of our older readers; but, as 50 years ago his case was championed repeatedly in the *Freethinker*, this would seem to be a suitable occasion to commemorate him.

Gott was one of the last people to be sent to prison for "the manufactured and theological offence" of blasphemy. On 9 December, 1921, after a re-trial, he was sentenced to nine months' imprisonment with hard labour for selling copies of *The Liberator* (which dealt with contraception), *The Rib Tickler*, or *Questions for Parsons*, and *God and Gott* on the streets of West Ham. Inspector Elphinck said "the prisoner was considered a socialist and atheist of the worst type".

Gott's appeal was heard on 16 January, 1922, before the Lord Chief Justice, with Sir Henry Curtis Bennett appearing for the appellant. Sir Henry pointed out that Gott was a diabetic, and 55 years of age, and the sentence was therefore, if nothing else, excessive. The appeal was refused: "Nine months is not too long for a person who has previously been three times convicted . . ." for what His Lordship considered was "this most dangerous class of crime".

Gott served his sentence in Wormwood Scrubs, despite the pleas of rationalists and religious alike. After his release in August 1922, Chapman Cohen, then editor of the *Freethinker*, found Gott "quite broken in health and it is evident that his long term of imprisonment has been too much for him". The Deputy Prison Chaplain was of much the same opinion: "Well, Gott, you are going out and I do not think you will live long. You will not be able to carry on your evil work much longer".

"Long or short", was Gott's stoical reply, "I shall do my best to end your creed."

Cohen, realising that Gott needed several months' complete rest in order to convalesce, published an appeal for donations in the *Freethinker* of 1 October. The response was indeed generous, but alas, too late: Gott died on 4 November, 1922, and was buried in Bradford four days later. "It might be too much", wrote Cohen, "to say that Mr Gott's last term of imprisonment killed him, but there can be no doubt that it materially shortened his life. And that, together with the fact that men are still imprisoned for speaking disrespectfully of the idiotic and sometimes obscene doctrines of Christianity, is what every Freethinker worthy of the name will bear in mind".

Fifty years on, the *Freethinker* salutes the memory and self-sacrifice of a brave old campaigner.

"Cowards die many times;

"The valiant tast of death but only once."

CHURCH WEALTH

A conference recently held in Ireland, and attended by 200 political and religious representatives, heard some uncomfortable truths about the wealth of the Roman Catholic Church. Sister Stanislaus, who works at a social service centre, told the audience: "We cannot dismiss comments on the Church's wealth as mere rumours. Even if they cannot be proved, they remain a scandal".

Sister Stanislaus went on to say: "The bishop who lives like a millionaire will tell you how much he is to be pitied because his diocese is £30,000 in debt. The priest returning from his holiday on the Continent is convinced that his style of living is just one degree removed from destitution."

The conference was informed by a bishop that the gap between rich and poor in Ireland is getting bigger

BOOKS

RADICAL SQUIBS AND ROYAL RIPOSTES: SATIRICAL PAMPHLETS OF THE REGENCY PERIOD, 1818-1821. Selected and Annotated by Edgell Rickworth.

Adams and Dart, £2.50.

Imagine rustic ballads on the Queen Mother feeding great tits in St James's Park or the Earl and Countess of Snowdon doing their own thing in Hyde Park, with illustrations by Gerald Scarfe, and you may have some idea of political pamphleteering in its golden age. Of course we do have what my underground friends will hate me for calling lightweight and pretty uninformed imitations of that sort of thing. What has gone wrong is difficult to say. I suppose the talent is still around. But the social climate is different: on the one hand too genteel; on the other, too noisy. Our modern "popular" parodists have neither the scholarship nor the temperament to achieve exact parallels or subtle innuendo. Perhaps we no longer have the right targets. Who could possibly compare our own Prince of Wales with the Prince Regent or "Sailor" Heath with "Doctor" Sidmouth?

Probably the most famous of Regency parodists was William Hone, best remembered for his parodies of the *Book of Common Prayer*. A good example of these, for which he was unsuccessfully prosecuted in 1817, is given in Edgell Rickworth's introduction. It is taken from *John Wilkes's Catechism*: "QUESTION: Rehearse the articles of thy belief. ANSWER: I believe in George, the Regent Almighty, maker of New Streets, and Knights of the Bath. And in the present Ministry, his only choice, who were conceived of Toryism, brought forth of William Pitt, suffered loss of Place under Charles James Fox, were execrated, dead and buried. In a few months they rose again from their minority: they re-ascended to the Treasury benches, and sit at the right hand of a little man with a large wig: from whence they laugh at the Petition of the People who may pray for Reform, and that the sweat of their brow may procure them bread". Beautifully apposite, if too earnest and protracted at the end. In the present text, derived from a slightly later date, we have further satirical prose. From *The Political Showman—at Home!* (1821) comes this tribute to the bishops as "The Locust"; "The Locust is a destructive insect, of the GRILL US tribe. They are so numerous, and so rapacious, that they may be compared to an ARMY, purusing its march to devour the fruits of earth, as an instrument of *divine displeasure* towards a devoted country . . . Many are so *venomous*, that persons *handling* them are immediately stung, and seized with shivering and trembling; but it has been discovered that, in most cases, their hateful qualities are completely assuaged by *palm oil*". Most of the parodies are, however, in verse.

Hone's most immediate success was *The Political House That Jack Built* (1819), inspired by the Peterloo massacre, public outcry and government repression that followed, as well as by the famous nursery rhyme. Included is a tribute to the Prince Regent:

This is THE MAN—all shaven and shorn,
All covered with Order—and all forlorn:
THE DANDY OF SIXTY,
 who bows with a grace,
And has *taste* in wigs, collars,
 cuirasses and lace:
Who, to tricksters, and fools,
 leaves the State and its treasure,

FREETHINKER

And, when Britain's in tears,
 sails about at his pleasure:
Who spurn'd from his presence
 the Friends of his youth,
And now has not one
 who will tell him the truth.

Soon after this came *The Man in the Moon* (1820), prompted by George's Speech from the Throne introducing the 1819-20 session and foreshadowing the notorious Six (Gagging) Acts.

MY L-rds and G-tl-n,

I grieve to say,
That poor old Dad,
Is just as—bad,

As when I met you here
 the other day.

'Tis pity that these cursed State Affairs
Should take you from your pheasants and your hares
Just now:

But lo!

CONSPIRACY and TREASON are abroad!

One way in which the radicals of that period resembled those of our own was their propensity to gild gingerbread causes and the vulnerability of some of their own members, e.g. Cobbett, to counter-attack. Hone did his best with the fat, adulterous Queen Caroline, whom he painted as the innocent victim of the fat, adulterous George IV, but one detects an element of propagandist strain in

Undaunted in spirit, her courage arose,
With encrease of charges, and encrease of foes.
Despising her husband,

 who thus had abused her,

She proved to his father,

 his son had ill used her:

Her conduct examin'd, and sifted, shone bright,

Her enemies fled, as the shadows of night.

(*The Queen's Matrimonial Ladder*, 1820)

In his foreword E. R. May observes that "the Loyalists were hard put to it to mount a counter-attack; the appeal of their pamphlets was limited and none of them caught the popular fancy. But they provide valuable evidence of the frame of mind with which the Radicals had to reckon, an unreasoning hostility to every innovation which appeared to threaten the inbred privileges of an effete caste". I do not feel that this does full justice to the Loyalist lampoons. Personally I preferred their account of Caroline to Hone's, on satirical grounds at any rate. In *The New Pilgrim's Progress* (1820) the "frowsy nymph" is described in her progress through Europe with the gigolo Bartolomeo Bergami and a Continental retinue:

Now the suite begin to doubt here,

She looks out for fresh recruits,

Nothing *English* left about her

But a book of *cheques* on COUTTS.

Hone, who wanted to be remembered as a scholar rather than a parodist, rivalled Sir Walter Scott's erudition in the ease whereby he found germane quotations for every second page. Equal learning is displayed by the anonymous authors of *The Political "A, Apple-Pie"* (1820) and the *Extraordinary Red Book* on which it was based, an invaluable documentation of jobs for Regency boys. But the present volume will be cherished and dipped into again and again for its illustrations, most of them by the justly celebrated George Cruikshank.

DAVID TRIBE

REVIEWS

ANIMALS, MEN AND MORALS

Edited by Stanley and Rosilind Godlovitch and John Harris. Gollancz, £2.20.

Perhaps the tendency to see animals and men as if they formed opposing camps is the most dangerous trend in these essays. As we have observed, it is human beings themselves who finally and inevitably suffer when man has numbed his gentler feelings towards warm-blooded creatures. The more civilised man becomes, in fact, the more all animals benefit—humans included. There is no clash of interests.

And yet . . . the whole problem facing man today is in essence the problem of his relationship with Nature: his own nature in its warmongering; his pollution of Nature's earth and seas by his excretions; his pollution by population; his ineptitude in his confrontation with the feminine, personifying Nature. As I have said more fully in my new book, *The Emerging Ethic*, I believe that it is only by getting this basic relationship with Nature right that man will solve the other evils of human existence and also begin to put right the harm he inflicts on his animal companions on this globe.

Harm them he certainly does. We know of the rapid progress of the magnificent whale towards extinction because of man's childish greed; we know that the gorgeous big cats are going the same way because man likes to exhibit his plastic women folded in their dead skins. We know that beautiful insects and beneficial insects both are dying out because of his stupidity with chemicals. Read this book and you will know a great deal more about the matter, and you will find it is even more horrible and that man is even more depraved than you realised.

Such facts cannot but fill an ethical breast with rage and sorrow. But I found myself swinging from one sort of fury to another as I read. Hopes are aroused at the opening sentences of the Introduction by the joint editors: "Our general approach demands only that the reader considers the issues rationally . . .", but as one reads on, this hope is dashed. In fact, I found this a very irritating book, bursting with the same conscious virtue as one finds in the writings of the Venerable Bede and the *Short History of the CPSU*. Moreover, a principle that one must follow, if one is really seeking to convince others on a matter about which one feels emotionally, is that one's presentation must be carefully cool, logical and professional. Some of the essayists recognise this principle; notably Brigid Brophy, Richard Ryder and Terence Hegarty, who give full and helpful references to a well-reasoned case, though I do not agree with all they say. Some recognise it but cannot resist the odd jab at outsiders—such as John Harris: "There are no real arguments in favour of killing animals for food; I have tried to demonstrate this by examining a few of the best I have come across—the pick of a pretty bedraggled bunch". This brings me to what I find the main fault of the book, that the real objections to its arguments are hardly dealt with at all, while a lot of inept attitudes are mercilessly massacred in a toffee-nosed fashion.

Let me say at once that as far as vivisection is concerned I find the book convincing as a whole, and informative. There is no doubt that the law on this question could be improved. But on the question of man's relationship with animals (and I suppose I come into David Wood's category, "The Evasive Intellectual", though I have thought more than "mildly", and do not regard the matter

as a "mere passing cloud in skies of thought") I find that my own conclusions are hardly dealt with at all. The truth, surely, is that we human beings are reaching a sort of adolescence of moral thought in which we are coming to realise that ethical questions rarely, if ever, submit to a black and white answer. The primitive paternalism of the Ten Commandments no longer suffices; moral situations must be judged in their context. Marriage, murder or meat-eating can all be justified in certain circumstances but are clearly immoral in others. The answer to the ghastly situation demonstrated by *Animals, Men and Morals* is as complex as those to most other ethical problems. Of course it is callously inhuman to de-beak chickens with a hot knife-blade for our tables; to inject chemicals into the brains of cats so that they die in agony to satisfy the curiosity of our researchers; to keep civet cats in terrible conditions and strip their genitals every nine days for our perfumes. Of course we should seek to avoid experimenting on animals, along the lines suggested by Terence Hogarty. But these things will only be righted when man at last becomes civilised; when he regains his ability to co-operate and communicate with Nature, and I believe there is not short cut even for the sake of our animal fellows. When man learns to sensibly exploit the laws of science, which are Nature's laws; when he learns how to become a partner of woman, he will learn once again how to become the friend of animals. What we have to fight for is the maturity of man, we cannot achieve anything by attacking on one tiny front without striking at the cause of the trouble.

Another illogical assumption one finds among the polemics of these essayists is that vegetarianism must be right. "The vegan" asserts Ruth Harrison, "who attempts to eschew (eating) all animal production . . . takes the most logical step towards elimination of cruelty, a step to which only a very small but gallant minority have so far devoted their lives". But quite apart from the impossibility of converting all mankind to a non-meat diet, and also the fact that this wouldn't affect vivisection anyway, I don't believe that vegetarianism is the natural human way of life. The omnivorous (i.e. meat-and-veg. eating) character of man is, I believe, as natural and proper as the omnivorous character of, for instance, the fox. And despite John Harris's stern assertion that "the scientific conclusion remains firm: it is not necessary to eat meat", there are plenty of "scientists" (a word almost as misused as "permissive"), specialising in nutrition who have reached a very different conclusion. Brigid Brophy demands that we come to a "general and explicit recognition of other animals' rights". Agreed. But if the fox must be admitted its right to steal the goose living in my orchard, so must I be admitted the right to wring the goose's neck and eat it at Yule. My proposition "finally rests on simple observation of the facts of our nature", as Miss Brophy rightly says it should. It's the *relationship*, one cannot too often stress, that is the crux of the matter. We must respect each other, the fox, the goose and I. And because I have self-awareness, and they have not, I must be more responsible towards them. So if I meet the fox, hunted, I will open my shed door and hide him and face the unspeakable. Confusion is confounded here too by a muddled attitude towards death. I think that we might be said to be the friend of animals in that when we take them for food we deny them old age. I notice that as soon as a wild thing ceases to be healthy it quickly dies. But: "It requires very little moral sense to realise that the taking of life is an important matter" says John Harris in words reminiscent of Norman St John-Stevas at his most papal.

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HUMANIST HOLIDAYS

MARJORIE MEPHAM

At this time of year many readers will be looking through brochures in search of information and ideas for holidays. This article is by a founder, and honorary secretary of Humanist Holidays, an organisation which has operated with considerable success for several years.

Two of us had a happy summer holiday with our children in 1962 at a centre run by an organisation we belong to. It was in a university hostel, and when the juniors were in bed parents and others had only to go downstairs to join in social events with people with whom they had something in common. This was a boon after awkward holidays in hotels, and tiring ones camping, which had provided little mental stimulus for the adults.

After encouragement but some difficulty in tracking down suitable premises, we found our first location, Brantwood, a conference house at Coniston generally used as a natural history centre, but sometimes available for holiday bookings. We secured this for two weeks in late July 1964, advertised in our journals and amongst humanist group friends, and about 40 people were there each week, a third of them children. Some came for a week, some for both weeks. The house overlooks the lake, with a grassy bank running down to the water, and is maintained partly as the John Ruskin museum. He had spent his last years there.

Not knowing what the demand was going to be, we had not attempted to book for summer 1965, as this would have had to be done before our pioneer centre had taken place. However, Dutch Humanist friends had invited a party to visit their conference house, De Ark, at Nunspect. Thirty adults and three children had an interesting holiday there, and we invited our Dutch friends to send a party to our centre in Somerset in 1967, we having meanwhile arranged for a centre for 1966 in Aberystwyth where we enjoyed a sunny fortnight at a seafront university hostel.

In 1967 we arranged two small extra events in addition to the fortnight at Penscot, Somerset: a one-week overflow at our original Brantwood in Coniston, immediately before the Humanist Summer School there, and in addition invited members to spend a week or two in the Wirral, centred on a friend's studio and dabbling in a variety of arts and crafts. Few took this opportunity, but those who went were received with much hospitality by Chester humanists in the area.

Making Ends Meet

The attempt the following year to have a fortnight in Edinburgh for the Festival, at the same time as a seaside centre in Northern Ireland, was not sufficiently supported to prevent a financial loss at each. This was sad, because the Northern Ireland holiday was particularly attractive and greatly enjoyed. We are not profit-making but must have at least enough in the kitty to cover two advance deposits on premises, and any possible disaster. It is difficult being dependent on freethinkers for potential "customers", as by no means all receive or read the references kindly given by the British Humanist Association, National Secular Society, the *Freethinker*, *The Monthly Record* and some local groups. Experience shows that advertising in national journals is unproductive as well as very expensive.

Humanist Holidays had a country centre in Devon in 1969, went to Aberystwyth again in 1970 and to another part of the Lake District, Bassenthwaite, north of Keswick, this year. Some skilled musicians have been found in the ranks; and we are ready to indulge in painting and other

activities as soon as an enthusiast comes and stimulates potential artists. Meeting local humanists at the centres always make an enjoyable occasion. Humanist Holidays are booked at Whitby for an active seaside and moor-walking holiday next August, and hope to make contact with some Yorkshire friends.

This summary does not mention the flourishing Easter Centres, which were started the Easter after the first summer centre. In 1965 we booked for 40 people at a small hotel in Brighton, and have since been each Easter at resorts in the south of England, usually by the sea, though at Bath in 1970 and to be in Bristol in 1972. Most people stay about five days at these popular spring reunions.

In January 1965, the holiday group became a subscription organisation, originally charging five shillings per annum and from 1971 fifty pence, per family. Three-quarters of this year's visitors had been to previous centres.

Making the Choice

Mention must be made of other small pioneer ventures so far attempted, such as at Christmas last year on the Isle of Wight, and a brief trip to Amsterdam recently, arranged through a travel agency. These did not attract sufficient support to be repeated immediately, but the experiences were helpful as well as enjoyable. Such members willing to take care of them, as is the case with developments depend largely on suggestions and help from the Youth Camps run most years, and the small ski parties taken to Norway in February. New places in this country are found usually by choosing a location, writing to the town for a brochure, and discovering whether there are any hotels or similar places of suitable size and price willing to take the party at the time required. Some will not take children, or have only shared bedrooms. It is essential for a committee member or a friend to find an opportunity to visit the premises before the final clinch—there can be all the difference between brochure and actuality!

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Maureen Duffy seems to me to probe the deepest and get nearest to the truth in a fascinating essay, "Beasts for Pleasure", the excellence of which renders its lack of references all the more exasperating. ("The reader is referred to any unbowdlerised collection of broadsides", she writes, as though one can pick these up at the village bookshop, and goes on to quote tantalising snippets.) She remarks: "From their own angles both men and women can find pleasure in hunting and conquering (the fox and the otter), a pleasure that isn't accessible to reason since it's based on strong psychological needs". Precisely, and the only way to deal with such needs is to channel them into equally satisfying but more adult pastimes. When communities ignore the rites of Dionysus, Nature forces acknowledgment in some other fashion. The rest of the writers in *Animals, Men and Morals* fall into the same error as Lord Longford; the belief that the answer to the problem lies in self-denying prohibition, when in fact what is needed is self-knowledge and self-realisation.

This book should be on the shelves of every school library. It will start many a fertile argument, but it does not in itself point the way to any answer to the man-animal relationship because the only real solution to the problem it propounds lies at the end of that long hard road towards the maturity of man.

AVRIL FOX