

THE FREETHINKER

The Secular
and Humanist
Weekly

Registered at the Post Office as a Newspaper

FOUNDED 1881 BY G. W. FOOTE

Vol. 92, No. 2

Saturday, 8 January 1972

3p

ROYAL RUMPUS OVER POPULATION PROBLEM

"You could ask if it would be possible to tax people for having children, and there is certainly something to be said for this." These were the words of Prince Philip during a summing-up speech at a recent symposium on "Health and the Environment" in Edinburgh. A family with eight children, he said, "would cost £30,000 in ten years for education, family allowances, and social security; and this doesn't take into account other subsidies". He went on further to say that he thought that birth control should be made easily obtainable, and that the 1967 Abortion Act was helping to control the present population level.

The reaction, of course, has been predictable: the Catholic Marriage Advisory Council made angry noises about "materialism", and the Moderator of the Church of Scotland trotted out the old it-might-have-been-a-genius inanity: "One of this family of eight could turn out to be another Fleming—the discoverer of penicillin".

Mr Nicholas Fogg, of Christian Action, accused the Duke of Edinburgh of "knocking the poor" and others of his critics have not been slow to point out that the Duke has a family well above the national average in size, and that he has recently been awarded a £25,000 a year increase in his state allowance. Now this paper has no great reputation for love of the monarchy, but credit should be given where it is due. The need for a responsible approach to population control is one of the most pressing of our age, though financial sanctions against those who produce large numbers of children are clearly not the remedy, especially as large families "overtax" themselves already (in a different sense), but it is at least refreshing to see members of the Royal Family sticking their necks out in support of some radical idea instead of being bland, opinionless or reactionary figureheads. Those who accuse Prince Philip of hypocrisy would do well to consider whether they are so free from it themselves, and if hypocrisy, within the bounds of moderation and restraint, is really such a vice at all. Emerson had hard words to say about those who made a fetish of consistency, and, in the case of the Duke of Edinburgh's stand on birth control one would have thought "better late than never".

NEW CAMPAIGN AGAINST ABORTION

The church militant has not been restricting its activities to contraception, however. The spring offensive of the anti-abortionists has started early this year with a prominent advertisement by SPUC (*alias* the Society for the Propagation of Unwanted Children) in the Anglican and Catholic press: "Some babies will never see Christmas (over 100,000 this year alone) as a result of the Abortion Act. On the Day of the Holy Innocents please pray: for those unborn children in danger of being

aborted . . . For babies who have been aborted and for their mothers. For those involved in the fight against abortion that their numbers may grow daily". The Society for the Protection of Unborn Children followed this up with an all-night vigil outside Westminster Abbey, and a march through Manchester of priests, uniformed nurses, and *schoolchildren*. Well, at least the pro-abortion lobby do not exploit children as demonstration fodder, and one cannot help but wonder if those of SPUC's camp-followers who have pretensions to calling themselves "humanists" also joined in this melodramatic surfeit of prayer.

Nobody pretends that abortion is a pretty business, or that it is, *per se*, desirable. It would never be needed if we all lived in a Utopia of fool-proof contraception and perfect "self control", but we do not. We therefore require abortion as a sad, but effective, means of ameliorating certain types of human tragedy. And if there is anything sadder or more unpleasant than abortion it must surely be the methods and attitudes of those who oppose it.

Assuming that the figure of 100,000 is roughly correct for the number of abortions carried out last year, one wonders if the anti-abortionists have seriously contemplated what would have become of those foetuses had they been brought to full term. Some, probably quite a small minority, would have been accepted, loved, and looked after by their natural or adoptive parents; and the rest, unwanted, resented and unloved, would have become the battered babies and then the problem children of tomorrow, drifting from broken homes to courts and institutions, finally to become the drug addicts and petty criminals of the future; to commit suicide or add to the heavy burden of the psychiatric services. Others, in a desperate search for acceptance and love would drift into ill-considered sexual encounters and themselves produce more unwanted children, and so the ghastly pattern would be perpetuated. Is that what LIFE and SPUC really want? It is high time the anti-abortion lobby took off their rose-tinted spectacles of wishful thinking, dropped their pretended humanitarianism, and faced the cruel reality that there are indeed such things as fates worse than death; and one of those fates is being born into this world unwanted.

THE RELIGION OF SECULARISM

J. STEWART ROSS

It is unfortunate that studies of late Victorian secularism have concentrated heavily upon the political aspects of the movement, assuming this to have been its primary interest. The bias is of course understandable because of the domination of the movement at that time by Charles Bradlaugh, a man who was before everything else an extremely ambitious politician. By his imposing personality and magnificent oratory he pulled the National Secular Society along his twisting path to the House of Commons. Bradlaugh's opinions were, overtly, virtually synonymous with those of the NSS. The relationship was one of mutual benefit: to the floundering, disunited movement of 1859 Bradlaugh gave unity, purpose and organisation, while the secularists in return paraded and spoke on his behalf, and clapped at the appropriate places in his Gladstonesque speeches.

As long as Bradlaugh remained in charge of the leading secularist organisation, he was not going to let it follow paths that were not to his liking and the paths that appealed to him most were political ones. It is significant that he was unable to work for long with any other male secularist in a relationship that was other than master and servant. At one time or other Bradlaugh broke with Joseph Barker, Charles and John Watts, G. W. Foote, Reddalls, George Jacob Holyoake, William Stewart Ross ("Saladin"), James Thomson ("B.V.")—in fact with every secularist whose notions as to what secularism should be differed from his own. Annie Besant was the only leading secularist who was permitted to express opinions different to those of Bradlaugh without incurring his antagonism; but his relationship with her was not quite as straightforward as the others. It is behind this great and impressive political facade of Bradlaugh's that one must look to discover the true nature of late Victorian secularism.

Behind the Iconoclast Screen

The sight behind the Iconoclast screen is not an attractive one to present day secularists; perhaps that is why they have refrained from peeping too closely. What is there revealed may still have relevance today. Moncure Conway in his *Autobiography* reports a private conversation that he had with Bradlaugh in 1875:

I maintained in our talks that the word "religion", though etymologically objectionable, could alone represent the sentiment all of us including himself had for the cause nearest to our hearts. The freethinkers also had their altar. When they gave of their substance to build their halls and support their lecturers, none of them would propose to devote the money to relieve the physical sufferings around them. They believed no doubt that secularism if generally adopted would relieve much distress, but the orthodox also included that kind of happiness in their millennial dream. So long as we were devoting our supreme energies to a cause as yet theoretical we had a religion. Bradlaugh agreed with the substance of my statement, but dreaded the connotations of the word "religion". It had so long and univally been associated with gods, ceremonies, superstitions that its use by a freethinker would be misleading unless accompanied each time by elaborate explanations.

Heresy! Maybe, but in the main true. What exactly do we mean by a religion? In her *Autobiography* of 1893 Annie Besant said, "If morality touched by emotion be religion, then truly I was the most religious of atheists". If we expand this definition of Arnold to mean adherence to an ultimately unprovable philosophy of life which is fostered in its believers through ceremony and emotion, then the secularism of the last century certainly was a religion, and Mrs Besant its leading High Priestess. The

secularists had their services of marriage, burial, and "Naming of Infants". These were ill-composed and sentimental to a degree—for example the end of Austin Holyoake's burial service, from *The National Reformer* of 15 November 1868: "As we drop the tear of sympathy at the grave about to close over the once loved form, may the earth lie lightly on him, may the flowers bloom o'er his head and may the winds sigh softly as they herald the coming night. Peace and respect be with his memory. Farewell, a long farewell". In her pamphlet *The Gospel of Atheism*, Annie Besant claimed a form of Positivist immortality of secularists: "The Atheist's immortality is the immortality of the stars; fair and bright and beloved are all the jewelry of the sky, but some outshine the rest; and as the wave-tossed mariner, astray and storm-driven, looks up to the heavens, and guides himself thereby to his home, so do the peoples striving for freedom . . . gaze upwards into Liberty's heaven where shine the hero-souls, 'lighting the way to her shrine', and guided and inspired by the immortals they struggle home to her breast".

Numerous secularist hymn books were produced, ranging from *The Penny Secular Hymn Book* of 1876, to the carefully bound and printed collections of the Failsworth Secular Society and the Leicester Secular Society of 1896 and 1882. Many of the hymns are, if it is possible, in poorer taste than the secular services, but they are nevertheless truly religious in tone and aim. Hymn cvii by Ernest Jones in the *Secular Song and Hymn Book* (authorised by the NSS, edited by Annie Besant), last verse:

(Tune: *The National Anthem*)

The altar's but a sod,
The sceptre but a rod,
A people is a God!
O God! Arise!

There is plenty of evidence in the reports of local secular societies' meetings in the numerous secularist journals that these hymns and services were used.

Positivist Influence

The Positivist influence shown by Annie Besant in her advocacy of an atheistic immortality is also to be seen in the early writings of G. W. Foote, especially in *The Secularist*. He is here, in the number for 26 February 1876, encouraging secularists to make their services more effective: "Look . . . at the wondrous Catholic church—the most perfect type of religious organisation—and try to discover the secret of its strength, the mystery of its influence . . . It lies in the church's purely human element; in its symbolism, its ritual, and its ceremonies, which appeal to the imagination, and in its subtly continued means of ministering to every great emotional want".

The further one gets from the influence of Charles Bradlaugh, who constantly sought to give secularism an immediately political purpose in accordance with his own wishes, the more explicit becomes the religious side of secularism. Nowhere is this more clearly set out than in the addendum to the pamphlet of G. C. Griffith-Jones ("Lara", of the *Secular Review*), entitled *Mokanna Unveiled*; the addendum is called "On the Relations Existing Between Secularism and Politics". The whole work is a bitter attack on Bradlaugh by one of the most prolific of

(Continued on back page)

A MISS WORLD FRACAS

WILLIAM WELSH

My competence as a news *reader* was not in question. But the job lost its novelty for me. Above all, it barred the way to more creative work, of which, rightly or wrongly, I imagined myself capable.

Having neither the patience nor the capacity for sustained effort required of a writer, I determined to achieve some kind of success in a field of BBC work other than news reading.

My opportunity came out of the blue. Quite fortuitously, in fact. I was used to dining at Broadcasting House. But I wanted a change. Something to cheer me, that dismal Monday lunch time on a dismal November day. I ventured into the portals of BBC Television Studios.

I was just finishing my first ham sandwich when quite involuntarily I turned round from the Canteen snack bar to find myself face to face with, would you believe it, the Controller of Popular Programmes. He knew me, of course, but not intimately. But he kept a shrewd eye on employees, whether in radio or TV.

"Surprised to find you here, Sneddon", he observed. "Looking for fresh fields to conquer? Like a change?"

Keen observer that he was, and always with his receptive ear close to the grapevine, he was on the look-out for fresh talent. Always, day and night. He had an uncanny sense which usually led him to his quarry. On that particular day, the fifth of November, he roused me from an apathy which was in danger of becoming habitual.

Take on Miss World

I had overcome my initial shock on meeting him when, like a bolt from the blue, he threw down his challenge.

"I want you to take on Miss World", he added, almost casually.

"What!" I blurted out, at the same time spluttering over my coffee at the mere suggestion.

"Why not? A chance of more creative work, I should have thought."

"Why, of course", I muttered, slowly, and with more than a little incredulity.

And that was that. Or that was how it started. The rest was to follow. If only I had for once declined to further my ambition at all costs. But I wasn't to know that till later.

The Miss World Contest was on a Wednesday. With the male population it took precedence over "Sportsnight with Coleman", and that's an achievement in itself.

Yes, no fewer than one hundred and fifty million viewers gazed, leered, and scrutinised the rows of long-legged lovelies.

I grasped my microphone, sagging at the knees. For once in my life, I counted the cost of inordinate ambition. What on earth had I let myself in for?

As the preliminary judging proceeded, so I became more and more disenchanted. I clutched my notes in my hands, now shaking feverishly. I must go through with it . . . at all costs.

Official weigher-up of form at last selected the final six. My job was to interview for charm, intelligence, personality.

"And what about hobbies?" I had jotted in my sheaf of notes. That followed ambitions. Routine in a way, but creative in the way you handled it.

First a voluptuous Miss England whose protuberant bosom threatened, on impact, to scatter my notes in a heap. But I held on grimly. Five more curvaceous dollies followed, whose coy approach to the cameras (whether a natural or an assumed modesty) did not in any way inhibit a frank display of those peculiar and characteristic charms with which the goddess Nature has endowed the female of the species.

Ambitions followed the expected course. Hairdressing salons, modelling, veterinary surgery, foreign travel: the usual inventory of fatuity.

Not very original were the hobbies indulged by those elegant creatures. Ballroom dancing, horse-riding . . . the lot. Sometimes learning another language gave an intellectual touch to the proceedings.

A Cruel Choice

I appreciated of course that many viewers on that evening had a cruel choice of viewing, giving rise in some to a state bordering on neurosis. It was like this: with uncharacteristic ineptitude, the BBC offering on the alternative channel was one of Willie Somerset Maugham's meatier pieces. No less than Sadie Thomson. You pays your licence money and you takes your choice.

But back to the Contest. I had fully expected Women's Lib. to put a spanner in the works. So far, not a banner, not a slogan, not even a catcall. No shouts of sex symbol, love object, what have you. Nothing at all. It was too good to be true. And then it came.

One contestant, Miss Isle-of-Dogs I recollect now, prattled on about enjoying life before, as she put it, she settled down. They were all good girls. They would all settle down. After a time, of course.

As for the personality and intelligence racket, a preponderance of male viewers didn't give a hoot. But they could tolerate (almost) personality or any other quality, so long as it was given in this context. Their overheated imaginations were past bothering about poise and personality.

The climax came suddenly. A huge, juicy egg smashed on my spectacles. I could still see, but just (through a glass darkly). The rich yoke ricocheted from my right eye and slithered to the floor, gracefully channelling its slow and sinuous way down the tapering lines of Miss Egg Market-ing Board's left leg. Women's Lib. had done it again.

And I went back to news reading.

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

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

ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Freethinker is obtainable at the following addresses.
London: Collets, 66 Charing Cross Road, WC2; Housmans, 5 Caledonian Road, King's Cross, N1; Freedom Press, 84b Whitechapel High Street (Angel Alley), E1; Rationalist Press Association, 88 Islington High Street, N1; Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, WC1; Freethinker Bookshop, 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 Mout, Mercers, Cuckfield, Sussex.

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.

Leicester Humanist Society, Vaughan College, University Centre, St Nicholas Circle, Leicester. Monday, 10 January, 7.30 p.m.: Annual General Meeting, followed by the Rev. Bruce Reed, "The Individual and Work".

Leicester Secular Society, 75 Humberstone Gate, Leicester. Sunday, 9 January, 6.30 p.m.: Mr Greville Janner, QC, MP, "Poverty and Parliament".

South Place Ethical Society, Conway Hall, 25 Red Lion Square, London, WC1. Sunday, 9 January, 11 a.m.: Harold Blackham, "Is There a General Morality?"; 3 p.m.: Tony Elliott and Mick Farren, "The Underground Press". Tuesday, 11 January, 7 p.m.: H. Lionel Elvin, "Do we need to put anything in the place of Religious Education?"

Welwyn Garden City Humanist Group, Backhouse Room, Hand-side Lane. Thursday, 13 January, 8 p.m.: Max Dias, "Is Judaism a Faith or merely a Way of Life today?"

The Room, 5 Nelson Road, Greenwich, until 9 January. An exhibition of paintings by Oswald Blakeston.

NEWS

PLEDGE TO RESTORE THOMAS PAINE'S BIRTHPLACE

The Thomas Paine Society has announced that it has received a sizeable offer of help with the restoration of the house in Thetford, Norfolk, where Thomas Paine was born in 1737. A pledge, of £1,000, has been made by Mr and Mrs Jesse Collins, of Steyning, Sussex; members both of the Thomas Paine Society and the National Secular Society. The TPS believes that "their generous offer will encourage other individuals to promise donations to a public appeal". and will discuss the launching of such an appeal at a meeting to be held in London in the near future. On the other hand, the Thomas Paine Society says that it is possible that the Department of the Environment may make a grant to the Thetford Borough Council for the restoration and upkeep of Paine's birthplace, which, until very recently, was under sentence of death at the hands of "developers".

UN-CHRISTMAS REMEMBERED

On Sunday, 19 December last, London Young Humanists held the third of their annual, and now traditional Un-Christmas Dinners, and managed, at least on this occasion, to escape being serenaded by carol singers in the process.

Charles Rudd writes:

"This year the Dinner was held in the confines of the Teddy Bear's Picnic in the Fulham Road, a small, softly lit restaurant very characteristic of Chelsea. The menu included live yoghurt and a dish which rejoiced in the title of Desperate Dan's Cow Pie. One of the diners—not the writer of this report—contrived to fall asleep over dinner, having worked most of the previous night on the Christmas post."

We trust that LYH will continue to be animated throughout the coming year by the Spirit of Un-Christmas Yet To Come.

TWO PRIVATE MEMBERS' BILLS

There are two Private Members' Bills shortly to be debated in the House of Commons which should be of concern to Freethinkers and Humanists.

1. **The National Health Service (Family Planning) Amendment Bill**, put down for Friday, 21 January 1972, by Mr Phillip Whitehead, Labour MP for Derby North:

To secure the provision, as part of the National Health Service, by local health authorities of voluntary vasectomy services on the same basis as the contraception services provided under the Family Planning Act, 1967.

The purpose of this Bill is self-evident and its need is further emphasised by a recent Department of Health and Social Security reminder to local councils that "they have no powers to provide vasectomy services under the 1967 Act".

This Bill stands a good chance of reaching the Statute Book provided that there is sufficient support for it both inside and outside Parliament. MPs will need strong indications of support from their constituents to persuade them

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to remain at Westminster until 4 p.m. on a Friday afternoon in order to give the Bill a second reading. A large number of letters supporting the proposals of the Bill may well be a decisive factor in the outcome.

2. Medical Services (Referral) Bill. To be debated on Friday, 18 February 1972, presented by John Hunt, Conservative Member for Bromley:

To prohibit, subject to certain exceptions, the charging of fees for referring or recommending persons to medical services for treatment.

The purpose of this Bill may not be immediately obvious, but it is intended to prevent the exploitation by commercial agencies and touts of women seeking help under the provision of the 1967 Abortion Act.

This Bill may not have time to reach a vote, but, as it should be welcomed by all who are concerned about abuse of the Abortion Act, it might obtain its second reading by consent. Again, this may depend on the amount of support indicated by constituents for such a measure, and the degree of encouragement given to MPs to attend the debate.

RIGHTS OF ATHEISTS IN THE UNITED STATES

The New Jersey Supreme Court has ruled unanimously that an adopted child cannot be taken away from a couple solely on the grounds that they are professed atheists. Religion, a judge said, is only one consideration among many in determining the fitness of adoptive parents.

NEW, IMPROVED VATICAN ROULETTE?

The Catholic Marriage Advisory Council in Scotland has called upon the Government to include the "safe period" method of birth control (the rhythm or temperature method—Vatican Roulette to the sceptical) in maternity clinics and birth control centres. The annual report of the Glasgow Branch of the Council states: "Many people do not know there have been great advances in the effectiveness of the temperature method. If properly taught and carried out it can be among the safest methods".

Quite apart from the fact that the safe period method approaches nowhere near the margin of safety provided by "artificial" methods of contraception such as the pill, what is so amazing is that the Church can with one hand condemn all other methods as being "artificial" and yet, with the other, advocate what must be one of the most cold-blooded methods imaginable, abstaining from intercourse except during phases of the woman's menstrual cycle calculated to be "safe" by a chart or thermometer reading—surely, in terms of the realities of human sexuality and emotional behaviour, about as "artificial" a practice as one can envisage.

The report goes on, somewhat revealingly, to say: "The spread of this knowledge is important since the attitude of society to birth control has become so positive a pressure in recent years".

Once again the infallible and unchanging Catholic Church is having to trim and compromise with worldliness and common sense—at least here and there. This timid attempt to enter the nineteenth century would be amusing were it not for the toll of human misery that has been brought about by religious opposition to contraception in the present century and its predecessor. Given time, the Churches will be claiming that they invented and pioneered birth control—if they are not already doing so!

ISRAELI JAILED OVER BIBLICAL REMARRIAGE

Nissim Sharabi, a 41-year-old Israeli, has been jailed in Tel Aviv for insisting on his Biblical prerogative of marrying Rivka, the childless widow of his brother. Sharabi claimed that the ritual required to absolve him of his religious duty would involve his sister-in-law's spitting on him, and throwing a shoe in his direction, and that this would "debase" him.

CLIFF RICHARD IN CROAT

As if Marshal Tito does not have enough troubles to cope with in Croatia, the *Church Times* has announced the publication of a Croat translation of Cliff Richard's *The Way I See It* as the "first Christian book to be published and publicised on a wide scale in Yugoslavia". The PR blurb goes on to say: "Even among Yugoslav young people there is an awareness of the so-called Jesus Revolution, and many are making a reassessment of the central Person of the Christian faith".

So now we know. Frankly, and with all due respect to Cliff Richard and the *Church Times*, I would imagine that the Bible, rather than *The Way I See It* would have an earlier claim in Yugoslav Christian publishing. Archbishop Stepinac would have seen to that. In reassessing Christianity and "Gentle Jesus" the people of Croatia, and particularly the Serb minority there, will doubtless remember the 200,000 Yugoslavs done to death by the Ustashi and other Christian gentlemen during the 1940s.

CHRISTIAN SOLDIERS ENCOUNTER COMMUNIST TACTICS

"My head of History department is a Methodist lay preacher; the head of English department is a devout Presbyterian. To either of these I would entrust the teaching of a Catholic child. Others on my staff, generally with no affiliation to any denomination, I would not entrust the teaching of a Catholic . . . Sending Catholic children to non-Catholic schools is like sending recruits into battle untrained and unarmed.

"My own opinion is, humanists are entering many organisations following Communist tactics, acting under some other banner, they are working to remove all religious education from schools."

Letter in the *Catholic Herald* from a "concerned" headmistress of a "selective school".

BOOKS

THE EMERGING ETHIC

by Avril Fox. Volturna Press, £1.20.

In these days of publishing combines, escalating printing charges and hence prices of serious hardcover books, it is a pleasure to welcome a new imprint with its own small press in Portlaoighaire, County Waterford, Ireland. It is a particular pleasure when its proprietor is Dr D. MacEwan, founder of the Conservation Society, and what I take to its first title is by Avril Fox, founder of the Cosmo Group (now combined with the Defence of Literature and the Arts Society). Appearing shortly after Mary Whitehouse's *Who Does She Think She Is?*, *The Emerging Ethic* may be thought by some to be a libertarian answer; but while a plea for cultural freedom comes into it the purifying lady does not, and the work is much more than a DLAS-NVALA confrontation.

Clearly yet elegantly it presents a case for recognising and developing what Mrs Fox sees as a new ethic having much in common with the ethic of ancient Egypt. Though she speaks of "unethical paganism" before the articulation of questions like "What is right?", criticises "free" (undisciplined) education and welcomes "the great quality paperback explosion", her general thesis is that the natural man, or man-woman-child, has over the centuries become intellectualised, credalised, patriarchalised, urbanised and dehumanised. Formal religion, especially Christianity, has not only evolved incredible propositions but has denied man sexual spontaneity and sensuousness and filled him with guilt. Conversely, "the fashionable left-wing contempt for religion" has sought to deprive him of immortality, extrasensory perception and joyous festivals in celebration of natural processes. What she wants is a new religion to accompany the emerging ethic. If there were enough loving care and mental freedom "there would be no criminality or delinquency" and old age would be recognised as "a period of good health" and "sexual potency". There would also be no war, for "ordinary people" want peace, no leaders and no led, a return to the countryside or subterranean cities, and a cultural renaissance.

The author has some shrewd observations to make on the battle of the sexes and the myth of penis-envy, child-rearing and the place of ritual in life. Her central theme is moreover a useful counter-weight to the emerging industry of moral education, which seems determined to turn it into a subject like history or geography, grounded in "rationalism", and thus defeat its own presumed purpose. But I must confess that as I passed through Mrs Fox's pages I developed twitches that I do not recall since half-drowning in the chapter "Yes to Life" in James Hemming's *Individual Morality*. For one thing, I felt suffocated by trendy names: Simone de Beauvoir and Jean-Paul Sartre, Jacquetta Hawkes and J. B. Priestley, Margaret Mead and Margaret Murray, Dr Alex Comfort and Dr Benjamin Spock, Alexander Dubcek and Pierre Trudeau, Simone Weil, Marghanita Laski, Aldous Huxley and J. R. R. Tolkien. Perhaps they were inevitable in the context. Other ingredients were not. It is bad enough to come upon unsupported and, in my view, insupportable statements on psychology, sociology, medicine and other

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disciplines; it is doubly irritating to be told that "scientific research" has established them, particularly from a writer whose anti-intellectualism leaves a parlous role for science. While rightly deploring the compartmentalisation of modern life she seems to believe that we can glibly divide the "creative" from the "factual", leaving one to the instincts and the other to science. Many of her specific claims come into the category of the inspirational, reminding me, as I read, of the *Reader's Digest*, Marshall McLuhan, Women's Lib, Julian Huxley's search for the "numinous" (a surprising omission), Dale Carnegie, Christian Science, the Agapemonites, the Beatles and Mrs Dutt-Pauker, the Hampstead Thinker. Reactions to these must be, I suppose, a matter of temperament; though I would like to ask how, if one assumes that "all you need is love", one is going to find enough lovers, especially for the unlovable, and when children have been taken away from their unsuitable parents (as most parents are, by the author's criteria) where are they to go? If we are all conditioned and at the same time basically peaceful and non-assertive, how have war and aggression evolved? And if old age is so madly healthy, how does it come about that anyone ever dies save under a bus?

There are however some things in this book which are not matters of temperament but (I fear I shall spoil a beautiful friendship) simply absurd. Apart from the above refusal to recognise incurable degenerative conditions (the main cause of death today), I have space to mention only the adducing of personality in the paralysed as a proof of immortality, an assertion of the impossibility of "respectable people" being involved in charlatany as a proof of extrasensory perception, and an incredible concatenation of sponges, God, "tremendous sources of power" in the human mind and heaven knows what else on pp 96-7. Some of this seems to derive from the trendiest of all the author's *gurus*, Teilhard de Chardin and his awful (Mrs Fox would use the word in its original meaning, I more colloquially) *Phenomenon of Man*. She has, I contend, completely misunderstood the implications of patriarchy and doctrinal religion. The change from matriarchal (where, for the most part, men actually ruled but as brothers or maternal uncles of women) to patriarchal societies came about when paternity was recognised and it was seen that offspring did not simply come unaided from the "blood" of women. In the days of its power, religion or magic was "scientific" orthodoxy and a basis of racial, class or national solidarity. It has not declined because we have forgotten our instinctive nature but because many of its functions have declined. I doubt if those whose lives are still primitive find their instinctive search for food as satisfying as Mrs Fox believes, or if there is any advantage today in wilfully confusing the aesthetic and the religious. And I fear I have lost count of the number of times in my historical researches that I have come across "new religions", "new theologies" and "new moralities" claiming to preserve what is truly "religious" and eliminate unworthy accretions. With her warm personality, organising talents and muddled ideas, especially if she included "mass promiscuous sexual orgies", I have little doubt that Avril Fox could, if she wished, establish a successful and lucrative cult; but I doubt if it would have much to do with an "emerging ethic" for the rest of us.

DAVID TRIBE

REVIEWS

THE BEST OF THE ENGLISH by Deasún Breatnach.

One evening in 1632, two Irish Catholics and an English Protestant sat down after dinner in the Palace of the Bishop of Kilmore and started work on the translation of the Old Testament into Gaelic. Their task occupied their evenings until 1640, although the resulting manuscript was not finally published until 1685. This booklet is "a short account of the life and work of the Bishop of Kilmore, William Bedell, and the Irish version of the Old Testament, for which he was responsible".

If one had to stratify the clergy according to merit, the bottom of the barrel would, I imagine, be filled firstly by the Inquisition, and probably next by the Anglican clergy who were wished on Ireland in the seventeenth century: for greed, corruption, bigotry, and sheer cruelty they take a lot of beating. Bishop Bedell was the exception.

William Bedell was born in 1571 of staunch Essex Puritan stock, was educated at Emmanuel College, Cambridge, and was ordained in 1597. From 1607 to 1610 he was chaplain to the British Ambassador in Venice, and was appointed Provost of Trinity College, Dublin, in 1627, before being made Bishop of Kilmore and Ardagh in 1629. The British Establishment were soon to regret Bedell's arrival in Ireland altogether, for he soon showed himself to be a seventeenth century forerunner of Robin Flower, or, in the idiom of the Western, an "injun lover". He proceeded to teach himself Irish, and ensured that Trinity theology students had a grant of £3 a year to learn the language of their prospective parishioners; he was jeered at in the Dublin streets by fashionable clergymen who saw him wearing simple Irish dress; and, worst of all, he was incorruptible in an age when bishops dished out church livings on a "jobs for the boys" basis. He also refused to have anything to do with the current racket of "excommunicating" Catholics to deprive them of their lands in favour of Protestant speculators. It is characteristic of the man that soon after being appointed to the Sees of Ardagh and Kilmore, "his conscience began to trouble him about holding down two bishoprics. It was his custom to rail against such abuses. He . . . resigned Ardagh the better to devote his energies to Kilmore".

In the reign of Elizabeth things Irish had been fashionable: English courtiers posed for portraits dressed as "wild Irishmen" (rather like modern Americans photographed in Red Indian regalia); the Queen herself was interested in the language and expressed the hope that "God in mercy would raise up some to translate the New Testament into the mother tongue" of her Irish subjects. By the end of the reign of James I & VI, however, the Celtic fringe was looked upon with less favour. The Dublin authorities saw Bedell's interest in Irish culture as a threat to their supremacy, and when Muirheartach O Cionga, Bedell's reviewer and corrector for the Irish Old Testament, became a Protestant and was appointed Rector of Templeport, Bedell's enemies secured O Cionga's wrongful arrest and imprisonment, though he was nearly eighty.

Then, in October 1641, the volcano of discontent erupted with a rebellion of Catholics in Ulster. Bedell was living in Co. Cavan, in the South of the province, and his home soon became a haven for terrified, destitute Protestant refugees. Bedell did all he could for them, but "Irish plague"—probably cholera, an old scourge of refugee camps broke out, and Bedell soon succumbed to the disease himself, and died on 7 February 1642. At first the Catholic

Bishop of Kilmore (who had been restored by the Kilkenny Confederacy) refused leave for Bedell's body to be buried beside that of his wife in Kilmore churchyard, but backed down in response to the popular outcry this caused. In fact the local Confederate (Catholic) commander sent a file of musketeers to the funeral to fire a ceremonial volley over the grave, and at the Protestant ceremony was a Catholic priest, Fr. Eamon O Fearghail, who was heard to cry: "*O sit anima mea cum Bedello!*" (Oh that my soul may be with Bedell).

Deasún Breatnach's booklet deals with the life of Bedell and with the strange fate of the MS of the Irish Old Testament. At one stage this was saved from a fire in Bedell's house by Donnchadh O Sioradain, ancestor of the famous literary Sheridans. Apparently the translation was, during compilation, checked against a Hebrew version of the Old Testament, written in Rome in 1284 AD which Bedell had purchased from a friend he had made in Italy—characteristically—a Jewish Rabbi!

My only complaint with this work is that it contains a number of annoying typographical errors (e.g. 1630 for 1640, and the author's name is given as "Breathnach" on the cover, and as "Breatnach" on the title-page and elsewhere). The Gaelic League is to be congratulated on publishing this tribute on the four hundredth anniversary of Bedell's birth. In another age of bigotry and violence it is some consolation to think that there will also be a small leaven of Bedells—saints (in the nice sense of the word) by temperament if not by faith—to tend the flames of human decency, tolerance and learning. After all, the apostles of hate have enough publicity nowadays.

The Best of the English may be obtained from Clódhanna Teoranta, 6 Harcourt Street, Dublin 2 (price 15p excluding postage).

NIALL AODH SIONOID

PAUSE FOR THOUGHT

Edited by Joanna Scott-Moncrieff. British Broadcasting Corporation, 25p.

FORTY DAYS AT THE CROSS

by Arthur Blessitt. Lakeland, 40p.

The radical change over the past few years in the climate of religious opinion, as reflected on BBC radio, is well illustrated in *Pause for Thought*, a collection of thirty-nine five-minute talks of the kind usually put out just before the morning news. No longer is this an exclusively Christian preserve. Just over half the contributions are non-religious in character; secular sermons and all the better for it. In fact the opening talk, on the advisability of questioning dogma, would hardly have looked out of place in *The Freethinker*. Even in some of the religious items God gets only the briefest of mentions, as if the speaker would have preferred not to, but felt it was expected.

Arthur Blessitt is the leader of the Jesus Movement and minister to the hippies of California's Sunset Strip. As his contribution to world sanity in 1971 he walked the length Britain and Ireland carrying a ten-foot wooden cross, an Imitatio Christi which one gathers stopped short of actual crucifixion. *Forty Days at Cross* is a series of meditations which formed Blessitt's daily devotions during a fast following an earlier similar pilgrimage in the USA. The infantilism displayed in his book is enough to make even a Christian wince. This for example: "Lord, I'm glad You smiled down on me, put Your arm around me and said, 'Arthur, it's now OK, I love to run with you. Laugh, smile, and have fun with my heavenly Daddy!'" Ugh!

R. J. CONDON

LETTERS

Replies to Avril Fox

I wouldn't for the world withhold information from Avril Fox, *Freethinker* readers or anyone else about where to find bawdy ballads. The cheapest answer is *The Common Muse* edited by V. de Sola Pinto and A. E. Rodway, Penguin, an excellent selection, or for hardcover reading the *Idiom of the People* James Reeves, published Heinemann. MAUREEN DUFFY.

"I think we might be said to be the friend of animals in that when we take them for food we deny them old age." Avril Fox's comfy theory (*The Freethinker*, 18 December) that the meat industry practises euthanasia can be exploded by asking a farmer to support his pigs till they reach the verge of senility. Food animals are killed in childhood (for tenderness) or as soon as they're full-grown. Had Avril Fox offered to eat me at six or 16 and claimed she was doing me an act of friendship, I'd have said she was a bloody (literally) hypocrite.

Maintaining that omnivorousness is "natural and proper" to humans, Mrs Fox denies that vegetarianism is "the natural human way of life". Who said it was? Of course I have teeth and digestion that *can* cope with meat. I have a hand that can form a fist. Am I thereby justified in punching people? I could, incidentally, kill and digest human babies. Should I?

There is no reason to think that democracy, art, reasoning, or wearing clothes is a "natural human way of life". Is that an argument against them? Who, anyway, is to say what is "natural" for humans? Where is there a pack of wild humans to shew us? Birds of one species build nests to one pattern; ants of one species observe a given social order. But humans have varied architectures and social systems. Perhaps the sole thing that's natural for humans is to vary and to try to better themselves (by which they mean various things): to be, in fact, "unnatural".

Mrs Fox's argument for doing precious little about the plight of animals is that man is still morally "adolescent"; we must, she maintains, wait for the "maturity of man", when he "will learn once again" how to behave decently to animals. Is there a shred of evidence that he ever knew? Mrs Fox's thinking seems to rest on the myth of either Eden or the Golden Age.

Perhaps those myths record the early history of our species, but it seems less extravagant to take them as accounts of our individual infancies recollected in tranquillity and seen through rose-tinted spectacles. Certainly nothing but myth supports the notion that a species must go through the same life-course as an individual. I understand the physical maturity of an individual (It's the stage when the pig gets killed.) But what can "maturity" mean applied to a species? What comes after that "maturity of man" which Mrs Fox bids us wait for? Mating and death? At what point did the dinosaurs attain "matutritry"?

To say that our unconscious need to hunt must be channelled into "more adult pastimes" is a cheat. Masters of Fox-Hounds are adults. "More adult" looks objective but means merely "favoured by me". MFHs could as reasonably reply that *they* favour hunting. *Animals, Men and Morals* is an attempt to define rationally defensible criteria, not just a disguised "I like this and dislike that", by which both to explore unconscious impulses and to propose alternative routes of expression. To wait till "maturity" descends on our species as a whole is merely to wait for God to arrive and make us all perfect (or, as he may prefer to call it, "mature") in his eyes. Meanwhile pigs suffer and don't survive till his coming. BRIGID BROPHY.

THE RELIGION OF SECULARISM

(Continued from page 10)

the "respectable" secularists of the "Saladin" school. Clearly he goes further than many of the NSS members would have been prepared openly to follow, but he sets out in writing what Bradlaugh had agreed upon in private with Conway and what follows logically from Annie Besant's *Gospel* and from the Secular services and hymns. Politics, "brother men and sister women in the Secular cause, are but as the shadows cast by drifting clouds on the earth below . . . Our mission as Secular

evangelists is not the making of good laws or the repealing of bad ones . . . Our work lies deeper and our aims lie higher than these things". And this is because "Secularism is a *Religion* and not a *Policy*".

T. H. Huxley defined Positivism as "Catholicism minus Christianity"; perhaps a fit description of nineteenth century secularism would be "Protestantism minus Christianity". Certainly Gladstone saw it as something like this when he wrote to Holyoake in 1897: "It seems to me that secularism owes all its materials to Christianity, which it represents by amputation", to which Holyoake replied, "Secularism was primarily designed for ethical inspiration where theology is inoperative".

Spiritual Background of Secularists

No one denies that secularism was involved with politics, but then every religion has been so. The fact is that if one's primary interest was Malthusianism, Land Law reform, Republicanism, Disestablishment and Disendowment of the churches or secular education, then there were societies and organisations whose specific concern was with one of these questions. In becoming a secularist one adopted a belief, a philosophy of life. This belief could lead one to a mild conservatism with "Saladin", radicalism with Bradlaugh, or to socialism with Aveling and Besant. Remember that McCabe, Barker, Symes and John T. Lloyd were all ex-clergymen; "Saladin" and H. Percy Ward had studied for the ministry; Aveling, John and Charles Watts were the sons of clergymen; Mrs Besant a clergyman's wife; and Foote and Holyoake were both at one time Sunday School teachers. They were unable to forget their spiritual background. It is a great mistake to follow Bradlaugh too closely; for him Secularism fulfilled a political need, for most of his followers the need was primarily religious.

FREETHINKER FUND

During 1971 *The Freethinker* has been adversely affected financially by the UK postal strike, postal costs, and the United States dock strike. We also expect a further increase, early in 1972, in the price of paper. We therefore appeal to readers and supporters to be no less generous this year as in the past.

We are most grateful to those readers who kindly sent donations to the Freethinker Fund during December: — W. J. Bickle, 45p; Charles Byass, £1.50; D. C. Campbell, £2.45; R. J. Condon, £10; R. Gerrard, 40p; J. D. Groom, 45p; E. M. Hay, 75p; James Hemming, £2.45; H. Holgate, 20p; W. Holland, 45p; Mrs F. M. Hornibrook, £1; Mr E. J. Hughes, 45p; S. D. Kuebart, 45p; S. Marshall, 45p; R. C. Mason, £2; A. V. Montague, £2.45; E. A. W. Morris, 45p; E. A. Napper, £2; M. H. Nash, 45p; Mrs K. Pariente, £1; H. R. Scobell, 25p; Mrs L. F. Stupart, £2.45; D. C. Taylor, £1. Total for December £36.30; total for 1971 £247.07.

In *The Freethinker* of 11 December 1971 Mr W. R. Grant's donation to the November Fund was incorrectly given as 13p; it should have read £1. We apologise for the error.