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THE "NOBLE SAVAGE" RECONSIDERED

The recent television documentary on the Navajo Indians must have brought a wry smile to the faces of those who watched it, as well as saddening them. The sight of a white doctor referring a Navajo patient to a medicine man for treatment for depression and anxiety was indeed ironic, and, if the report is to be believed, it would appear that where the treatment of mental and psychosomatic illness is concerned, the Indian medicine man, with his amulets, eagle feathers, and organised ritual dances, has as high a success rate with patients as the Almighty Orthodox Medical Profession with its pills, placebos, and consulting-room couch.

If nothing else, the programme demonstrated the needless misery and cultural destruction brought upon so-called "savage" societies by European man in his arrogant and often utterly unscrupulous desire to suborn, exploit, and sometimes eliminate them. After years of trying to destroy the Red Indians as distinct cultural and linguistic entities, the United States government has, somewhat late in the day, condescended to open two schools where a small fraction of Navajo children can be taught something of their endemic culture through the medium of their native language. In the "good old days" the schools were English-speaking only, and had little signs outside for the edification of the Indians: "Tradition is the Enemy of Progress". Neither was it unknown for Indian children to be legally kidnapped and brought up in State boarding schools to turn them into English-speaking All-American boys (and girls).

The Americans are by no means the only guilty parties; the story has been repeated in various permutations throughout the Old and New Worlds. Western civilisation, which conveniently developed the theory of economic and cultural "Darwinism" at a time of its rapid expansion and empire-building in the nineteenth century, contented itself, and justified its over-running of "primitive" peoples by assuming that it was somehow racially and culturally superior: "For we had the Gatling gun, and they had not".

Seen with the benefit of hindsight, the blessings of civilisation, and indeed the nature of so-called civilisation itself, seem very suspect. What the missionaries left was picked clean by rapacious commercial interests, and vice versa. True, primitive peoples have been brought into contact with life-saving antibiotic and other drugs, and centralised government has replaced tribal wars, but the debit side: idiotic clothes, European prudery, tuberculosis, syphilis, alcohol, and extinction, has, in many, if not most cases, outweighed this. It is not insignificant, for instance, that the present suicide rate among North American Indians is five times the United States average.

This paper has traditionally (if you will pardon the apparent contradiction) allied itself with progress; but then what do we mean by "progress"? Progress, for this writer at least, is essentially increasing the means by which a greater proportion of people in a society are able to live adequate and happy lives. By these standards, the incultation of commercialism, Christianity, and the American Way of Life (export variety) in place of a balanced, "primitive" existence is utterly retrograde.

What is so tragic is that the process is still going on: villages in the jungles of South America are being machine-gunned from helicopters so that land speculators can claim that the area is uninhabited jungle, and duly "develop" it. Some tribes there live in areas designated as national parks, but the speculators already have title deeds drawn up, waiting like vultures, for a *coup d'état* or other change in law or government policy. In New Guinea the missionaries are obliterating a culture that, apart from collecting heads, produced magnificent works of art in the form of wood carving. Soon there will be nothing left. Furthermore, the "cures", plant and animal lore of primitive peoples vanish with their culture, and with it information that may prove of inestimable benefit to Western biology, pharmacology, and technology.

Worst of all, "civilisation" has failed where the savage, by and large, has succeeded albeit by the hard way; for the latter has usually had to be a natural ecologist, living in harmony with his environment. Civilised technology on the other hand, has indulged in the colossal conceit of trying to conquer nature, of which it is itself a part and is now in danger of suffocating in the pollution it has caused — of committing social suicide.

In the 1968 Boyer Lectures, *After the Dreaming*, Professor W. E. H. Stanner of the Australian National University quoted these words from an old Aborigine: "When all the blackfellows are dead, all the whitefellows will get lost in the bush, and there'll be no one to find them and bring them home." And serve them right!

DID JESUS EXIST? Part 2 ★

G. A. WELLS

(Continued from page 24)

That Paul's celestial visions should have informed him that the voluntary death that redeemed us occurred by crucifixion is by no means surprising, since his environment included traditions of the crucifixion of holy men in the previous two centuries. Although crucifixion was not normally practised in Palestine before the Roman occupation, Josephus reports that both Antiochus Epiphanes and Alexander Jannaeus had crucified Jews in Jerusalem "while they were still alive and breathing". Both periods of persecution are referred to in other Jewish literature (e.g. the Assumption of Moses and the Dead Sea Scrolls), and Paul could well have thought of his Jesus the descendant of David as one of these victims.

I do not wish to suggest that such vague historical reminiscences were the *origin* of the Christian idea of a suffering and dying Messiah. Christianity could not have been based on vague reminiscences. It was based on emotional needs, on mystical beliefs, on contagious delusions, and it was moulded in the meetings of the congregations under the influence of preachings, prophesying and speaking with tongues. The craving for love and protection found satisfaction both in the community of like-minded persons, and in the belief in a divine saviour. My point is that the historical—and the more fanciful—traditions current at the time could have lent support to the pagan-inspired idea of a dying saviour.

Historical Existence of Jesus still Accepted

One of the principal reasons why the historical existence of Jesus is still accepted today is that he is assigned by the gospels to a definite historical situation, whereas this is not true of the pagan saviour gods who died and rose to redeem us. But this difference between paganism and Christianity is perfectly intelligible, even if Jesus is no more historical than Osiris. According to Budge, Osiris was the god of the resurrection in the earliest dynastic times (before 4000 BC), and so his worshippers in the first century AD could not think of his death and resurrection as a recent event. None of the pagan mystery religions of the Roman Empire began as entirely new revelations, but were adaptations of cults which reach back into pre-history. If a god is worshipped by a primitive society before it acquires written historical records, there is no historical framework into which to fit him. The worship of Jesus, however, is not documented before the first century AD, and appears as the cult of a new divinity; and so the possibility of assigning his resurrection to a known historical situation was at least given. Indeed, it was really demanded. A god who was from the first regarded as a descendant of David had to fit somewhere into a known chronology, and sooner or later, in order to answer critical questions, his worshippers would have to be explicit about the where and when. My critics may feel that, had those worshippers alleged that a purely mythical Jesus had in fact lived on earth in the recent past, they would have invited rebuttal from sceptics who had themselves lived through that past. But such rebuttals, even if there had been occasion for them could well have been first ignored (as rebuttals are today commonly ignored!) and then suppressed by the triumphant party, just as so much literature hostile to Christianity was in fact suppressed. In actual fact, the earthly career of Jesus is not given a precise historical setting in any document (Christian, Jewish or pagan) that is dated before about AD 100; and the period

to which this career was allocated was then no longer the immediate past; few then survived who had lived through the procuratorship of Pilate. And that Jesus' life on earth was not allocated to a hazily-conceived distant past is readily intelligible because of his Messianic character. The Messiah was to come in the "last days". If the new god Jesus retained the Messianic character of association with the last days, and if he was not only (like the Jewish Messiah) to come but had also (like the pagan dying gods) been on earth, then his earthly sojourn was surely also part of the last days. This idea (expressed in 1 Peter, written late in the first century) may originally have meant no more than that his coming to earth inaugurated the final epoch (however long) of man's history—the epoch which would culminate in the god's return. But it could easily have come to mean that he was on earth in the recent past; and this is what the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews and Clement of Rome (both writing at the end of the first century) had come to assume of Jesus. The next stage in the evolution was to pin-point the recent past in such a way as to specify a precise historical context; and this is what we find in the writers of the next generation—Ignatius (AD 110), 1 Timothy (probably AD 117) and Tacitus (AD 120), all of whom link Jesus with Pilate. I have explained in my book the motives which led believers to assign Jesus to this historical context, and I will not repeat myself more than is necessary to answer Mr Hinchliff's objection that "no Christian of Jewish persuasion would have gratuitously invented a story in which the founder of his faith had been crucified as a rebel against Rome".

The Significance of Pilate

A Christian writer of the early second century would naturally have supposed that, if Jesus had come as the Messiah, he would (like other Messianic claimants) have been executed by the Romans. To have perished at the hands of this hated foe would not constitute a dishonourable death, but make Jesus one of the many martyrs who laid down their lives for their ancestral faith. Pilate would have struck a writer of the early second century as a likely person to have ordered the execution, for according to both Philo and Josephus he was particularly detested by the Jews. Furthermore, to stamp Pilate as Jesus' murderer would not necessarily mean incurring Roman displeasure; both Philo and Josephus criticise Pilate harshly, yet were perfectly loyal to Rome, where Pilate does not seem to have been highly esteemed. A Christian of about AD 100 would have asked himself exactly when in the recent past Jesus had come. He would reflect that, if this had happened very recently, there would be hundreds who could report on it first hand. But as this did not seem to be the case, he would suppose that the occurrence could not be quite so recent, and therefore probably occurred during Pilate's administration; for he was just the type of person to have murdered Jesus, and was also active sufficiently recently for a few contemporaries still to be (or to have recently been) alive.

I would stress that my theory of Christianity without a historical Jesus does not imply that erroneous beliefs became widespread under conditions which ought quickly to

(Continued at foot of next page)

* This is the second, and final part of Prof. Wells' reply to Mr Hinchliff.

BUT WHAT DOES MUSIC MEAN?

CHARLES BYASS

Among freethinkers, as among the religious, there are presumably some who would describe themselves as being musically tone-deaf, or at least unable always to sing in tune. Yet such persons may well not only enjoy their own singing but warmly appreciate the sounds emanating from those who are somehow better able to sing in tune. Insofar as anyone with ears to hear can get some enjoyment from music, everyone can be said to know what it means to be moved by music.

Not everyone, however, would agree with some of the meanings ascribed to music. There would presumably be some discord between freethinkers and religionists over what is meant by ascribing to music a potential "spiritual" quality. To religious ears, there seems no doubt that music sometimes moves in a most mysterious way. Free-listeners, on the other ear, would presumably comment that although music certainly moves all of us in some irrational ways, such ways cannot reasonably be ascribed to any supernatural source. The sounds and rhythms which we have come to associate with "music" (at what ever "level") have evolved naturally and through specifically human resources. Man is also a musical animal.

The questions of how, why and when it was that humans first began to sing and make music are questions which, as yet, belong to that large class of "honestly debatable questions". And this despite believers in the Book of Genesis who would doubtless hold that in the beginning was the Song with the Word (or, the Word with Music). But if, even for the religious, devotional words seem to be losing

much of their original meaning, the "spiritual" claims for music still seem to be quite serviceable within both churches and The Churches.

The use of music in the service of superstitious beliefs is surely a human misuse of music's independent irrationalities. And "religiously inspired" music is surely an outcome (and evidence) not so much of "spirituality" as of human imagination. Surely, it shows a lack of musical imagination when beliefs which are extraneous to music are imposed on the language of music. A song means something though the words are or are not intelligible! A piece of music means something, apart from any story that may go with it.

Music presents us with its own language; it can be "transposed" and "transcribed", but it can't be "translated". Nor is there any need to translate it—a Gaelic song can communicate many a meaning to non-Gaelic speaking listeners! In music we have a unique and direct communication system; there is a feeling of "directness" in which composers, performers, listeners can all share. Yet music does surely involve us intellectually and ethically as well as emotionally! For when we say of a piece of music that it is a "great" or "profound" work, are we not then trying to describe certain qualities other than those of some intuitive musical intelligence?

Considering all the serious and not so serious parts that music plays in our lives, one wonders whether science hasn't much still to tell us about the nature of music.

DID JESUS EXIST? PART 2

(Continued from Previous page)

have discredited them; for Jesus was not linked with Pilate by writers contemporary with Pilate, but only by those of about seventy years later. This fact is a sufficient answer to Mr Hinchliff's statement that Jesus is likely to be historical because his historicity is never disputed in the Talmud. Rabbinical references to Jesus begin only in the second century, and how little the Rabbis were then able to argue points of historical research is well illustrated by the fact that they differ by as much as two hundred years in the dates they assign to Jesus!

Nero and Tacitus

When Tacitus explained to his Roman audience in AD 120 that Christians are followers of someone executed under Pilate, he was (to my mind) simply repeating what Christians had (by then) come to believe about the alleged founder of their faith. But Mr Hinchliff thinks that Tacitus drew from a much earlier *pagan* tradition about how Christianity originated. Tacitus explains who Christians are when he is describing Nero's persecution of them in AD 64, and Mr Hinchliff comments:

If, then, there were Christians in Rome during Nero's reign, . . . was the origin and nature of the sect known to the Roman ruling class? For if there were, indeed, an independent Roman tradition concerning Jesus, it would provide a very strong basis for the presumption that he actually existed . . . That this is so is clear when we consider that no Christian of Jewish persuasion would have gratuitously invented a story in which the founder of his faith had been crucified as a rebel against Rome . . . [And] we know that the Church at Rome was initially Jewish in character.

Commenting: (1) Paul's Epistle to the Romans addresses Christians at Rome who are gentiles (*ethné* 1:5) with reference to whom Paul has received his apostleship. They are obviously Christians of the Pauline type, for they are justified by faith (5:1) and are no longer under the Jewish law but under grace (6:15; 7:6). (2) I have explained above why the "invention" of a tradition that Jesus was crucified by Romans is by no means unlikely. (3) Whether or not there were Christians in Rome in AD 64, Tacitus' statement sixty years later about what Christians believed is not a reliable guide as to what they believed in Nero's reign—any more than a Marxist handbook summarising the "new theology" of today is a reliable indication of the Christianity of the nineteenth century.

Immaterial

Whether there was a Neronian persecution is immaterial to my argument, but Mr Hinchliff does not succeed in authenticating it when he argues that "we know" (do we?) "that the trial of Paul took place in Rome under Nero"; and that "the Epistle of Clement, written at Rome around the year 96, explicitly mentions the death of Paul together with the persecution of a 'vast multitude' of the elect". Mr Hinchliff is here making unreasonable use of the phrase "together with". Clement does not say, nor imply, that Peter, Paul and the "vast multitude" all suffered at the same time and place. He does not assign these events to any place, but lists them as relatively recent examples of fortitude in adversity by way of supplementing his list of Old Testament examples, which ranges from Abel to David.

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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 Moutat, 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 Secular Society, Secular Hall, 75 Humberstone Gate, Leicester, Sunday, 23 January, 6.30 p.m.: Mr J. J. O'Higgins, "The Church and Napoleon".

South Place Ethical Society, Conway Hall, 25 Red Lion Square, London, WC1, Sunday, 23 January: 11 a.m.: Dr Helen Rosenau, "Art as a Life-Enhancing Experience"; 3 p.m., Charles Medawar, "Naderism for Britain". Tuesday, 25 January, 7 p.m.: Michael Duane, "De-Schooling".

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NEWS



NEW TEXTBOOK ON CONTRACEPTION

Nurses and midwives are often the best people to provide family planning advice and in several countries they already carry out tasks such as the insertion of intra-uterine devices which were previously only done by doctors.

This is one of the conclusions of a new publication by the International Planned Parenthood Federation, *Family Planning for Midwives and Nurses*, which is intended for worldwide distribution. Its publication follows a decision of the IPPF Central Medical Committee to prepare materials specially designed as training materials for those professional members of the family planning team who are not doctors.

Emphasis is laid on the fact that family planning advice in itself is part of preventive medicine, in that "the dangers of childbirth increase with age and with high parity. The dangers to the baby rise with maternal age, parity and if pregnancies are too close together".

THE DUKE OF WELLINGTON

The seventh Duke of Wellington, who died recently at the age of 86, achieved a considerable reputation for himself as a diplomat, an architect, and as a connoisseur of the arts, particularly of the Regency period. He was also the author of several books on the life and friends of the first, the Iron Duke, and he presented the Duke's London house to the nation (now the Wellington Museum).

Virtually all the obituaries that have appeared in the national press have omitted to mention that the late Duke was a life-long member of the Voluntary Euthanasia Society.

AN HISTORIC CONFERENCE OF MODERN MUSLIMS

A. Solomon writes:

The first "All-India Conference of Forward-Looking Muslims" was held on 4-5 December 1971 at New Delhi. The Conference was organised jointly by the Indian Secular Society and the Muslim Satyashodhak Mandal (Muslim Truthseeker Association), and attended by 80 delegates including a fraternal delegate from Bangladesh.

S AND NOTES

It was an historic Conference. Never before during the twelve centuries that they have been in India have Muslims come together on a secular platform to discuss the problems of modernisation of their society in India. It is doubtful whether such a Conference and for such a purpose has taken place in any other country.

The delegates were welcomed on behalf of both the organisations by Prof. A. B. Shah, President of the Indian Secular Society. Prof. Maqbul Ahmad, Director of the Centre of East Asian Studies at Aligarh University delivered the keynote address, and Mr Hamid Dalwai the presidential address.

The discussions at the Conference were lively and often controversial when caused by statements about the Koran and Prophet Mohammad. For perhaps the first time in the history of Islam in India, the authenticity of the Koran and the claim that Mohammad was the last prophet that mankind had received, was publicly questioned by someone who was by birth a Muslim.

Twelve resolutions unanimously adopted included those calling for family planning, enactment of a uniform civil code, and liberal, science-based education for Muslim boys and girls. The Conference voiced unqualified support for the struggle of the people of Bangladesh for freedom.

The Indian Secular Society is planning to hold a similar conference in South India. The Gandhi Peace Foundation has offered to co-sponsor the Conference. The proceedings of the Conference will soon be published by the Indian Secular Society.

ARCHBISHOP McQUAID GOES

The resignation, at the age of 76, of Dr John McQuaid as Catholic Archbishop of Dublin, is a small chink of light in the darkness of Irish church-state relations. Dr McQuaid, said the *Catholic Herald*, was popular with the priests in the Dublin diocese, "But his disapproval of a Yugoslav soccer team visiting Dublin, criticism of modernistic crib figures used at Dublin airport, loyalty to the Pope's encyclical on birth control, and most recently apparent stand on the issue of clerical control of schools have not endeared him to those of his people who consider themselves progressive".

The resignation was particularly appreciated in Ireland by Dr Noel Brown, an old antagonist, whose Mother and Child Welfare scheme was sabotaged by the Archbishop in the late 1940s.

NOISE POLLUTION

An old man was fishing one Sunday morning, just before church time, when the curate saw him and inquired in dulcet tones:

"My man, don't you hear those heavenly chimes?"

"Eh?"

"Don't you hear those heavenly chimes calling you?"

"Beg pardon, sir; but I really can't hear what you say for those infernal bells."

[From *The Freethinker*, 22 January 1882]

STILL GROPING

"The English people of today have practically no religion; they are groping in the dark. I am convinced that it is high time that we arranged teams of preachers who could expound the Hindu religion to Englishmen, and also to other Europeans."—M. V. Jayakar in *Masurashram Patrika*, Bombay (January 1972).

Better the otiose gropings you know . . .

KINKY CLERICAL CAPERS

Reuter reports that the January number of *Playboy* has published, interspersed amongst the profusion of bare bottoms and bosoms, a full-page advertisement offering "strong-willed young men" a new life—as priests.

One wonders if this has any connection with the *New Statesman's* account of the demise of another "girlie" magazine, *Club*. Sounds like one of those deathbed conversions one used to hear so much about!

IT STARTED WITH AN APPLE

I suppose it had to happen, sooner or later: a young lady in the teaching profession had just delivered a lecture on contraception and was approached by one of her students with a tube of something.

"What's this?"

"Spermicidal jelly, Miss."

"Oh? . . . Is it?"

"It doesn't work, Miss—but you can keep it if you want to."

In the "old days" it would probably have been an apple. *O Tempora! O Mores!*

GOD WILL PROVIDE

St Peter's School, Greenwich, has issued a booklet to mark the departure for a sabbatical year with the Independent Television Authority of the headmaster, Mr Jack Hames. The booklet is entitled *God Will Provide*.

SCENE IN A CEMETERY

A new grave,
Of sparkling marble,
Flower-bedecked:

A young widow,
Tending the bitter buds
Of a long grief.

L.G.B.

FREETHINKERS AND HUMANISTS IN NINETEENTH CENTURY ENGLISH LITERATURE

MERLE TOLFREE

The nineteenth century is often regarded as an age of conformism. As far as most of its main literary figures are concerned, it was rather an age of free-thinking. In some, religious scepticism was allied with an urge towards radical social change. In others free thought was a necessary pre-condition for the broad and unprejudiced view of life which they wished to present.

Lord Byron, born 1788, is a case in point. This fine poet, who, according to the French critic, Cazamian, lost his own country and conquered Europe, began his public career with a speech in the House of Lords on behalf of the frame breakers of Lancashire, and ended it, dying of rheumatic fever, in the campaign—that earlier campaign—to liberate Greece.

Childe Harold's Pilgrimage already contains a rousing call to oppressed peoples.

"Yet, Freedom! yet thy banner, torn, but flying,

Streams like a thunder cloud against the wind;"

This poem won him early renown, but his Whig politics, his unconventional life and the breath of scandal made his name a by-word among the fashionable classes of London, and he left England for Italy. From there his poems, his ideas and his style took Europe by storm. From Moscow to Madrid his work was known and eagerly awaited. The poets Pushkin, Lamartine and de Musset were inspired by him, and the remarks of Goethe on Byron are of the greatest interest.

Byron and Traditional Faith

"We see", he said, "how the inadequate dogmas of the church work upon a free mind like Byron's, and how by such a piece he struggles to get rid of a doctrine which has been forced upon him. The English clergy will not thank him." This was in reference to *Cain*, a modern interpretation of the old story. In his poem Byron questions the doctrine of original sin, which punishes the children for the sins of the fathers, and questions the nature of a god who could exact blood sacrifices. In *Manfred*, Byron deals with a Faust-like figure who has meddled with the occult, and is now seeking to expiate some terrible crime. The drama that unfolds raises the question of personal responsibility, and rejects the priest as a mediator. Traditional faith is thus seen at war with a conscience and a power of reasoning that owes much to Voltaire, of whom Byron was a professed admirer.

Don Juan shows Byron at his best as a master of pungent, witty verse, which parodies his own style of *Childe Harold* days, and subjects the ruling classes of Europe and the condition of things generally to a devastating criticism. In a vigorous, mocking and gay metre he whirls his famous character across Europe in a series of cataclysmic adventures, which finish up in London. The whole poem is an onslaught against war, and the way ordinary people are manipulated by their oppressors into taking part in the carnage that periodically devastated the continent.

I wonder (though Mars no doubt's a god I

Praise) if a man's name in a bulletin

May make up for a bullet in his body?

I hope this little question is no sin . . .

And I will war, at least in words (and should

My chance so happen—deeds) with all who war

With Thought; and of Thought's deeds by far most rude

Tyrants and sycophants have been and are.

I know not who may conquer: if I could

Have such a prescience, it should be no bar

To this my plain, sworn, downright detestation

Of every despotism in every nation.

The Romantic poets of the early years of the century were all influenced by the liberating ideas of the French Revolution and the eighteenth century in general. Shelley was influenced in particular by the ideas of Godwin, author of *An Enquiry Concerning Political Justice*. He was sustained all his short life by a burning passion for reform, a hatred of injustice and an interest in scientific knowledge that places him among the most intellectual of poets. In his early youth he was fiercely anti-clerical, and saw religion, as did Byron, as one of the most repressive weapons of state. He was banished from Oxford for writing a pamphlet on *The Necessity of Atheism* and this shocked his father, Sir Timothy, so much that he also banished his son, and when the young poet's grandfather died a few years later, Shelley had to sit outside on the doorstep while will was read.

Shelley's Indictment of Religion and Injustice

One can admire not only the poetry, but also the courage that went into the writing of *Queen Mab*, a major epic in the language. It is an indictment of priests, religions and injustice of all kinds. Shelley himself later somewhat regretted its didactic tone, but nevertheless it was published, and was often quoted by Chartists and other reformers and iconoclasts. Even when Shelley's poetry broke away from its early trenchant and polemical quality, and reached heights of incomparable lyricism, he never became an orthodox Christian. In a letter written three months before he died he referred to the "delusions of Christianity . . . no man of sense can think it true". And Trelawney quoted him as saying "the delusions of Christianity are fatal to genius and originality: they limit thought". He seems to have believed at the end in some vague and all pervading spirit of good. One remembers *Adonais* written on the death of Keats:

"He is made one with Nature . . ."

The soul or life of man is absorbed into the universal but has no separate existence. Shelley finds "inexplicable and incredible" the hypothesis of "a Being resembling men

in the moral attributes of his nature", i.e. he rejects the anthropomorphic God of Christianity, and particularly the concept of sin, which makes it such a despairing religion that its advocates give up hope for this life and seek refuge in the fantasies of a life hereafter.

Shelley, like Byron and Keats, found refuge in Italy. He was drowned off the Gulf of Spezzia, when his boat, the Don Juan, capsized, in 1822. He was 30.

"Life, like a dome of many-coloured glass,

Stains the white radiance of Eternity,

Until Death tramples it to fragments."

It was not only the Romantic poets however who were in continual intellectual revolt. The 19th century, which is often presented as smugly conventional, was, in fact, a time of radical social and intellectual change. Darwin's *Origin of Species* was published in 1859, and was highly successful. The first edition sold out on the day of publication, and a second edition of 3,000 soon afterwards. "1,600 copies have now (1876) been sold in England", said Darwin, "and considering how stiff a book it is, this is a large sale." It was translated into almost every European tongue, including Spanish, Polish and Russian. The theory of evolution was a blow against traditional theology, and now, with thinkers of the calibre of Spencer, Huxley and John Stuart Mill in the vanguard, rationalist thinking made dramatic progress. Mill wrote his famous plea for democratic liberty, and corresponded with Auguste Comte, who attempted a scientific study of society. According to G. M. Young, the effect of these writers on their age was to make it "almost impossible for their younger contemporaries to retain the notion of a transcendent, governing Providence".

George Eliot's Studies of Society

One who felt this impact was George Eliot. A friend of Herbert Spencer and a rationalist journalist before publishing her first novel in 1859, she accepted the theory of evolution as soon as it was expounded. She had herself evolved from a position inside the established Church to a sort of Calvinist Methodism, and then to agnosticism. Without religious belief, she was yet the most moral of writers, in the sense that she saw the development of character as a result of moral choice. With her work the novel takes on a new dimension. Her understanding of character and of society, her analysis of intellectual and religious movements are much deeper in many respects than those, for example, of Dickens, who gives a powerful imaginative picture of society, where she gives a patient intellectual analysis. In *Silas Marner* we find an account of the religious groupings in an industrial town compared with the different development in rural communities, and all this as a background for the story of the alienation from society of the weaver Silas Marner, and of his readmission to the human fold. This book is a masterpiece of construction and observation.

Her greatest book is *Middlemarch*, which is an absorbing study of a whole cross-section of society. It puts the English novel into the class of Flaubert, Turgenev, Tolstoy and Dostoevsky, who all give, in their various styles, a picture of society in the grip of social and intellectual crisis. There was a movement of ideas right across Europe, and

the heights that the novel reached in all these countries reflected the dramatic change in ideas that was taking place.

Thomas Hardy comes in the same tradition. He was an unbeliever who was also a pessimist, as he saw that man's will was permanently opposed by the hostile forces of nature, or society. In *Jude the Obscure* it is the latter that combine to crush the ambitious young artisan. Gissing, the novelist of the seedier side of London, expresses with Hardy, the reaction against the easy optimism of certain circles. Samuel Butler in his satires, *Erewhon* and *The Way of all Flesh*, attacks Victorian institutions, the Church and the family. By the end of the century, there was a galaxy of writers who all rejected the current modes of thought on religion and/or society—Somerset Maugham, H. G. Wells, Bernard Shaw.

Only a Few

These are just a few of the giant figures in nineteenth century literature who were noted freethinkers. Others whose work would repay study are Hazlitt, Matthew Arnold, Winwood Reade, Mark Rutherford, Sir Leslie Stephen, and Swinburne. Swinburne's poetry echoes the themes of Byron and Shelley, the Italy of Cavour and Mazzini being substituted for Hellas.

The nineteenth century certainly had its Catholic revival, its nonconformist churches, its pre-Raphaelite religiosity, but its literature as such established the values of free thought and rationalism as necessary to an understanding of man and society, and expressed that understanding in an incomparable way.

THE RIGHTS OF OLD PEOPLE

Report of the National Secular Society

Working Party with a foreword by

RICHARD CROSSMAN, MP

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AND IN DEATH THEY WERE STILL DIVIDED

The Catholic Church in Ireland has again refused to reconsider its insistence on denominational schools.

WELCOME DETERMINISM

CHARLES BYASS

It is surely true to say that, as human beings, we live within limitations of human experience and expression. Our experience of "thinking" is inseparable from our experience of language; our thoughts are formed within limitations of vocabularies and grammars. Moreover, we can only "communicate" thoughts through a mutual experience of understandable meanings.

What, then, are intelligible meanings of the expressions "free will" and "free choice"? In what sense can either "free will" or "free choice" be understood to be "meaningful"? In what sense can either human will or choice be thought to be "free" rather than "determined"?

Those who believe that we are capable of exercising something called "free will" are wont to cite in support of their belief their experience of "free choice". Their exercise of a "free" will is expressed through their so-called "ability to choose" between alternative actions. Their act of "choosing" is experienced as a "decision" of their "free" will.

Now even the most determined of "free-willites" can surely see a difference between an *awareness* of possible future actions and an "ability to choose" a future action.

An awareness of choice is an awareness of possibilities; an act of choice is a *decision*. (An "ability to choose" is perhaps something to do with an awareness of possible decisions.)

Any experience of an "awareness" is surely determined by an ability for awareness; any act of "choosing" is surely determined by an ability to make a "decision". Something or other surely determines an act of decision; indeed, a decision is a determination.

Part of our human experience of an "act" is that of a happening in time (and, of course, space). Every such happening is a unique happening. From our human point of experience we may well say that we "decide" to do (or not to do) a certain something; and having done it (or not done it) we may well say that we could have "decided differently". However, we cannot then prove the point by not doing what we did do (or doing what we did not do). Indeed, what we did, or did not, do was a uniquely determined human happening.

The influence of "awareness" and "understanding" on human decision and action is surely to be welcomed as a promising outlook for determinist human beings.

LETTERS

Religion and Language in Ireland

Probably most *Freethinker* readers are of the opinion that the Roman Catholic Church in Ireland is closely linked with Irish nationalism. The most interesting review (8 January 1972) by Niall Sionóid of the pamphlet on Bishop Bedell by Deasún Breatnach deals with a little-known aspect of the English-Irish cultural conflict that demonstrates the fallacy of this view.

One aim of the Reformation was to provide the Bible for the people in their own language. Unlike Bedell, most of the early Church of Ireland clergy were less reformers than carpetbaggers. The result of their failing to proselytise through the medium of Irish was that it acted as a shield protecting the people from the reformed faith. During the period when Catholicism was proscribed in Ireland, Irish clerical students at continental seminaries were sedulously encouraged to speak Irish, without fluency in which they would have been most ineffective on their return to Ireland.

Towards the end of the eighteenth century the penal laws against Catholics had largely dropped into abeyance. The Catholic Church began to receive official recognition, which culminated with the foundation of the seminary of Maynooth which was heavily subsidised from the official purse. The subsidy proved to be an excellent investment towards the cultural conquest of Ireland. From its foundation Maynooth has worked for the spread of English and has indeed been the most effective of the agencies of anglicisation. Ireland was evidently envisaged as a bridgehead for catholicising the Anglo-American world. An Irish-speaking Ireland would have been of no utility in furtherance of its aim. Many individual priests have opposed this tide of anglicisation. Nevertheless, like Bedell in the Church of Ireland they have been the exceptions which proved a very general rule.

PADRAIG O CONCHUIR.

Thomas Paine's Birthplace

With reference to your note in *The Freethinker* of 8 January, on the birthplace of Thomas Paine at Thetford, Norfolk, the Thomas Paine Society is calling a general meeting at Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London, WC1, on Saturday 26 February, at 3 p.m., to discuss what action can be taken to save the house from being allowed to fall into ruin. All interested individuals are invited to attend.

The Society is anxious to see Paine's birthplace restored and while no appeal for aid has been made we have received the munificent offer, referred to in the report, of £1,000 from two of our members, Mr and Mrs J. Collins of Steyning, Sussex. Another of our members, Mrs I. G. Browne of Norwich, Norfolk, has also offered the magnificent sum of £1,000. The Thomas Paine Society has thus backed its opposition to the demolition of the Paine birth-

place with a substantial sum of money (there have also been several offers of small amounts). However, most of the people in Thetford who strongly objected to the demolition of the house have become very silent in respect of offering financial aid to any fund set up to purchase and restore the house. Sadly the Thetford Council, which agreed to the demolition by a single vote (and the Council has since been "captured" by the Labour Party), has refused to back a public appeal for funds to save the birthplace.

R. W. MORRELL,

Hon. Secretary, Thomas Paine Society.

Secularism a Religion?

I was very much interested by J. Stewart Ross's article "The Religion of Secularism". That secularism could become a religion was foreseen by the German "philosopher of the self", Max Stirner, in his penetrating and profound exposition of individualism, *The Ego and His Own*, first published in 1844. Here he scornfully referred to the orthodox atheists of his time as "pious people" because they wanted to replace the worship of God with the worship of Man. For Stirner, "Man" was just as much a mental spook as "God". Both were concepts which denied the uniqueness of the individual. Not only do the nineteenth-century secularists described by Mr Ross bear out Stirner's critique, so do many contemporary humanists.

S. E. PARKER.

Prince Philip on Population

I cannot see how any endorsement of the Duke of Edinburgh's statement on taxing children can be made.

The Duke has a job (by marriage) of keeping his mouth shut on anything that asks for legislation. I would, of course, prefer he had not such a royal post. It is a sheer waste of my money and his time.

It would be better for his social knowledge if he tried for a job at his local employment exchange for a low-paid job. Then join, say, the Transport and General Workers' Union. The result would really give him something to say on British life.

ARTIUR FRANCIS.

"Yes to Life"

It pained me to learn from your number of 8 January that the chapter, "Yes to Life", in my book *Individual Morality* had given David Tribe the twiches! I wonder why?

This raises an interesting point. "Yes to Life" is an uncompromising statement of life-affirmation. Unfortunately, some humanists are taking their responsibilities so seriously that they give the impression that they stand for a rationalism which is as joyless and, indeed, sometimes as pessimistic as the "Long-faced Christianity" which it is supposed to supplant. Humanists will get nowhere with the young unless they stand for life-affirmation, an optimistic perspective on the future, and responsibility between people. I wonder where David Tribe stands in these particulars?

JAMES HEMMING.