

A TALENTED FAMILY

R. J. CONDON

Invent a better mousetrap, runs the proverb, and the world will beat a path to your door. My father invented a better mousetrap. Unlike the ordinary trap, which springs as soon as its business end is touched, this one required the bait to be eaten through, allowing time for several mice to join the feast. Father's trap could catch three at a time. He tried hard to interest the world in his invention, but only the wolf, figuratively speaking, ever appeared at our door. So much for lying proverbs.

At another time father had the idea of making a toy cash register, something previously unheard of. He put one together and sent it off to a manufacturer. It was returned, dismantled, with a kindly-worded letter of rejection. Shortly afterwards toy cash registers began to appear in the shops. They have been a popular line for nearly half a century.

My Uncle Nelson fared better with his inventions. Condon's Drop Counter and Condon's Magnetic Tip were long featured in catalogues of scientific apparatus, and brought him in an occasional trifle in royalties.

This brings me to the point of my story. The similarity of my name to that borne by the contraceptive sheath has often been remarked upon. My standard reply has always been: "Yes, it was invented by a member of my family. We're always coming up with bright ideas". Nobody ever

took this statement seriously. Neither did I until I read the October 1971 issue of that excellent magazine, *The Townswoman*.

According to the magazine's medical correspondent, an eighteenth century London apothecary named John Condon hit on the idea of using a section of the blind gut of a sheep as a defensive sheath against syphilis. The contraceptive properties of his device were quickly recognised and its fame spread far and wide; the formal name for it, "condom", being due to mispronunciation. The Church reacted violently against this means of enjoying sexual intercourse without risking pregnancy, and clergy throughout the country denounced it as an invention of the devil. The unfortunate John, who had only intended to reduce the spread of infection, and who gained no reward from his idea, found himself a social outcast. He sold his business and fled to Ireland, where he eventually died, a disillusioned man.

This last circumstance makes it virtually certain that John was Irish, and all Irish Condons are descended from a single family. Father used to tell us our ancestors were kings. That was not entirely one of his inventions; actually they had a barony in County Cork. So John Condon, that ill-used benefactor of humanity, must have been a relative of mine after all. My opinion of proverbs notwithstanding, a true word my sometimes be spoken in jest.

LENIN'S LUNACIES

I. S. LOW

Like a monument above a plain Lenin's book *Imperialism: the Highest Stage of Capitalism* once towered over political thought. Recently I read it rather carefully, and I was astounded: it is such tripe!

This is what Lenin says: monopolies rise, firms join together to form great combines. In particular banks rise to dominating positions. The capitalists decide they need not export goods any more. They export capital. They make loans to countries like the Argentine, buy shares in companies there, and then sit back happily and enjoy themselves on the dividends and interest.

This is awfully nice for them. So they divide up the world into regions where each lot of capitalists can export capital without interference. British capitalists can export capital to India. French and German capitalists to East Europe. But a day comes when the capitalists cannot get enough money from their empires. They want more. They must bag someone else's empire and the First World War happens.

Now please note—the vital thing in this process is the export of capital. When did it start?

Lenin is quite clear on this point. In chapter four (The Export of Capital) he says: "This table shows that the export of capital reached formidable dimensions only in the beginning of the twentieth century". In the first chapter (Concentration of Production and Monopolies) he says that after 1873 cartels "... are still a transitory phenomenon". Only after the boom at the end of the nineteenth century and the crisis of 1900-3 do "cartels become one of the foundations of the whole of economic life". In the

same chapter he says "the time when the new capitalism (i.e. monopoly) was definitely substituted for the old can be established fairly precisely: it was beginning of the twentieth century". Clear enough. Monopoly, the export of capital, did not become important till at least 1900.

Now imperialism started long before that. Britain grabbed Cyprus in 1878. She also grabbed Egypt in 1882. Ferry, Prime Minister of France, grabbed Indo-China about 1884. Bismarck grabbed bits of Africa in 1884-5. North Borneo, the Niger, East Africa and other places were grabbed by Britain between 1881 and 1889. Lenin himself says (in chapter six—Division of the World Between the Great Powers), "For Great Britain the period of the enormous expansion of colonial conquests is that between 1868-1880 . . . for France and Germany this period falls . . . in those last twenty years" [of the nineteenth century]. This shatters Lenin's theory. The monument lies in ruins.

Cause of Imperialism

"Well", snarls an indignant Marxist, "what do *you* think caused imperialism?"

First let me say that a lot of things helped cause it. The desire of politicians like Disraeli for a good electioneering programme. The need of certain countries to keep up their prestige. The need of countries to keep up exports when faced with trade rivals. "Ha, ha!" jeers the Marxist triumphantly. "You're admitting Lenin's thesis!" No I am not. Nations such as Britain would have had to keep up exports if there had been no monopolies or if all the industries had been nationalised. I admit that economics

plays an important part in politics generally and in the rise of imperialism, but I don't admit that it plays the only part or even the main one.

What did play the main part? I think national sovereignty. It can hardly be a coincidence that imperialism started soon after 1870 when Germany knocked France flat in six weeks. According to G. B. Shaw, every country in Europe thought: "Good Heavens! What would happen if Germany attacked us?" (chapter two of *What I Really Wrote About the War*). So they decided they needed power. And they thought they could get it by having empires. If they had empires they could use the manpower of the countries they conquered to raise armies, they could tax the conquered peoples to pay for fleets, they could control strategic points.

Lenin wrote *Imperialism* in 1916—apparently to explain why the war was happening. Like all Marxists he considered himself a political scientist. A real political scientist would have thought about all the different aspects of the problem—the diplomatic aspect, the military aspect, the economic aspect, together and in isolation, to find which was the decisive aspect. Not Lenin. He had already decided that capitalism was the cause of the war. So he rigged up a theory which is contradicted by the information he himself brings forward in support of it.

He lets other cats out of Marxist bags. In chapter three he says "In Germany it is illegal to issue shares of less value than one thousand marks and the magnates of German finance look with an envious eye at England where it is legal to issue one pound shares". How interesting! The capitalists of Germany want something and they cannot get it! Yet the capitalist class is the real ruling class, according to Marxists (such as Lenin); and Kaisers, generals, Reichstags, civil servants and other members of "the Superstructure" are just their stooges!

Lenin's Rabkrin

According to a book *Stalinism in Britain* by Robert Black, a Trotskyist, Lenin had a problem after the Revolution. He had set up new ministries or commissariats to run the socialist economy. But the only people he could get able to staff these ministries were members of the middle class. They were not likely to be keen in carrying out socialist policies. So Lenin set up a special body called Rabkrin whose task was to keep these middle class civil servants on the proletarian straight and narrow. And at the head of Rabkrin he put—Stalin! That character at once started using his position as head of Rabkrin to build up his own power, much to Lenin's surprise and horror.

Why did Lenin make this boob? Perhaps it was because he was so hypnotized with the idea that all one had to do was to sit firmly on the capitalists and everything would be lovely? So he made no provision for dangers from other directions, just as, in the Second World War, some people thought we had only to sit firmly on the Germans and all would be well: they refused to listen to ideas about dealing with other problems or to proposals for World Government. Result: the Cold War, Korea, Hungary, Vietnam, Czechoslovakia, Bangladesh.

Why am I getting at Lenin? Because I'm for capitalism? No. Because I think that national sovereignty is a greater danger than capitalism. We should have been getting on with fighting this and working for World Government for a long time. But by blethering on about capitalism the Marxists have kept people's minds off this task and they are partly to blame for Vietnam, Bangladesh and other horrors.

But I'll let Lenin have the last word. In the first chapter of *The State and Revolution* he says: "... it will be necessary to quote at length from the works of Marx and Engels. Of course long quotations will make the text cumbersome and will not help to make it popular reading...". I couldn't agree more!

ON JAMES THOMSON ("B.V.")*

Shuffling 'neath the yellow gaslights
 In the rain of London streets;
 Sick and dirty, cold and wretched,
 Haunted by some dire,
 Destroying angel that stalked
 The metres of his mind;
 Seeking the milk of oblivion
 From the bitter-sweet breasts
 Of the grape: and yet no solace;
 Only failure, friendships broken,
 Self loathing and disgust.
 —The débris of what might
 Have been a man fulfilled:
 And yet, among the "empties"
 Scattered round some mean and
 Ugly room, a tattered
 Pile of papers, scrawled with verses:
 The spark of genius and
 The love of life that flickers
 Through the flotsam and the filth.

L.G.B.

* I beg to add a brief note for the non-specialist reader: James Thomson (1834-1882)—not to be confused with an eighteenth century poet of the same name—was a well-known figure in freethought circles in the 1860s and '70s. His most famous poem, "The City of Dreadful Night", was first published in Charles Bradlaugh's *National Reformer* in 1874. "B.V." was his most frequent *nom-de-plume*. Thomson finally became a chronic alcoholic. (Editor).



"And I hear that Hare and Squirrel are on the Pill now, too."

THE FREETHINKER

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ANNOUNCEMENTS

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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.

Freethought books and pamphlets (new). Send for list to G. W. Foote & Co. Ltd., 103 Borough High Street, London, SE1.

Humanist Postal Book Service (secondhand books bought and sold). For information or catalogue send 5p stamp to Kit Mouat, Mercers, Cuckfield, Sussex.

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

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.

Brighton and Hove Humanist Group, Imperial Centre Hotel, Hove. Sunday, 5 March, 5.30 p.m.: Michael Lines, "Humanism Abroad".

Children's Rights Conference, 11-12 March: details from National Council for Civil Liberties, 152 Camden High Street, London NW1.

Freethought History and Bibliography Society, Conway Hall, 25 Red Lion Square, London WC1. Saturday, 11 March. 2 p.m.: General Meeting; 2.45 p.m.: J. S. L. Gilmour, "Some Freethinkers and Their Writings, I: Epicurus to the Eighteenth Century".

Leicester Humanist Society, Vaughan College, University Centre, St. Nicholas Circle, Leicester. Monday, 6 March, 7.45 p.m.: speaker from the C.B.I.

Leicester Secular Society, Secular Hall, 75 Humberstone Gate, Leicester. Sunday, 5 March, 6.30 p.m.: 91st Anniversary. Guest speaker, Richard Clements, O.B.E.

(Continued on page 79)

NEWS

ABORTION AND RELIGION

A survey* of 3,000 women seeking help from the Pregnancy Advisory Service with unwanted pregnancies has shown that failure to use contraception accounts for two-thirds of the cases. More than fifty per cent of the sample were either married women or "single women in stable relationships".

Of particular interest to *Freethinker* readers will be the table of patients' religions, which is reproduced below. Since these figures are based on 3,000 consecutive patients they may be said to represent a fair statistical sample. Of the 528 Roman Catholics, "283 (54 per cent) stated that they were practising members of their church. The decision to terminate pregnancy did not appear to be affected by the religion of the patients".

Church of England	...	...	1,782 (59%)
Roman Catholic	...	...	528 (18%)
Non-conformist	...	...	241 (8%)
Agnostic	...	...	237 (8%)
"Other", Hindu, Moslem, etc.	...	...	94 (3%)
No religion	...	...	50 (2%)
Jewish	...	...	30 (1%)
Not known	...	...	26 (1%)
Atheist	...	...	12 [0.4%]

*LAMBERT, Joan 1971 (October 16). "Survey of 3,000 Unwanted Pregnancies". *British Medical Journal* 4: pp. 156-160. These extracts are republished by kind permission of the B.M.J. and Mrs. Lambert.

MOTHER TERESA TENDS WAR VICTIMS

The indefatigable Mother Teresa and her Missionaries of Charity are making inroads into two of the serious social problems thrown up by the recent Indo-Pakistan war. On the one hand Mother Teresa is opening homes for three thousand Bengali women, raped and made pregnant by Yahya Khan's gallant Moslem warriors last year, and subsequently disowned by their families. And on the other, she and her nuns are doing relief work among some 50,000 Biharis who are huddled together in the Khulna province of Bangladesh. It is to be hoped that Mother Teresa's initiatives will not pass unnoticed by the governments of India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh, in whose hands lie the responsibility for, and indeed the very lives of, the unpopular Bihari minority in East Bengal.

THE COMMON MARKET

As far as I know none of the various Humanist organisations has formulated any official policy statement on the Common Market, into which we are currently being steered, nor for that matter do I think that as organisations they ought to: I imagine that each body contains among its members a fair proportion each of pros, antis, and "don't knows".

On a purely personal basis, as a small-nationite and Little Englander, I look upon the massive European Economic Community, with its bureaucracy and its cancerous obsession with industrial "growth" with the gravest of misgivings. But if there is one argument against joining Europe that gets my goat, it is the one that states that the

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Humanist movement should oppose Britain's entry into the E.E.C. on the grounds that the consortium so formed will be "Catholic dominated".

Good grief! Where is the spirit of Paine and Bradlaugh? If we have become so pusillanimous and impotent that a couple of *Freethinker* readers (or even the Women's Liberation Sub-committee of the Assembly of Bloomsbury Heretics) can no longer pitch a platoon of Swiss Guards into the Tiber before breakfast, then indeed we deserve nothing better than to be served up as entertainment at an *auto da fé!*

Be that as it may: hands off Mercia!

PRESIDENT NIXON ON CHURCH SCHOOLS

"... As we see those private and parochial schools . . . close at the rate of one a day, we must resolve to stop that trend and turn it round. And you can count on my support."—President Richard Nixon in a recent address to the Knights of Columbus in New York.

Meanwhile, in Silver Springs, Maryland, the war-drums are throbbing in the offices of Americans United for Separation of Church and State: "We will fight to the last ditch to prevent the use of one more cent of public tax money being used to support religion in violation of the law of this land [The United States Constitution]".

—That's much better!

THE WAGES OF UNCONVENTIONAL SEX?

The *Evening Standard* quotes the following from a New York bookseller's catalogue of exotica:

"Profusely illustrated first edition (printed in Bombay) of *Unconventional Sex Practices*. Spine cracked, appendix torn."

Let the buyer beware!

NO CIVIL MARRIAGE IN ISRAEL

Another attempt to institute civil weddings in Israel has failed: a private members' bill for civil marriage and divorce has been defeated in the Knesset. This means that couples who want a non-religious marriage ceremony still have to go to Cyprus for one.

Under the existing law, Jews can only be married by Orthodox rabbis, and non-Jews by ministers of recognised churches.

CHRISTIAN EATING HABITS

Headline in a recent article in the *Church Times*:

"Ordinands will be eating their way to Unity."

—Let on-one be deceived: the only way in which the Christians will achieve unity—if they ever do—will be by the time-honoured process of cannibalism.

MORE DEVIL-HUNTING

They are at it again! The *Catholic Herald* (18 February) informs us that a petition, "distributed to local churches" and calling for the film, *The Devils*, to be banned from the Exeter area, has been signed by nearly 4,000 people, including, of course, "hundreds of Catholics". The petition is being back by Mr. John Hannam, M.P. for Exeter; and by the Bishop of Crediton and the Archdeacon of Exeter. They all want the film banned because "beside the perverted sex and violence in it, it is also blasphemous".

—Ah, so!

"LITURGICAL ANARCHY"

"If half what I have been told by people who have attended such services should become well known, I think the bishops will have to do something to restrain the Liturgical anarchy that is being practised in this hole and corner fashion." The mind boggles, but this is, in fact, the Rev. Lorimer Rees (Vicar of St. Mary Abbots, Kensington) denouncing the House Church Movement in a recent parish newsletter.

The idea of the Movement, is, apparently, for people to meet for Communion in their homes "varying from kitchen to bedsitter", in an attempt to "recapture the atmosphere of the primitive church when it worshipped in secret and underground". Mr. Rees, however, is not impressed: "This gimmick is a retrograde step because it ignores the primary duty of a Christian, which is to witness the faith publicly to the best of his ability . . . It is a great astonishment to me that so many of those who, while having on their lips the jargon of evangelisation, 'outreach', 'the Christian presence', 'confrontation', etc., should in practice be retreating into cosy quarters and organising themselves not outwards but inwards".

Lord! How these Christians love one another—especially "when two or three are gathered together. . .!"

WANTED . . .

In a suburb of Rome a little while back, "wanted" notices went up for the "hippie"-type leader of a way-out religious cult who had been illicitly practising medicine, and distributing food and alcoholic beverages without a licence. His name, of course, was Jesus of Nazareth, *alias* Jesus Christ.

Rome police are now looking for the people who put up the wanted posters in order to charge them with "insulting the State religion."

N.S.S. STATEMENT CRITICISED

The National Secular Society's strictures on the Essex Churches' "Day of Prayer for Peace in Northern Ireland" (reported in last week's "News and Notes") have themselves come in for sharp criticism.

In a recent press statement the Hon. Secretary of the Grovelling End (Essex) Humanist Group has described the N.S.S. comments as "negative and unconstructive", and "utterly out of harmony with the meaningful relationship with the Churches which we all wish to foster in Essex as elsewhere". The N.S.S.'s attitude, he said, was sinking rapidly "into the sterile quagmire of the sort of irresponsible, immature, vulgar village atheism that we associate with the etiolated pages of *The Episcopophagist* and *The Freethinker*".

BOOKS

MAGIC: AN OCCULT PRIMER.

By David Conway. Jonathan Cape, £5.

For some people magic is something more than sleight-of-hand or the subject of a Denis Wheatley novel. Un-Christian rituals furtively performed in churches and the nude antics of witch covens are occasionally reported in the press, and claims are made that the spells thus cast really do work. Now we can all take part, for *Magic: An Occult Primer* has been specially written for the uninitiated by a practising magician. The work purports to be a rational defence of magical theory, together with practical advice on putting it into effect.

To a large extent the author disarms criticism in advance, for he readily admits that the phenomena, when there are any, resulting from magical ritual are mainly subjective in character. The demons summoned up by the magician are the products of his subconscious mind. But, it is argued, they are at the same time objective, being reflections of cosmic forces which the mind, because of its limitations, can only express in this way. The purpose of ritual is to put the celebrant in tune with these forces, so that he can make use of them. No scientific instrument, it is true, has ever detected them, but the best evidence of their reality is the results obtained.

That magic is a form of applied psychology is clear from the rites themselves. Everything, we are told, has been carefully chosen with a view to its effect on the mind of the magician. The preliminaries, silence, abstention from sex, sleep and solid food, and anointing with oils and scents, are notoriously conducive to hallucination, and have been so used by holy men from the shamans of primitive societies to the saints and mystics of Christendom. The visionary process continues in the ritual proper, with the burning of incense, the monotonous repetition of a single word, and intense concentration on the desired result. The climax comes with "a state of unreason similar to the divine frenzy of the Bacchantes. Like their delirium the aim of such unreason will be to receive the deity that is being invoked". The frenzy may be achieved with the assistance of alcohol or drugs, though these are not recommended since they weaken the will. Blood sacrifices are deprecated as cruel and messy. The author, sensitive soul, suggests drawing one's own blood or even cracking an egg, rather than killing a bird or small animal.

More commonly sex is used to reach the climax; whether hetero- or homosexual is immaterial. It can even be a solo effort; in one ritual the celebrant is instructed to masturbate. Best of all is group sex, on the principle of the more sex the greater the power generated. Those shy or past it need not despair; though a great help, sex is not essential. With the climax, or orgasm, the magician feels the god or cosmic force or whatever overflowing inside him. Visualising his magical intention as if it were already realised, he instructs the force to depart on its errand.

In all this there is nothing which cannot be explained by psychology without postulating "cosmic forces". True, says the author, but it gets results; try it. Since "it does help considerably if you happen to believe in what you are doing", this advice is of little use to the sceptic. The few examples given border on the farcical. We are told, for instance, of an occult group who sent out an "artificial elemental" to attack a rival fraternity. Tipped off in time, the intended victims sent the aggressor back to plague its creators. Pandemonium broke out, teacups and sandwiches

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flew about, and an ivory Buddha was sent crashing through a gilt-framed portrait of Madame Blavatsky. Obviously the elemental knew an impostor when it saw one. Mind you, Mr Conway is none too sure of this case. It might have been a collective delusion, he concedes, though it rather suggests a practical joker playing the poltergeist.

Cursing, says the author, is best left alone, though instructions are here if you want them. A curse, it appears, is "an object designed to attract malefic forces to whomever the magician has in mind during the course of its manufacture". As everyone knows, "there is always the risk that some morning you may yourself get up to find one of these nasty curses lying on your doormat". Well, your reviewer has been prayed for without noticeable result, but a curse may be magic of a more potent order. Fortunately the cosmic force evoked travels at somewhat less than a snail's pace, so you have time to ritually neutralise any curse that comes your way.

Among the practical applications of magic may be mentioned "astral projection". An out-of-the-body sensation is a fairly common form of hallucination, a noted example being that of the Apostle Paul (2 Corinthians 12: 2-4). Astral projection enables one to travel backwards and forwards in time, and the Crucifixion is suggested as one scene at which the budding magician might like to be present. This ought to settle the historicity question once and for all, but also, there are snags. As Mr Conway says, the impressions given by magicians are often contradictory, and cannot be confirmed empirically. Moreover, one's consciousness at such an event is likely to hover uncertainly between what actually happened and one's own preconceived notion of it. The one example of time-travel given here concerns a lady who willed herself back in her home town as it had been fifty years previously. The experience might have been a dream, and she might earlier have seen old photographs of the place, though the author thinks it unlikely that all the details noted by his friend could have come from such a source. But who knows what she might have had stored in her subconscious mind, or how it got there?

Another function of magic is precognition. Coincidence could account of many successes in this field, but some predictions are fulfilled in too detailed a manner for that. Mr Conway cites the well-known case of the psychical investigator Dr S. G. Soal and the "direct voice" medium Blanche Cooper. During a séance in 1922 Dr Soal received a "spirit" message purporting to come from an old school friend, Gordon Davis. The voice described a house and its interior arrangements in considerable detail, and also mentioned a wife and small son. Three years later Dr Soal discovered that his friend, whom he had thought dead, was alive and living in Southend. When he went there Soal found Davis, with his wife and son, in the house described by the medium. But they had not moved in until nearly a year after the séance. A clear case of precognition, says Mr Conway, and it does seem to have been accepted as such by other writers who have referred to it. Those who have some knowledge of mediumistic methods may not be so sure. It would have been an elementary precaution for Mrs Cooper to have looked up this old friend of Dr Soal, whose name she may have learned through the latter's habit of thinking aloud. Suspicion grows when we learn, though not from Mr Conway, that Davis had first

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inspected his future home three days before the séance. Collusion, however unlikely, cannot be ruled out.

Reading through this book one gets the feeling that Mr Conway's tongue often strayed into his cheek while writing it. For instance, a recommended method of communicating with the dead is the one using a circle of the alphabet and an upturned glass. But don't despair if the glass moves aimlessly from one letter to another; you may have contacted an illiterate personality!

As a critic once wrote of Madame Blavatsky's *Isis Unveiled*, here is "a wonderful collection of the maggots of the human brain. There is hardly a superstition which is not wholly or partially sanctioned . . .". At the same time the book is pleasant enough reading, and with appendices on magical receipts and scripts, plus an occult Who's Who, there is much to interest the curious. Not quite 300 pages, it is a slim volume for the price, though with "Money, to acquire" on page 97 no doubt it will earn its keep.

R. J. CONDON

PREJUDICES AND ANTIPATHIES by Sanford Berman. Metuchen, N.J.: Scarecrow Press Inc., \$7.50.

The Library of Congress Subject Headings are used in a large and increasing number of academic libraries not only in this country and North America, but also in developing areas such as the West Indies and Africa, where the author of this book works, particularly in large university libraries which use the L.C. classification scheme for its scholarly detail.

Sanford Berman has examined those headings in the list which concern people, and found such a plethora of outmoded ideas contained within them that they must be a considerable embarrassment to many librarians working in the Third World. These ideas, needless to say in a list first drawn up in 1914, form a coherent pattern of imperialism, prudery, preservation of Christian values, and condescension towards women, young people, and "negroes". Some examples: NATIVE RACES [white supremacist overtones]; LITERATURE, IMMORAL [what is really meant is erotic literature]; HEAVENLY RECOGNITION [unintelligible without explanation as part of Christian doctrine]; WOMEN AS ACCOUNTANTS, etc. [implying needless surprise, instead of "women accountants"].

Elsewhere the author is less convincing. The only justification for the establishment of any subject heading lies in the literature, embodying an infinite variety of viewpoints, which finds its way into libraries. This is known in the trade as "literary warrant". Berman rightly attacks the use of words which are inherently offensive, such as "mammies", "kafirs", or which embody preconceived notions of morality, such as LITERATURE, IMMORAL: these have literary warrant only in the barest sense, which any neutral list of headings should be above perpetuating. Even so, Berman takes one of these far too seriously: YELLOW PERIL is likely to raise only a wry smile nowadays, and in fact was used only once by L.C. during 1965-70. But headings such as BANKS AND BANKING—JEWS, where no other races are specified and where Berman demands corresponding headings for Christian (etc.) bankers, are surely justified because of the Jews' distinctive contribution in this field: Jewishness here is a marked term, and

the literature on specifically Aryan bankers is non-existent. Similarly, WOMAN—ANATOMY AND PHYSIOLOGY, with no corresponding male heading, has point in view of woman's more complicated reproductive system.

But bias there certainly is, and Berman easily proves his case overall. He also acutely points out the questionable hidden assumptions which lie behind some of the cross-references, e.g. the automatic linking of homosexuality with perversion, or of abortion with infanticide.

Most of the author's suggested remedies are good, and one wishes without much hope that they might be adopted in time by L.C. A few, such as "Afro-American" for [U.S.] negro, are cumbersome and suffer from their studied inoffensiveness.

The book is written in a kind of barely controlled rage, which makes a refreshing change in a field where most of the literature is exceedingly dry.

CHARLES RUDD

NATIONAL SECULAR SOCIETY ANNUAL DINNER

Saturday, 25 March 1972

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BEING WITH OTHERS

Among all other things,

Ourselves, one and alone;

Each of us nothing, unless

Among others their own;

Only with others, alone

Ourselves without loneliness.

Charles Byass.

Correction

The final sentence of David Tribe's "On Twitching" (12 February: p. 55) should have read: "The conflict between optimism and pessimism (or euphoria and realism) cuts across all creeds."

We apologise for the omission of the last six words.

EVENTS—(continued from page 76)

South Place Ethical Society, Conway Hall, 25 Red Lion Square, London WC1. Sunday, 5 March, 11 a.m.: Ronald Mason, "The Genesis and Exodus of Today's Writer". Tuesday, 7 March,

7 p.m.: Ros Kane and Peter Jones, "The Failure of Prisons". Sutton Humanist Group, 6b Gloucester Court, Overton Road, Sutton (c/o Doris Holtorp): informal discussion.

Thorndyke Theatre, Leatherhead, Surrey. 9-25 March: paintings by Oswald Blakeston and Halima Nalecz.

LETTERS

Religion and Nationalism in Ireland

In trying to unravel the complexities of the Northern Ireland impasse it is worth making the following points:

1. Irish Republicanism was entirely secular in origin, being greatly influenced by the French Revolution and by the writings of Tom Paine.

2. The influence of the Catholic Church has been consistently exerted against Republicanism. Any departure from this rule has been necessitated by the need to avoid being completely out of touch with public opinion.

3. The underwriting of a "Protestant State for a Protestant People" over 50 years by Westminster has been the means of ensuring the seventeenth century sectarian line-up in the six counties and a Catholic clerical set-up in the twenty-six counties.

4. The I.R.A. had little support in Northern Ireland at the beginning of the Civil Rights struggle.

5. The I.R.A. grew appreciably once the policy was adopted of using the British Army for rough-stuff arms searches in the Catholic ghetto areas, at the behest of Stormont.

6. It gained the support of virtually the entire Catholic community when internment without trial was put into operation.

7. Violence, excluding Establishment violence, has been condemned by the authorities of all churches, excepting Dr. Paisley's Free Presbyterians.

8. The I.R.A., both varieties, are non-sectarian, despite the fact that most adherents are Catholic. Their selective killings have been "ecumenical" to the extent that Catholic members of the R.U.C. or U.D.F. would have a much heavier actuarial weighting than their Protestant counterparts.

9. The readiness of Westminster politicians to either encourage a Protestant backlash or to dance to an Orange tune is the biggest obstacle to the development of a post-Christian or at least of a tolerable Christian society in Ireland.

No doubt a rationalist voice in the House of Lords merits your front page. To a rationalist the Christian sects appear as the obvious scapegoats in ascribing the responsibility for England's Cuba. Yet, had Lord Raglan's assessment of the situation been the result of a more rational analysis he might have come to the conclusion that Ireland's English Question supplies the answer to why Ireland remains a Christian country in post-Christian Europe?

PADRAIG O CONCHUIR.

Ireland and Immigrants

In his comments on Ben Marcato's letter, your editor sneers that the Ulster plantation Protestants cannot be considered "indigenous", and so, one gathers, have no rights to defend themselves against the "indigenous" Catholics.

But although the editor feels this way about the Ulster Protestants, who have been there nearly 400 years, his attitude towards coloured immigrants in England, most of whom have not been here even ten years, is quite different. These, one gathers from his writings, not only have all the rights of the indigenous English people but are allowed even more favourable treatment insofar as they have access to such institutions as the Race Relations Boards.

Could he explain his attitude?
What writings? (Ed.).

BRIAN FENTON.

Jews in the U.S.S.R.

Yours correspondent Pat Sloan asks us to take into account six points in considering Russia and the Jews. Let us look at them one by one:

1. "Nationality and religion are here inextricably tied up." They certainly are in the Russian Empire where Jews must carry passports stating their Jewish "nationality". Comrade Sloan certainly misunderstands the meaning of the term "chosen people" (note the bitter Jewish joke: "after six million more martyrs, isn't it time God chose someone else for a change?"). Any visitor to Israel can see that the attitude of superiority towards Arabs is a figment of Pat Sloan's imagination, and even if the Israeli government did claim the allegiance of Jews everywhere would this be any worse than the Russian government's claim to the allegiance of all followers of the Marxist faith?

2. "Zionism representing a 'God-given' ideology has always been anti-Socialist and anti-Soviet." Zionism has never been considered a God-given ideology. Some of the most orthodox Jews are strongly anti-Zionist and the orthodox religious groupings are a minority in Israel. Furthermore both the Israeli government and the main opposition parties claim to be socialist. Has Pat Sloan not heard of the Kibbutz movement? And didn't the Soviet

Union vote for the formation of the Israeli state and sponsor its admission to the U.N.?

3. This conglomeration of points, apart from implying that any Jew wishing to leave the Soviet Union is a criminal, seems to suggest that Soviet Jews cannot complain of being persecuted for their wish to emigrate because there is a general Soviet ban on emigration. By the same argument the presence of non-Jews in Hitler's extermination camps should be held to prove that Nazism was not anti-semitic. And does anyone really believe that the existence of Jewish cemeteries is the same thing as apartheid? No-one objects to the Marxist custom of embalming its saints for public view or segregating their remains in the Kremlin wall. Secularists could and should oppose religionists in Israel and elsewhere who force their beliefs on the rest of humanity, but we have surely no wish to prevent believers from indulging in their own harmless ceremonies.

4. Comrade Sloan speaks of Israeli aggression. Does he really believe it is aggression when a nation of 261,000 people fights back against nations of 90,000,000 who have declared an intention to "annihilate, massacre and wipe them off the map"? But then Pat Sloan's own faith probably enjoins him to believe in Czechoslovakia's unprovoked aggression against the Russian empire in 1969.

5. As the Editor has ably answered this point I shall only ask whether Pat Sloan thinks that other governments should persecute those of their citizens who declare their allegiance to the Soviet Empire?

6. Can Mr. Sloan supply us with comparative statistics showing the number of Soviet Jews who wish to leave and the number who have left and wish to return? Is the Israeli government preventing any of the latter from going back? S. R. DALTON.

Denis Cobell's "Free-Thinkers"

In his first paragraph ("What is Free-thought?" *The Freethinker*, 12 February) Denis Cobell begrudgingly allowed: "Mr. Tribe is right to use the word insofar as it is established semantically". Yet before he comes to his tenth and final comment (? commandment) we find he has already snatched the term "free-thinker" back from the atheists. It appears: "The name is misleading in this context today as atheists are often as dogmatic in their assertions against God as any believer in the supernatural". Militant atheists are even worse, it seems. "... as dogmatic as any R.C. and at time look equally ridiculous." And then at long last the esoteric definition is revealed: "... thinking freely is to be truly democratic, even to the point of political, philosophical and religious anarchy!" One can almost hear the Russian accent of Tolstoy breaking through.

Considerable confusion exists with the word "belief", and Mr. Cobell's failure to understand the natural processes that occur before the conceptual stage of knowledge is reached causes him to confuse the rational idea with *implanted belief*. Hence he unites the two and endeavours to describe them both with the single word "believe". The apparent contradiction is no more than the idealist's attraction to the mystical qualities of his revered "reason", to which all thought and actions must bow. And who else could say: "Possibly the only real 'free-thinker' is the baby in its cradle!" Some baby! Some cradle!

TREVOR MORGAN.

Reading Denis Cobell's article, "What is Free-Thought" (12 February), it struck me that the concept of "free-thinker" is not a very useful one, especially when it leads to the possibility of regarding the baby in the cradle as "the only real free-thinker".

Maybe if we introduce the question "free-from-what?" we arrive at a more workable concept.

Free from all influences and forces around us? One can hardly regard a person living in such a way as a thinker at all, since our capacity for thinking develops only by coming into contact with these influences and forces.

What about "free-from-fear—to think"?

I will give an example as an illustration: someone brought up with the fear of God drummed into him will be crippled by anxiety and guilt feelings when he starts to discard the concept of God in his thinking; whereas someone brought up to regard God as a loving father will only feel some nostalgic sadness on leaving the warm security of his God concept.

"Free-from-fear—to think" should be accompanied by "free-from-fear—to express" these thoughts.

I am not so sure about the next step, that is "free-from-fear—to act" upon one's thoughts. A high degree of responsibility and regard for the rights of others and our community as a whole seems to be a necessary precondition here.

ANNELIESE OVERTON.