

# The FREETHINKER

The Secular  
and Humanist  
Weekly

Registered at the Post Office as a Newspaper

FOUNDED 1881 BY G. W. FOOTE

Vol. 92, No. 20

Saturday, 13 May 1972

3p

## THE DEATH PENALTY

Until about a fortnight ago there had been an apparent lull in the activities of the "bring back the rope" lobby. Suspicions—that those who wanted to bring back the death penalty had by no means given up—were duly justified when on 2 May Mrs. Elaine Kellet-Bowman, M.P., presented to the Commons a petition calling for the restoration of capital punishment. It had been signed by some 250,000 members of the public, and had been organised, at least in part, by Mrs. Maureen Richardson, the widow of the murdered Blackpool police Superintendent. Readers of this paper will surely feel sympathetic towards Mrs. Richardson over the loss of her husband in such tragic circumstances, but the answer to the latest demand for the restoration of the death penalty in Britain must still be a firm and insistent "No."

### Capital Punishment Irrevocable

The case against the death penalty is basically a very simple one; namely that it is an irrevocable act which thereby increases the prospect of miscarriages of justice occurring. In many cases of conviction for murder and similar crimes there is usually at least still a shadow of doubt about the accused's guilt or the exact circumstances under which the crime took place; and even under the most enlightened of legal systems judges and juries remain fallible. If a man is found guilty of a serious crime but after the passage of time is subsequently proved to have been wrongly convicted he can be released from detention and some attempt towards restitution can be made to him. If, however, he has been hanged, nothing can be done, and an injustice will have been perpetrated that it is impossible to redress. The same argument also holds good, of course, against punishments such as mutilation, common a few centuries ago.

As to whether hanging is a "deterrent" to murder, or whether its presence keeps the murder rate down is uncertain, and the evidence of those who support capital punishment on these points is unsatisfactory. In the days of handlopping, and public executions of children for theft, the crime rate was still high in proportion to population, and the nature of offences as appalling as today, and sometimes more so. As long as society possesses the sanction of life imprisonment (*for life*)—which is also being increasingly questioned—there seems no further justification for the gallows as a means of protecting the public; and about the only serious case that is left for the use of the death penalty is for atrocities committed by troops in time of war, where the circumstances are markedly different from those of a civil population in time of peace and order.

### Atrocity Trials in Bangladesh

This point, of course, raises the thorny question of whether the authorities of the new state of Bangladesh are justified in putting the captured military leaders of the former Pakistan army of occupation in East Bengal on trial for war crimes. The Pakistan government's sympathisers maintain that this was essentially a civil war between

Pakistanis in which India intervened without declaration of war, and that therefore the Geneva Convention does not necessarily apply. There was, however, no distinct precedent in international law for the trial of the Nazis at Nuremberg, and there seems no reason why the Pakistani prisoners should not stand trial so long as the trials are conducted scrupulously, according to the laws of evidence, and with the right of proper defence. The allegations of sadistic cruelty and of systematic and remorseless terror as deliberate instrument of government bear a sickening similarity to those proved against the Gauleiters of Nazi-occupied Europe.

### WINIFRED ROUX RETIRES

Readers of *The Freethinker* will be sorry to hear that Mrs. Winifred Roux has resigned from editing and managing the South African Rationalist Association's journal, *The Rationalist (Die Rasionalis)*. Her place is taken by Ann Weinberg, who deserves our congratulations and good wishes.

Mrs. Roux took over *The Rationalist* in 1964 when the previous editor (her now deceased husband) was placed under restriction by the South African Government. The tenacity and courage of the Roux family and of the officers of the South African Rationalist Association in standing out against apartheid and Calvinism may not have made them well-loved in their own country. They may, however, rest assured that they are greatly admired and respected elsewhere.

### TWO NEW N.C.C.L. FACT-SHEETS

Two new fact-sheets, concise, and designed for quick reference, have been issued by the National Council for Civil Liberties. They cover an individual's rights on being questioned by the police (*Police Questioning*) and the procedure for making a formal complaint against a police officer (*Making a Complaint against the Police*).

An earlier N.C.C.L. fact-sheet, *Your Rights on Arrest*, is still in print and all three are available from N.C.C.L., 152 Camden High Street, London NW1.

# THE RADIO FREEDOM LEAGUE

F. H. SNOW

My association with the National Secular Society began at the Godless Congress of thirty-two years ago, by which term the Catholic Church signified the International Congress of Freethinkers, to which I had obtained introduction through the kind offices of H. G. Wells. At about the same time I became a member of the Rationalist Press Association, of which Charles Watts was managing director. I remember how proud I was to become identified with the two principal secularist organisations. As an ardent atheist, I wished for the education of the public in reasoned arguments against belief in the hoary tale of God, heaven and hell, and hoped to play a part in bringing the truth to the people.

It was during the "blitz" of London that I became a member of the Radio Freedom League. Making my way, in company with W. J. Poynter, an able contributor to *The Freethinker*, towards Red Lion Square, to attend the N.S.S. Annual General Meeting, I was fearful lest Conway Hall had been destroyed. Past smoking ruins, with gas pipes emitting acrid fumes or flame, stumbling over rubble, we reached the still erect place of the meeting, where we found an understandably small gathering.

Mr. Poynter rose to propose the forming of a body to agitate for greater facility for the expression over the radio of freethought, with the ultimate aim of full freedom for secularist ideas. The proposal was adopted, and the projected body came into being. On a certain Wednesday afternoon, at the Chancery Lane headquarters of the National Secular Society, the Radio Freedom League held its first meeting.

There met, at the dusty premises off Holborn, under the chairmanship of Chapman Cohen (President of the N.S.S. and editor of *The Freethinker*), Miss Evelyn Millard, B.A., who had prompted the idea of the League and was its secretary; R. H. Rosetti (General Secretary of the N.S.S.), W. J. Poynter, P. Victor Morris, Basil Bradlaugh-Bonner, Bill Margrie and the writer of this article.

## B.B.C. Stranglehold

The efforts of the Radio Freedom League to secure a relaxation of the B.B.C.'s stranglehold on the throat of freethought were very unpromising. Lord Reith hardly deigned to acknowledge its appeals, astutely though rather trenchantly worded under the direction of Chapman Cohen. Miss Millard was nothing if not tremendously keen in the cause of air freedom for sceptical ideas. Financially, the League was virtually threadbare. We laboured on, however, moving our meeting places in accordance with the menace from enemy aircraft operations, and being numerically augmented by several enthusiasts, one of whom was a spiritually-mediumistic lady, who failed to reveal anything helpful to our cause.

We held several *al fresco* meetings at Hyde Park's "Speakers' Corner", at which Chapman Cohen spoke eloquently, ably supported vocally by Miss Millard, Victor Morris and A. D. Howell-Smith. An indoor public meeting at Conway Hall was well attended. Bill Margrie was accorded the privilege of announcing the speakers, though he declined the honour of a personal speech. Cohen was very effective, also Howell-Smith, who laid special emphasis on

the fact that freethinkers would fight, if need be, for the right to freedom of worship as well as of freedom of thought.

The Radio Freedom League fizzled out, despite the zeal of Chapman Cohen, Miss Millard, Basil Bradlaugh Bonner and P. Victor Morris, the latter of whom became President of the N.S.S., and editor of *The Freethinker*, after the greatly lamented death of Chapman Cohen. The very zealous and amiable R. H. Rosetti died soon after his distinguished colleague, and the demise of W. J. Poynter and of Bill Margrie—who wrote poetry under the title of "The Sage of Peckham"—further depleted the number of those who constituted the pioneers of organised campaigning against the virtual embargo on the publicising of secular humanism over the air.

Subsequent efforts to secure greater facilities for the broadcasting of anti-theistic ideas have been little more successful than were those of the ill-fated Radio Freedom League. Not only so, but the societies I joined in the first year of World War II, hoping that they would strike powerfully at the entrenched forces of superstition, have lost sign of urgency for the broadcasting facilities that would enable them to put the atheistic case to the many millions comprising our radio and television audiences.

## Religious Belief still widespread

Is the enlightenment of the people as to the case against God no longer important? Though belief in the deity of our fathers is not so general today, religious belief is still held by the large majority of our population, whilst positive disbelief in God, Jesus and the Gospel Story is professed by few outside the secular movement. Indeed, the signs are that belief in the metaphysical is increasingly strong, and we have recently seen a backsurge to Christ-worship amongst various adolescents. Roman Catholics, Mormons and Jehovah's Witnesses continue to gain numerically, and our immigrant population to produce fresh believers.

Are secularism and humanism, as represented by the N.S.S. and R.P.A., satisfied with this condition of things? There is no indication, in *Humanist* and *The Freethinker*, that the societies whose policies they reflect, are perturbed about it. Father Corbishley gloatingly informed readers of *The Universe* several years ago that they had no cause to fear the effect on the public of humanism's anti-Christian pronouncements, which were so mild as to be hardly recognisable as those of sceptics. Father Corbishley would surely not have taken pains to reassure Catholics in those terms unless they and he were fearful of the atheistic propaganda which humanism regards as needless today. The fact is plain that the Christian sects fear mightily the bite of the "dead horse" that organised secularism is concerned with burying.

## Conniving at Longevity of Religion

The question arises: Are we content to await the demise of religion until humanity rouses from its superstition-drugged sleep and, of its own volition, throws off its shackles? If so, religious belief will be a very, very long time in dying, and the sceptical world will be liable to the charge of conniving at its longevity.

The Radio Freedom League suffered from numerous war-time handicaps and other unfavourable circumstances, but had a fighting spirit which, more now than ever, organised secularism needs. Without it, there is faint prospect of our securing the broadcasting facilities essential to the effective dissemination of secularist ideas. And if our journals continue to cater only for the already converted, by means of matter largely uncritical of religious doctrine, and appealing chiefly to "high-brows", how shall we reach the people?

## A BRIEF REPLY TO CRITICS

I will deal first with Mr. Morrell (8 April). Historical criticism is not pointless word-chopping (did Nero "persecute" or "punish" the Christians?) in support of the strange idea that the evidence of two Roman historians, Tacitus and Suetonius, reporting the same event, is not mutually corroborative. Nor is it a complete failure to understand the point at issue in the Tacitus text, which for the benefit of readers who must by now be heartily tired of the whole debate is quite simply this: why should any pious Christian scribe deliberately insert a passage in a famous Roman history that described his own faith in the most scathing terms? At no time has Mr. Morrell sought to answer this simple point.

### Logical Fallacies

Nor, of course, should Mr. Morrell commit blatant logical fallacies, thus: "as once we resort to tradition we cannot really question any tale associated with Jesus and his followers, but must *logically* accept all" [my italics]. So, once I see a black cat, have I to accept that all cats are black?

Next, Professor Wells (15 April). I accept that the different accounts in Acts and Galatians of Paul's visits to Jerusalem raise severe problems of dating, but nonetheless there are three main points:

(i) Galatians 1:18 and 1:19 recount that Paul went to Jerusalem to confer with Peter and James, the Lord's brother, three years after his conversion. Whether or not James really was the "brother of the Lord"—and both Matthew 13:55 and Josephus, in his *Jewish Antiquities*, refer to James as the brother of Jesus in the straightforward sense of the word—is not vital to my argument, for what this episode in Galatians reveals is that Paul's notion of Jesus did not take root entirely outside a Jewish context, in which mystery-cult concepts of Jesus would have been repugnant. And I still see no good reason to doubt that the Peter, James and John referred to in Galatians and Acts were the leaders of the original Jewish Christian community and contemporaries of the historical Jesus. It is certainly *conceivable* that Peter, James, John and the rest were all leaders of various grouplets all of whom had no experience whatever of Jesus, but whether there is any evidence for such an assertion is another matter entirely. To suppose such a thing would be to dispose, arbitrarily, of all the gospel evidence that directly links these apostles with Jesus, not to mention discarding the Acts of the Apostles as an early history of the Christian Church, I prefer the more orthodox, if unexciting, view that caution is required before chucking out all the bath water along with the baby. To show that a particular theory is tenable,

As an adherent of "The Best of Causes", over a period of fifty years, I ask: Is the hope too vain, of a re-orientation of humanist ideals away from ultra-permissiveness and towards the implementation of our basic *raison d'être*—the enlightenment of the masses as to the many intelligent reasons for rejecting religious belief, which has been the cause of the bloodiest wars and persecutions, and is today the main barrier to world peace and the drastic betterment of human conditions?

PHILIP HINCHLIFF

in the sense of being consistent with the facts, is not necessarily to provide any evidence for that theory, as Professor Wells acknowledges.

### Paul and his Opponents

(ii) Some brief remarks on the differences between Paul and his Jewish Christian opponents. The Jewish Christians depicted in Acts were exceedingly zealous in their dedication to Judaism; their community included many priests and Pharisees; they took part in the customary Jewish rituals and sacrifices; and their leader after 44, James the brother of the Lord, was so devoted to his Jewish faith that his execution by the high priest Ananus in 62 so provoked the influential Jews in Jerusalem, those most renowned for their practice of the Law, that they agitated successfully for Ananus's removal. Contrast Paul's vehement opposition to the Jewish Law and the evidence of strife in the early Church on a whole range of issues arising out of Paul's teaching. It then becomes necessary to explain, which Professor Wells does not, how a divine or quasi-divine Jesus could ever have been accepted by the Jewish Christians. For the difference between them and orthodox Jews was that they held the crucified Jesus to have been the messiah of Israel, not just that they believed salvation to have come from Jesus rather than the Law. How otherwise could they have continued to be Jews?

(iii) I know Professor Wells thinks the gospels to be late creations, although he admits that the edited gospels were all based on earlier documents. To my mind, it will not do to use as an argument against an early date (around 70) for Mark, the silence of Clement of Rome when the latter could well have used details from Mark's gospel, had he known it. For this is exactly the kind of argument from silence that Professor Wells uses too often. One could employ a precisely similar argument to show that the Pauline epistles are to be dated after Acts; for Acts, as Professor Wells says, has no indication that its author knew Paul's theology, as contained in the epistles, whereas to quote Paul would certainly have been useful for him. This is because Acts is primarily an apologetic document, concerned to paint an edifying picture of the spread of Christianity throughout the eastern half of the Roman empire, culminating in its preaching at Rome itself. As Acts sets out to conciliate the Romans and disparage the Jews, it would have been highly appropriate for its author to quote Romans 13, in which Paul dilates on the need to obey the Romans as a power "ordained of God." But Acts does nothing of the sort; hence we could use an argument from silence to show that Paul's epistles postdate Acts. Yet we know, of course, that the opposite is the case. It is because arguments from silence must be used with extreme caution in this sphere that Professor Wells's critics remain unconvinced.

## THE FREETHINKER

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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. Manchester: Grass Roots Bookshop, 271 Upper Brook Street, 13. 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.

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.

Freethought History and Bibliography Society, Conway Hall, 25 Red Lion Square, London WC1. Saturday, 20 May, 2.45 p.m.: J. S. L. Gilmour, "Some Freethinkers and their Writings, II. The Eighteenth Century and Beyond."

South Place Ethical Society, Conway Hall, 25 Red Lion Square, London WC1. Sunday, 14 May, 11 a.m.: Dr. John Lewis, "Beyond Freedom and Dignity"; 3 p.m.: Marion Boyars, Dr. Jonathan Miller and others, "Censorship." Tuesday, 16 May, 7 p.m.: Dr. Mary Austin, "Acupuncture and Radionics."

Welwyn Garden City Humanist Group, Backhouse Room, Hand-side Lane, Welwyn. Thursday, 18 May, 8 p.m.: Max Dias, "Is Judaism a Faith or merely a Way of Life today?"

# NEWS

## OBITUARY

Mr. FREDERICK E. PAPPS, who died recently, was a life-long member of the National Secular Society and reader of *The Freethinker*. He lived in the Midlands before moving to Devon several years ago.

At the secular funeral ceremony Mr. Papps's grandson spoke, and music by Schubert and Handel was played.

We extend our sympathy to Mr. Papps's family and friends.

## THIS MATCHLESS TWADDLE

Our comment last week about the Lord's Day Observance Society being distressed by the passage of the Sunday Theatres (No. 2) Bill was duly confirmed in a press statement issued by the L.D.O.S. General Secretary. "Agnostics," said Mr. Harold J. W. Legerton, "have publicly welcomed this action and now plead for 'others to press for the abolition of obsolete Sunday regulations governing sport, trade and licensing laws.' Therefore let all who value the Lord's Day—which is never obsolete—take warning from this grave disaster and be ready to stand actively with those who have fought so long to preserve this matchless heritage. The call to the Church is still: 'Be watchful and strengthen the things that remain.'"

We, of course, shall do likewise, for instance by giving the shaft of our iconoclast's sledgehammer another rub-down with linseed oil!

Meanwhile, the new legislation has been well received in theatrical circles. Eric Johns, editor of *The Stage*, has forecast that "the habit of Sunday theatregoing, like that of lunchtime theatregoing, is likely to mushroom and produce all sorts of results beneficial to the profession," as well as provide "a new theatregoing public consisting of those people whose only free day is Sunday."

## ONE HUNDRED YEARS AGO

The disestablished Irish Church has substituted the words "our Sovereign Lady the Queen," for "our most religious and gracious Queen," in the prayer for Parliament.

Josephine E. Butler forwards us a protest against the somewhat recklessly drawn Infant Life Protection Bill now before Parliament. Intended probably to prevent baby-farming, the measure in no wise deals, as J. E. Butler points out, with "the difficulty experienced by the mothers of illegitimate children in maintaining them, together with the grossly unjust favour which the law of bastardy shows to the fathers of such children."

—From *The National Reformer*, 12 May 1872.

## CONGRATULATIONS

Even committees, it seems, are not without a sense of humour. The Executive Committee of the British Humanist Association has tabled the following motion for the agenda of the B.H.A.'s Annual General Meeting in July:

# S AND NOTES

This A.G.M. congratulates Malcolm Muggeridge and Long Longford on their efforts during the year in promoting humanism and asks the B.B.C. to ensure that their television appearances are equally frequent in the future.

We would respectfully suggest that, by way of amendment, the name be added of Peter Simple, whose "Way of the World" column in the *Daily Telegraph* has become an historic chronicle of humanism, bolshevism, anarchism, trendism and "treason", ancient and modern.

## "MODERNISING" CHRISTIAN MARRIAGE

The shattering news that the Church of England's Liturgical Commission was considering redrafting its marriage ceremony was doubtless greeted by most *Freethinker* readers with a wild, hysterical yawn. Until now the *Book of Common Prayer* has listed the "aims and objects" of marriage in this order:

1. The procreation of children, to be brought up in the fear and nature of the Lord.
2. A remedy against sin, and to avoid fornication.
3. Mutual society, help and comfort in prosperity and adversity.

As ever, the Christians have had their priorities wrong!

## ANTI-ABORTIONISTS "DISGUSTED"

Whilst the organisers of Liverpool's anti-abortion pageant on 30 April must have been gratified by the turnout of 40,000 of the faithful, they were not so pleased at the response to the advance invitations the Society for the Protection of Unborn Children sent to 167 local M.P.s, aldermen and councillors: less than ten per cent even bothered to reply. "I am absolutely disgusted," said Mrs. Frances Foot, Merseyside secretary of SPUC, in an interview in *The Universe*, "It is the very time when they should be showing their strength."

The *Daily Telegraph* quoted Mr. Leo Abse, M.P., as saying after the parade that the Abortion Act was a confidence trick played on women by immature men. Quite apart from the fact that most protagonists of the present act were women, pray tell us, gentle reader, whom do you regard as the more "mature" on past performance, between Mr. David Steel, M.P. (who proposed the 1967 Abortion Act) on the one hand, and Mr. Abse (and friends) on the other?

## BAPTISTS AND RACE

The *American Rationalist* reports that most white Southern United States Baptists object to having Negro members in their congregations. The minister of the First Baptist Church of Birmingham, Alabama, resigned when, after months of bickering, a Negro member and her daughter were rejected. The minister, with the support of ten staff members, formed a new, multiracial church and now claims 300 members for it.

Here in Britain, the Baptists are facing a gloomy future: their latest annual report for Great Britain and Ireland says that membership fell by 5,800 and that some 16 Baptist churches have closed.

## NINETY YEARS AGO

Many people cry out that Ireland should at once be put under martial law; in other words, they demand a stronger dose of the wrong remedy . . . The Coercion Act, it must never be forgotten, was in full force when Lord Cavendish and Mr. Burke were murdered within two hundred yards of the Viceregal Lodge, and the assassins easily made their escape, despite all the armed constabulary . . . Let the Government be armed with ample powers against secret societies, but let the constitutional rights of the Irish people be respected. Above all, let not the guilt of a few villains be charged against a whole people . . . Freethinkers should oppose themselves to the momentary madness. They must show regard for the permanent interests of humanity. They must resist any attempt to gag, oppress, and imprison a nation."

—G. W. Foote in *The Freethinker*, 14 May 1882.

## SECTARIAN SCHOOLS: A LESSON

"It may be that the only alternative to a bloodbath is a further partition of Northern Ireland, with the two counties around Londonderry being ceded to the Republic of Ireland and the four remaining counties remaining part of the United Kingdom under Stormont rule. An exchange of populations within the six county area could then be arranged under military and police supervision.

"Further partitioning is a sad admission of the inability of English-speaking Christians to live together in peace, but let it not be forgotten that one of the worst villains in the whole affair is the British Government policy of almost total subsidy for sectarian segregation in education. Other nations, including ours, should never forget this lesson."

—From the American magazine, *Church & State* (March 1972).

## FIFTY YEARS AGO

Newspapers report the death of a Matadore, killed by a bull during the course of a Spanish bull fight. Our sympathy is wholly with the bull, and the prevalence of this "sport" is a striking commentary on the moralising effects of Christianity.

—From *The Freethinker*, 14 May 1922.

## FREETHINKER FUND

We are most grateful to those readers and friends who kindly contributed a total of £19.57 to the Freethinker Fund for April.

Our thanks to: Anonymous, £1; H. J. Batty, £1; Jack Benjamin, 33p; Robert Brownlee, £1.70; James Cullen, 45p; W. H. Goodall, £1; M. S. Grimsditch, 28p; Robert J. Hale, 45; T. E. Harrison, 16p; James Kent jnr., 35p; Gerald P. T. Lewis, 45p; Thomas Marino, 35p; "U. C. Mann", £2; Mrs. W. N. Mawson, £5; R. M. McGarry, 13p; S. C. Merrifield, 35p; D. Molyneux, 80p; Mrs. Madalyn Murray O'Hair, £1; W. C. Parry, 68p; R. Reader, 64p; N. S. Read, 20p; H. Scuffle, 25p; I. Yettram, £1.

"Reason, to me, marks out the method to be used on all occasions by humanists; compassion marks out the ideal in the service of which reason is employed."

—H. J. Eysenck, psychiatrist.

# MAGAZINE

**NEW HUMANIST.** Pemberton Publishing Co. Ltd.\*  
£1.50 per annum.

In celebration of their monthly journal's having been accepted (after 86 years, no less) for display on the bookshelves of the almighty W. H. Smith & Son, with effect from the current (May) issue, the Rationalist Press Association has again changed the title of the journal—this time from *Humanist* to (wait for it!) . . . *New Humanist*.

In further celebration, a press reception was held on Tuesday, 2 May in the magnificent "penthouse" of New Zealand House, looking down from a height of eighteen storeys upon the metropolis. The National Secular Society was represented by Barbara Smoker, and among the distinguished guests was Dr. J. Bronowski, on a rare visit from America.

The R.P.A. and their editor, Christopher Macy, are to be congratulated on the very substantial circulation increase that is effectively guaranteed by the Smith contract. The change of name, however, appears to be little more than a publicity gimmick, all too reminiscent of a washing powder (New Daz, New Persil).

One might have expected at least some noticeable change of format in an attempt to justify the new "New," but it is difficult to discern anything even slightly new about the May issue—except for a few extra pages and inevitably, a new price (raised from 10p to 15p). But perhaps the old familiar style is not to be deplored: it can be disturbing when an old friend has a face-lift. So it is good to see that the contents of 'Volume 1, No. 1' are, anyway, up to the usual standard, and, in particular, that Hector Hawton's monthly chat page continues. Long may it be so.

BARBARA SMOKER

\* 88 Islington High Street, London N1 8EL.

# BOOKS

**CLUB LIFE AND SOCIALISM IN MID-VICTORIAN LONDON** by Stan Shipley. History Workshop (Ruskin College, Oxford), 60p.\*

Among the somewhat specialised readership of this History Workshop "pamphlet" (it is so described by the publishers, though it has 85 scholarly pages and might rank at least as a booklet) certain general claims will come as some surprise. The author himself concludes: "Socialism in London is said to have started with the formation of the Social Democratic Federation in 1881. But the initial spadework was done amongst workers by workers from a club in Soho which held a pivotal position in metropolitan clubland between English artisans and foreign exiles. This was the Manhood Suffrage League." And in a foreword Raphael Samuel claims, *inter alia*, that "this pamphlet puts into question a very common stereotype of the Victorian working man—respectable and self-satisfied, narrow and selfish in his trade unionism, and making use of education chiefly as a means to personal advancement." What is surprising about these claims is not that the specialist reader will challenge their content but that he is expected to find them at all original. Now, it may be true that they are in conflict at certain points with *The History of Trade*

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*Unionism* by the Webbs, but no one familiar with the typically well-promoted, prolific and opinionated views that have characterised leading Fabians down the years will find this at all surprising either.

The fact is that for two centuries many historians have been not just reinterpreting the past in the light of the present (which is inevitable and valuable) but rewriting it; and nowhere is this truer than in connection with socialism and communism. In the nineteenth century "socialism" was used for Owenism (which itself fluctuated wildly in its aims according to the favour or disfavour enjoyed from year to year among its supporters by "labour exchanges" and "utopian" communities), Christian Socialism, the co-operative movements and Marxism. "Communism" meant support for these communities, the Paris Commune and Marxism. Running through these movements was interest in land law reform, which began with the Diggers in the seventeenth century and took the form of demands for "nationalisation" among the followers of Bronterre O'Brien and others in the nineteenth century. Though Marx's *Das Kapital* was not available in French and English till the 1880s, Engels and he spent most of their working lives in England, the *Communist Manifesto* was first published in English in Harney's *Red Republican* in November 1850, Marx himself was active in the First International when it was based on London, and Marxist ideas influenced one branch of the republican movement and certain working-class clubs, especially but not only in Soho, in the 1870s. Further, "liberty, equality, fraternity", with varying degrees of literality, were something of an aspiration in radical circles from 1789. It is plainly absurd to speak of socialism arising newborn in the 1880s, though it hardly became a national talking-point among all classes till that time. Readers of History Workshop pamphlets are, however, likely to have read social history and perhaps the original documents where the full story can be ascertained.

What Stan Shipley's interesting essay has in common with Fabian literature—which makes it controversial in a way neither realises—is an assumption that social progress and "scientific socialism" in Britain are in any meaningful sense equatable. Despite its Clause 4 it is bizarre to speak of the Labour Party as socialist in any Marxist connotation, and most of the social legislation implemented by Labour Governments in fact originated with the Liberals. The most characteristic statements of the socialists of the 1880s were, as Bradlaugh pointed out, pure hot air; and it is noticeable that today he is "forgotten" with greater determination by socialists than by Christians, and as much as by reverent agnostics. And it may also be said, unkindly, that the caricature of the nineteenth-century trades unionist referred to by Mr. Samuel looks only too true of his twentieth-century counterpart.

Having made these reservations about the intentions of this pamphlet (at some length because in many respects it is typical of a substantial *genre* of contemporary "advanced" literature) let me say that its actual contents are fascinating. Though I am myself pretty familiar with its sources, Mr. Shipley has found interesting quotations which I rushed past in my own researches. He has also reproduced documents made available to him by secularists like Mrs. Emily Warner and Miss Ella Twynam and paid a

# REVIEWS

tribute to a much-neglected treasure-house, the Bishopsgate Institute (which contains, by the way, the original minute-books of the First International).

DAVID TRIBE

\*Copies of *Club Life and Socialism in Mid-Victorian London* are also obtainable from G. W. Foote & Co. Ltd., 103 Borough High Street, London, SE1 1NL, price 60p, plus 10p postage.

## SOCIALISM IN BRITAIN by T. L. Jarman.

Victor Gollancz, £1.50.

This is a timely and thought-provoking book. Its appeal to secularists and humanists arises from their concern for the development of a good life on earth. Now that it has become clear to millions of people that mankind must forge its own destiny, the creation of democratic, progressive, economic, political and social institutions emerges as the dominant issue in our age. That, in essence, is what modern socialism is about. It is not a petty matter of party politics.

Our author has surveyed British socialism in a capable and fair-minded manner. He has analysed a mass of material; and, in doing so, has introduced his readers to leading socialist pioneers, has described the nature and ideas of the movements in this country which have evolved under their influence, and posed the question: what is living and what is dead in British socialism today?

Mr. Jarman is an academic, and writes frankly and attractively from his own standpoint. He is not a dogmatist, nor is he a socialist. In his own words: "I have always been a Liberal, but one who has felt at times the attraction of the socialist ideal without being able to accept it as a system." This approach explains certain weaknesses in the book; but they do not detract from the writer's sincerity. At the outset he explains that the theme of the book is the rise and decline of socialism in Britain. Now it is clear no conscious socialist would accept as a fact that socialism today is in decline in Britain; and, indeed, a much more widely held opinion is that the old capitalist order, both in this country and abroad, is in a state of grave crisis. Neither the Labour Party under revisionist and right-wing leadership, nor the present Government, has succeeded in making the system work. The failure has disillusioned a whole generation of youth, and spread far and wide the spirit of frustration and cynicism.

My impression is—with perhaps some reserve on points of detail—that the historical and descriptive parts of the book are excellent. They are factual, informative, and stimulating. For example, humanists will read with pleasure what our author writes about such social pioneers as Thomas Paine, who in his *Rights of Man* (1792), "made known the exciting ideas from France, and advocated a policy of democratic political reform with a social policy closely related to it, whereby the state should use taxation to aid the helpless and the old." In fact, an eighteenth century type of Beveridge plan, which inspired rational inquiry and reforming zeal for many decades.

The pages descriptive of the changes brought about by the French Revolution in Europe and the Industrial Revolution in Britain are excellent: "both," writes Mr. Jarman,

"however gradual in their development, . . . were revolutionary in their effects. Things were never the same again after the French Revolution—as, indeed, they were never the same again after the Russian Revolution of 1917—and Jacobinism haunted Europe after the French as did Bolshevism the world after the Russian."

A whole chapter is rightly devoted to the life and work of Robert Owen (1771-1858), who is described as "the characteristic figure of the industrial age . . . and at the same time the most famous figure in the early history of British Socialism . . . he considered the new productive forces must be subjected to social control for the common good." These views led him to become a pioneer advocate of factory legislation to ensure the safety and health of the industrial workers; of shorter working hours; better housing, education; and more humane industrial relationships. He was the great rationalist of his age.

The note of contemporaneity sounds also in Owen's argument against low wages. "The markets of the world," he wrote, "are created solely by the remuneration allowed for the industry of the working classes, and those markets are more or less extended and profitable in proportion as those classes are well or ill remunerated for their labour. But the existing arrangements of society will not permit the labourer to be remunerated for his industry, and in consequence all markets fail." In other words, the problem of poverty lay not in the sphere of production, but in the failure of society to distribute wealth in an equitable and rational manner.

There are also pages of condensed historical writing on Chartism and the Chartists, Marx and Marxism, the Fabian lecturers and writers, and other socialist voices. Amongst the latter will be found brief sketches and comments on John Ruskin, H. M. Hyndman, William Morris, Annie Besant (recalled in her rôle as "a well-known speaker in the cause of secularism"), George Bernard Shaw, H. G. Wells, and Robert Blatchford.

The book gives its readers an account in outline of notable movements and personalities in some two centuries of British social history. I found myself wishing at the end of the story that Mr. Jarman had laid more stress upon the part of the trade unions, the socialist pioneers, the co-operative movement and the secularist groups and societies, in the process of civilising British society. This simple fact is often lost sight of in the heat of current controversies. Its full appreciation is also very important for the future: humanists and socialists still need to have a deep concern for "man's unfinished business." No foreseeable form of society is ever likely to succeed in the sense of finding final solutions to individual and social problems. The vital task is to prevent any slackening in human advance.

RICHARD CLEMENTS

## LETTERS

### Capitalism and War

Mr. Charles Doran (Letters, 29 April) says that the plotting of Col. Repington and Co. took place in 1906-14 and that as a result and of the bribery made at this time "Czarist Russia became our ally."

Well, Russia became the ally of France against Germany (and therefore indirectly and ultimately of us) as early as 1896, when the Czar paid a visit to Paris. You can read about this in the

history books. So if the "plotters" went about bribing Russian foreign ministers in the 1906-14 period they were wasting the taxpayers' money!

This brings up another point. The rivalry between Russia and Austria was just as big a cause of the First World War as Anglo-German rivalry and in fact touched the war off. And the rivalry between Russia and Austria was clearly caused by the struggle for national power in the Balkans.

Mr. Doran brings up that old story of wars being caused by capitalism. Well I do not believe that any longer! If capitalism is the cause of wars why are Russia and China at loggerheads? Some time ago I bought a book at a Communist bookshop issued under Marxist auspices which admitted tacitly that the industrialists of West Germany were against their government's anti-Soviet policy because it prevented them selling to their traditional markets in Eastern Europe. And the U.S. capitalists are also said to have been against the anti-Soviet policy of J. F. Dulles because it prevented them selling their export surplus to Russia. When Mikoyan, the Soviet trade minister, visited the U.S.A. in the late fifties he got a rousing welcome from the financiers of Wall Street!

Mr. Doran does not answer any of the points I brought up. In regard to Admiral Consett, I still do not believe that, if British capitalism had to be saved from Germany by having a war, that British capitalists would have helped Germany—and I am not impressed by Mr. Doran's vague talk about "contradictions." Finally as I said in my last letter, Col. Repington's book in fact does not seem to bear out Mr. Doran's assertion. I. S. LOW.

### The Right to Vote

Whether or not Peter Cadogan (Letters, 29 April) succeeds in "getting through to people," he surely gets through a number of subjects with questionable ease. The subject of democracy is one over which it would be particularly unfitting even to try to "score points"; yet, in so far as imagination and "new ideas" are relevant to the subject, it seems well to recall that—unlike the freedoms of infinite fantasy—"rational imagination" takes place within the bounds of criticism. The right to vote is surely an essential part of democracy, and is critically important as a safeguard against the potential tyrannies of those who believe they are "working for objectives that are good in themselves" and who may work for their living and their love. Surely, experts represent expertise—it is the improvement of the representative principle which alone can ensure that the wishes of the people are best served.

CHARLES BYASS.

### Pliny the Younger and Tacitus

Nicholas Reed (Letters, 29 April) will soon discover, should he take the trouble to look, that there is a wide divergence of opinion as to the respective dates of the governorships of Pliny and Tacitus, and in the light of such disagreement my point stands. Tacitus was a member of the small (relative to the population of Rome) ruling class and held the highest elective offices other than the actual principate, he would thus move in the circles close to the emperor, and his appointment to a province of great strategic importance is indicative, particularly in light of the immediate history of government in Rome, that it is reasonable to call him a friend of Trajan.

I agree with Mr. Reed that Pliny would have difficulty in consulting records housed in Rome. However, it is well to remember that had the persecution of the Christians taken place it would have happened during his lifetime, thus he would have known something of the cult. In the light of this his ignorance remains, as I maintained, inexplicable, unless there was no persecution, and then, of course, it is fully understandable. As to Nero's conduct we might bear in mind that certain of those who "wrote up" his life cannot escape the charge of bias, and Nero showed considerable diplomatic skill both in the quality of his appointed officials and in his successful negotiations with the Parthians. Trajan would have learned much of value had he consulted the records of Nero's reign.

ROBERT MORRELL.

### Sex and Illiteracy

When your paper is called *The Freethinker*, why do you get an illiterate person with a closed mind to review my *Sex and Dehumanization*?

DAVID HOLBROOK.

Illiterate!—? (Ed.)

## PUBLICATIONS

TITLE	AUTHOR	Price	Post
The Freethinker 1970 Bound Volume	Edited by D. Reynolds and W. McIlroy	£2.00	25p
The Freethinker 1971 Bound Volume	Edited by W. McIlroy	£2.50	25p
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