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THE ESCALATION OF THE VIETNAMESE WAR

President Nixon's decision to step up his appalling and unnecessary war against the Communists in Vietnam by shelling Haiphong, mining the approaches to North Vietnamese ports and by air strikes against Hanoi's rail links with China will doubtless sadden many readers who had hoped to see the end to a conflict that has dragged on for so long that it has virtually become a macabre way of life for millions of people on both sides of the demilitarised zone. In terms of technology and air power the United States forces have had, and still have, unchallenged superiority. In terms of morale and international opinion, however, they have lost the war, and they lost it a long time ago. Unless "Tricky Dicky" is seriously prepared to push the conflict to the point of an international confrontation of the big powers, he will, inevitably, have to accept this fact and make a humiliating climb-down.

A Warlords' Stamping-ground

Freethinkers, by their nature, tend to be stubborn, stiff-necked and individualistic creatures, few of whom, one would imagine, if given a clear choice, would care to live in at near-subsistence level in a centralised south-east Asian state where they were regimented from cradle to grave. However, if the choice was between this, and living at, or below subsistence level in a bumbling chewing-gum republic whose capital had become a warlords' stamping-ground and a huge military brothel for foreign troops, they might well decide otherwise.

American foreign policy, like the road to hell is paved with good intentions. Intervention in Vietnam was originally justified on the grounds that it would contain the spread of Communism in Asia, though this was basically an unprovable assumption—the old domino theory. It is ironic that the infant United States also had to bear the brunt of another domino theorist, George III, who was convinced that unless the rebel colonists were brought to heel there would be an epidemic of insurrection throughout his possessions. Whether he was right or wrong depends very largely upon how you interpret history. In any case, by their conduct—and misconduct—of the Vietnam war the Americans have ironically turned themselves into first-class recruiting sergeants for Communism throughout the "Third World."

Specious Arguments

In the beginning United States intervention had to be justified on the grounds that it constituted giving help to a small nation threatened by *external* aggression, that is to say, from North Vietnam—a construction could only be taken seriously by such people as members of the John Birch Society. The argument is, of course, specious when one recalls that Vietnam was only partitioned as a temporary measure during the departure of the French colonial administration, and that, in any case, the North Vietnamese have never lacked allies among the population of the South.

It is rather doubtful if the average Vietnamese peasant, without a pistol being held to his head, would say that he preferred rule from Hanoi to that of Saigon; probably the old dislike of government, officials and soldiers, of whatever complexion, still prevails in many places. What is clear, however, is that the politically conscious minority of the 1940s and '50s wanted an independent and unified Vietnam under the essentially nationalist leadership of Ho Chi Minh. Such a state would certainly have been Communist, but had it been left well alone (politically) by the British, French and Americans, there is no reason why it should have not have developed into an Asian version of Yugoslavia, rather than a spawning ground of international violence. Instead, the big powers decided to meddle; they have created appalling and endless misery, and have, if nothing else, ensured that the people of the North have come to support the Hanoi government with a remarkable loyalty and tenacity.

A Legacy of Hatred and Misery

The present war has achieved virtually nothing for democracy; were the Americans and the Viet Cong to vanish overnight it is probable that the Saigon republic would be beset by strife in other quarters, notably by conflict between the Catholic and Buddhist sections of the population, whose position approximates in some respects to that of the warring communities in Northern Ireland. As it is, years of American intervention have maimed, decimated, and embittered two generations of Vietnamese, who, even when the last G.I. has left, will not forget. Neither will the rest of Asia.

Equally, the Americans themselves have been brutalised and demoralised by the conflict, as the incidence of atrocities and drug-addiction among their army shows, and the "American Dream" appears to be turning sour both home and abroad. Mr. Nixon's "silent majority" have every right to wish themselves to be "better dead than red"; but for them to foist this cliché with mines and bombs upon a poor country far removed from their own doorsteps is entirely another matter.

BERTRAND RUSSELL: A FORCE TO GUIDE OUR FUTURE

G. N. JYOTI SHANKAR*

"My own view of religion is that of Lucretius. I regard it as a disease born of fear and as a source of untold misery to the human race."

Rationalists need no introduction to Bertrand Russell, the centenary of whose birth falls on 18 May. He was reason personified. It was his consistent use of reason in his "hundred years' war" against fettered thinking and limited sympathies fostered by tradition, religion, nationalism and other obscurantist and parochial institutions; it was this unrelenting force of Russell's, immortalised in his works, that made reason a force to be reckoned with by the perpetrators of ignorance and dispensers of delusions.

"A good life," Russell believed, "is one inspired by love and guided by knowledge." And at the end of his life he humbly stated that he had achieved "a little". This little, however, was sufficient, for as Alan Wood has observed, "the post-Russellians are all propter-Russellians." Bertrand Russell wrote more than seventy books, innumerable pamphlets, letters to the public, articles and essays covering religion, philosophy, ethics, politics, economics, psychology, logic, mathematics, education, history, and culture. Lest it might be misunderstood, however, I hasten to point out that he was not just an armchair writer. His life was crowded with varied activities: travel, study, research, teaching, lecturing, debating, broadcasting, demonstrations, arrests, trials, fines, imprisonment, abuse, dismissal, ostracism, public recognition, and love affairs; but all this he underwent with one aim and one method, and, by this skill proved himself to be a genius.

What made him a saint in the secular sense—of being morally admirable? What made him protest against

Britain's participation in the First World War, and thereby lose his livelihood and be imprisoned? What made a man who had, at the age of 78, won the Nobel Prize for Literature plunge into a campaign of civil disobedience, and at the age of 89 squat on pavements, carry placards, and again defy the British government?

Russell gave the reason in these words: "Love and knowledge," he wrote, "so far as they were possible, led me upward toward the heavens. But always pity brought me back to earth. Echoes of cries of pain reverberate in my heart. Children in famine, victims tortured by oppressors, helpless old people a hated burden to their sons, and the whole world of loneliness, poverty and pain make a mockery of what life should be. I long to alleviate these evils." This is the heart of an atheist. Here is the reason why so many sensitive and thinking men became atheists. This was why the Buddha became an atheist and social reformer.

What Bertrand Russell once proudly described as "The Wisdom of the West" has come, largely by his own efforts, to be regarded by rationalists as the sound edifice upon which a future world culture may be built: the achievement of world peace, world unity, human happiness and prosperity by means of the scientific method and a rational ethic. This is a blueprint bearing his stamp. His legacy has been passed on for us to wield, and Russell's legacy is the force of reason.

*G. N. Jyoti Shankar is the editor of the Indian Rationalist Association's monthly newsletter *Free Thought* (Madras), in which this article originally appeared in March 1972. The text has been slightly abridged. (Ed., *Freethinker*)

BRADLAUGH AND BOTTOMLEY

DAVID TRIBE

The publication of Alan Hyman's *Rise and Fall of Horatio Bottomley* is giving fresh impetus to the story that Bottomley was Charles Bradlaugh's illegitimate son. Long before I wrote Bradlaugh's biography, from time to time after freethought meetings some older secularist would steer me into a corner, look furtively around, ask my view of this rationalist sin against the Holy Ghost, and mutter guiltily that "they were strikingly alike, you know."

Personally I have never been convinced that the facial resemblance is actually striking, though there are important similarities. Against these must be set the considerable difference in stature. In favour of the theory are parallel interests and talents, though used for very different purposes. Both men were brilliant though technically unqualified lawyers, imposing orators, adventurous journalists and magazine proprietors, shrewd businessmen and colourful M.P.s. There is, moreover, a certain mystery surrounding Bottomley's origins.

Bottomley's secularist connections

While his work was in progress Alan Hyman was kind enough to contact me and we have had most interesting conversations on the subject. I do not suppose anyone today believes the original story that Annie Besant (born 1847) was the mother of Bottomley (born 1860). But the swindler does seem to have had secularist connections. Though he was brought up in an orphanage there is little doubt that his mother was Holyoake's sister Elizabeth. There is much more doubt whether her husband was Bottomley's father. So, argues Mr. Hyman, since the Holyoakes and the Bradlaughs knew one another, the nineteenth-century secularist world was, if not exactly a "ghetto," at least the sort of place where its luminaries moved in narrow orbits, and Elizabeth admired Charles, what more natural than that they might have had an affair; especially when one remembers that Bradlaugh's wife Susannah was an alcoholic and in her later years they lived apart.

Now, this is the sort of circumstantial evidence that can be neither proved nor disproved. And, in my view, it is not superficially plausible. Contrary to the assertions of some critics, I do not say this because I will not hear a word against my hero. When I dwelt on Annie Besant's flirtations in *President Charles Bradlaugh, M.P.*, it was not out of any desire to discredit her. Sexual conventions do not unduly disturb me. Nor do I think moral considerations should enter into the evaluation of people's work. Recent attempts by left-wing puritans to belittle Edward Aveling's intellectual attainments at the same time as they berate his undoubted caddishness have annoyed me.

Practical objections

My reasons for doubting Bradlaugh's paternity of Bottomley are not derived from an implicit belief in the great freethinker's virtue—though he probably was pretty virtuous. They are more practical. While Elizabeth Holy-

oake may have admired Bradlaugh, there is no evidence that this feeling was reciprocated. She does not rate a mention in Joseph McCabe's long *Life and Letters of George Jacob Holyoake* and Bradlaugh may hardly have known her. Keeping track of the sisters, cousins and aunts of one's associates in Victorian times must have been difficult. Moreover, at the time of Bottomley's conception Bradlaugh was on particularly bad terms with the Holyoakes. More importantly, he was on particularly affectionate terms with his wife, who was not then an incurable alcoholic. Above all, he had a unique sense of dedication to his "mission" and determination to do nothing to undermine it. He had no shortage of enemies inside and outside the secularist movement, and if he were even tempted to sow wild oats would have surveyed the territory carefully. Clannish, censorious and gossipy, the narrow world of Victorian secularism was not the place where one would lightly engage in matrimonial adventures. It seems a pity to spoil a good story, but I think this one may be attributed to Bradlaugh's notoriety and Bottomley's vanity.

MARXISM AND CHRISTIANITY—PART 1

PHILIP HINCHLIFF

It is now a commonplace that the vacuum left by the decline of organised religion in the last two hundred years has been filled at least partially, by Marxism, in so far as this is a source of inspiration and purpose in life. Yet, when critically examined, both Marxism and Christianity are found to shed their intellectual coherence, and to become in practice mere vulgarisations that bear little resemblance to their forbears. Thus the Christian god has been progressively watered down so that the emasculated version espoused by Paul Tillich and John Robinson is far removed from the elaborate concept of Aquinas and the medieval schoolmen. Consequent on this has been the slow dilution of the Christian theory of ethics, with the result that the churches now have very little to offer by way of guidance on a whole host of political, social and moral problems. Similarly the "Marxism" of the British Communist party, or of the régimes in Russia, China and Cuba is very different from the Marxism of Marx. For this boasts a certain theoretical elegance that modern versions have lost, brutalising as they have the original body of Marxist ideas. Marx was a great system-builder, but what passes for Marxism today is a string of assertions about the evils of capitalism and a simple, unreflective faith in the redemptive power of revolution.

The Retreat from Reason

Most obvious of all, I think, has been the retreat from reason in both Christianity and Marxism in the present era. Despite the fact that both proclaim themselves to be universally valid sets of ideas, unaffected by changes in the intellectual climate, both have in practice been infected by the disillusion with reason that is the outstanding characteristic of modern existentialist philosophy. No longer do Christians derive the existence of God from the natural world, or from the kind of *a priori* arguments much loved by Aquinas; for, however debatable natural theology proved to be as a path to God, it did at least represent an attempt at rational defence of Christian belief, and compares favourably with the currently fashionable but intrinsically sloppy vindications of belief in God by pointing to

the person of Jesus. That such a procedure is both philosophically fallacious and historically dubious is familiar to every *Freethinker* reader. And as for the Marxists, the fact that they never undertake a Marxist analysis of Marxism itself is highly significant. For, if they did, it would show that Marxism, as the offspring of the philosophical tradition and economics of the nineteenth century, is now outdated. Marxist theory contends that as the economic basis of society changes, so does it intellectual "superstructure", but while the western economies have falsified one prophesy after another of Marx and Engels, Marxism itself—the Marxists like to hold—is as relevant as ever.

The breakdown of both the Christian and Marxist systems of thought has resulted from the falsification of their world-views, which turn out to have more in common than either would like to believe. Yet since these general perspectives on man, society and indeed on reality itself still underlie what remains of Christian and Marxist thought, insight into both can be gained by a comparison one with the other. The obvious objection is that Christianity asserts a god, whilst Marxism does not. This is not, to my mind, a decisive rebuttal, for classical Buddhism is atheistic but freely granted to be a religion. Nor is "religion" committed to a single, all-powerful deity. Men have believed in many gods and mystical beings of all kinds, and it is very problematic to say *a priori* what belief in religion commits you to. If, however, we say that common to all religions is a certain kind of attitude to the world, distinct from scientific empiricism and based instead on premises that cannot be rationally demonstrated but depend on faith, then it seems plausible to include Marxism in the list of religions, at least tentatively; and as religious faith demands positive action in the world, action governed and inspired by the needs of the faith, the plausibility of this tentative case is strengthened.

Rival Interpretations

Marxism, like Christianity, has both a founder, a mythology, and a sacred book. It has, in practice, developed a

(Continued on page 167)

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ANNOUNCEMENTS

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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.: Nigel Sinnott, "Charles Bradlaugh and Ireland."

Havering Humanist Society, Harold Wood Social Centre, Gubbins Lane. Tuesday, 23 May, 7.45 p.m.: Norman G. Marcus, "Advertising."

Leicester Humanist Society, Vaughan College, St. Nicholas Circle, Leicester. Monday, 22 May, 7.45 p.m.: Dr. J. B. Moss, "Venereal Disease."

South Place Ethical Society, Conway Hall, 25 Red Lion Square, London WC1 Sunday, 21 May, 11 a.m.: Peter Cronin, "Conviviality." Tuesday, 23 May, 7 p.m.: Roger Evans, "Mind Training."

Thomas Paine Memorial Lecture. University of East Anglia, L.T. 1, University Plain. Tuesday, 23 May, 8 p.m.: Dr. E. P. Thompson, "The Paineite Underground in England."

Worthing Humanist Group, Burlington Hotel, Marine Parade. Sunday, 21 May, 5.30 p.m.: tea party and A.G.M.

NEWS

"Religion is based, I think, primarily and mainly on fear . . . Fear is the parent of cruelty and therefore it is no wonder if cruelty and religion have gone hand-in-hand. . . We want to stand on our own feet and look fair and square at the world—its good facts, its bad facts, its beauties, and its ugliness; see the world as it is, and be not afraid of it. . . The whole conception of God is a conception derived from the ancient Oriental despotisms. It is a conception quite unworthy of free men."

—Bertrand Russell (1872-1970), addressing the South London Branch of the National Secular Society, 6 March 1927.

LONDON TRANSPORT ADVERTISEMENT

In a written reply to a Parliamentary Question from Mrs. Renée Short, M.P., following the refusal of an advertisement for the Marie Stopes Memorial Centre by London Transport (see *Freethinker*, 29 April) the Minister of Health said that he was anxious to do everything that he could to propagate and support birth control but that he had no authority to insist on any public body accepting any advertisements. In a letter to the National Secular Society Mrs. Short explained that it was not possible to put Questions down directly about London Transport's policy on anything as, of course, they were not answerable to Parliament. "It is very restricting indeed, and this of course applies to all the nationalised industries."

London Transport has since agreed to an advertisement with revised wording.

LEICESTER SECULAR SOCIETY

The secretary of the Leicester Secular Society, Mr. C. H. Hammersley, is to retire in June of this year. He will be succeeded by Mr. Robert W. Morrell, secretary and co-founder (with Christopher Brunel) of the Thomas Paine Society, and well known for his writings on freethought and geology. We wish Mr. Morrell well in the task of running the oldest secular society in the world.

Mr. Hammersley has served as secretary at Leicester's Secular Hall for the past sixteen years, and during this period has promoted the cause of secularism throughout the Midlands and beyond. I am sure that *Freethinker* readers will wish to join in thanking him for his sterling services to the movement, and, as he will continue as a committee member of the L.S.S., long may these continue.

Mr. H. E. Weston, who has served as Leicester Secular Society's treasurer for more than eighteen years, is also resigning that office. He is to be succeeded by Mr. T. Croxtall. Robert Morrell, in a statement to *The Freethinker*, said that the task of treasurer of L.S.S. was not an easy one by any means, "and Mr. Weston has done very well in a position which called for a great deal of skill."

NOT QUITE

"Within fifty years it is quite possible that England will be Catholic." F. Vassall-Phillips, described by the *London Catholic Herald* (May 6) as a "redemptorist convert," is responsible for this utterance. "The harvest is not distant." We are inclined to think that this convert has been reading Tennyson's *May Queen*, with its tender refrain, "Call me early, mother dear," and the words linger in his memory.

—From *The Freethinker*, 21 May 1922.

S AND NOTES

PONTIFICAL HUMOUR

The Holy Father, like everyone else, is entitled to his little joke. On May Day, which also just happens to be the "Feast of St. Joseph the Workman" (how "relevant" in this modern age!), Pope Paul, besides claiming that the Church was a better friend of the working man than any Communist government, went on to say: "The Church does not stand with the rich and powerful, is not conservative and does not preach the duties of the weak while practising the rights of the strong."

He was joking . . . wasn't he?

POLITICS AND RELIGION IN LIVERPOOL

The *Catholic Herald* has recently indicated a probable case of collusion in Liverpool between the local Conservatives and the so-called Protestant Party. Labour contested all of the city's 42 wards, but the Conservatives only 40, and in the other two the only candidates opposing the Labour Party were the Protestant Party. A Conservative spokesman is reported by the *Herald* as saying that it was "a matter of common sense" not to have two anti-Labour candidates which would mean presenting the wards to the socialists.

Orangeism, it appears, is alive and well, and not just in Scotland and Northern Ireland, either!

NINETY YEARS AGO

"Christians make a great boast of humility, but no people have more 'check.' They strut about the world as God's elect, who know all the truth, and need no further enlightenment. To doubt their creed is a sin, to deny it is blasphemy. They do not feel bound to give any reasons why their faith should be embraced; they just put it before you and say, Take it or be damned. . . . There was a time when Christian impudence passed unchallenged. Freethinkers had then no power to resent it. But we have the power now. We have thrown off the apotheotic attitude. We mean to have our full rights as free men."

—G. W. Foote in *The Freethinker*, 21 May 1882.

PERHAPS HE OUGHT TO BE

"Would you want your children taught by communists, anarchists and humanists? I would not—I am not ashamed of being a Christian."

—Councillor Pat Traynor, during the annual conference of the Scottish Council of the Labour Party, meeting in Inverness (quoted by *The Guardian*). The conference was debating the thorny question of school integration.

Come to think of it, gentle reader, would you be madly enthusiastic to have your child taught by Councillor Traynor?

THE REPRESSIVE SOCIETY

The Campaign for Homosexual Equality has described as "amazing" the recent dismissal by three judges of an appeal by John Stamford, a Brighton man, against a "ludicrous" conviction on a charge of sending indecent articles through the post, namely copies of *Spartacus*, a magazine for homosexuals.

The General Secretary of CHE, Paul Temperton, commenting on the case in the Campaign's monthly bulletin, writes: "CHE members who have seen *Spartacus*, whose most daring deed has been the occasional publication of photographs of solitary naked youths doing absolutely nothing, and which has more often had them either carefully posed to show no genitals or else decorously clothed in underwear, will find it difficult to take seriously the suggestion that so tame and innocuous a publication could possibly offend anybody . . . Yet this is to be taken seriously, because it is yet another disgusting act of repression by the Establishment. It demonstrates yet again that what the mass media have conned the public into thinking of as the Permissive Society is in reality the Repressive Society—a society so hypocritical, so uptight, so mediaeval in its corporate attitudes that it cannot allow to be sent through the post a magazine for homosexuals which, if it were the girlie equivalent for straights [heterosexuals], would be on open sale even at W. H. Smith without anyone turning a hair."

DIABOLICAL RODENT CONSPIRACY

We wonder how many readers have been following the movements of the London supermice tat have been making their presence felt recently, first in Westminster Cathedral, then in the House of Commons, and now in trendy, bourgeois Hampstead. Indeed, rodent operatives may already be wondering if there is not some sinister pattern in this phenomenon. We can now inform them that there is.

Our suspicions were first aroused when these mice started their attendance at Westminster Cathedral at the same time that our intelligence agent, disguised as a samovar, informed us that the offices of the Glorious People's Liberation Iconoclast Press Ltd. (publishers of the People's Revolutionary Atheist Daily, *The Episcopophagist*) were ordering large amounts of bran. Further vigilance confirmed, not only that the mice were being bred and trained in the cellars there, but that they were only a beginning!

Now it can be told—the whole sordid truth! Not only has the Hon. Peregrine Burke (editor of *The Episcopophagist*) been breeding mice, but these were only a prototype. They are to be followed by a fiendish strain of super-rat deliberately bred (on Lysenkoist principles) for their ability to devour an altar candle in ten minutes or a plaster saint in twenty, and then gobble a chasuble, or a Tory M.P.'s car tyres, for dessert. The taste of these man-made monsters for plaster is catholic in more senses than one, however: a few days ago one of the brutes "escaped" (so the subsequent apology stated) and found its way to our office. We entered the room that morning to find it slobbering ecstatically over a miniature bust of Bradlaugh that we had just paid good money for in a Putney antique shop. With a scream of horror we hurled the first available heavy implement (the bound volume of *The Freethinker* for 1971) at the obscene rodent. To no avail: the heavy tome bounced off the rat's thick skull, and the foul beast merely turned and bared its long, yellowish-green fangs. In desperation we tried other weapons: the telephone directory, a paper knife, and a wax figurine transfixed with pins (sent by an admirer), all to no avail.

Finally, in utter desperation, we seized our last resort, the office copy of the good book (Revised Version) and hurled it at the hideous creature. There was a sickening thud, a crackle of breaking bones, a faint scent of burning brimstone wafted through the office, then silence . . . 8 . . . 9 . . . 10 . . . Out! (There's no substitute for butter—or bell, book and candle!).

BOOKS

LYTTON STRACHEY BY HIMSELF, edited and introduced by Michael Holroyd. Heinemann, £2.50.

To read some authors, all one needs is patience. To read Lytton Strachey, however, one needs another so-called Christian virtue: the ability to resist temptation. Temptation to be irritated, temptation to be too amused, temptation to think you could do it yourself, or that if you could you wouldn't. If he is to entertain, you must surrender to his hospitality; he must be treated with a guest's forbearance. And how he entertains! Going through history with him is like going round an antique shop with a connoisseur, endlessly productive of revealing anecdotes and sudden, dazzling perceptions. If one can resist temptation, it is worth it.

Lytton Strachey by Himself is a collection of autobiographical fragments, and one has to take most of the other Stracheys on trust. As compensation, there is Strachey's special way of conveying personal experience—a glittering stream of consciousness, ordered enough to be intelligible but still strangely natural. At the same time, the unconverted still find plenty of stuff for parody and resentment in a book literally and inevitably self-centred, on Strachey and the group. "Postcard from George [Mallory] at Florence, with Botticelli youth, suggesting I should go and see him in Paris . . . Walked to H. 4 o'clock. Appearance of O. [Ottoline] in a purple hat . . . After dinner J. played Hammerclavier on pianola . . ." And, typically, "left alone we talked *intiment* about ourselves. Atmosphere of demi-flirtation, but infinitely discreet." The discretion is usually waived for the benefit of belles-lettres, but the flirtation is invariably demi. It is unfortunate that the group as they were would in many respects have been more interesting and attractive to us than the image they took such trouble to create. That impression, still widely held, is of affectation, toying with ideas and projects and people. But how could mere dilettanti have written *To The Lighthouse* or revolutionised economics?

Though the diaries here reprinted are intermittent and mostly brief, the picture of Strachey that emerges is remarkably complete. By no means all the material covers the main Bloomsbury period. There are precocious childhood diaries (though strictly speaking Strachey remained precocious till well into middle age), confidential, desperate teenage diaries in which secret symbols disguise the name of the current hero and his adored freckles; finally, a marvellous account of Strachey's last holiday in France, a typical feat of presentation of a human being's most intimate, most momentary feelings. They connect well and the impression seems strangely unified—perhaps because each period of Strachey's life is described by the Strachey of that time; the style is not uniform, but the picture develops simultaneously in form and content.

Michael Holroyd largely confines his task as master of ceremonies to slipping a few connecting remarks between each section. He understands the darker side of Strachey and his experience as author of the superb biography (and perhaps his reading of the correspondence, a treat for which we shall have to wait a few years yet) enables him to distil so much of that understanding into what he writes here. He reserves a special admiration for the riper pieces, but one cannot help liking the eighteen-year-old Strachey of the Liverpool diary, critical and pleasantly self-confident in his description of dreary people and places, lectures and

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cocoa, and university papers who found his writings above them. In addition there are two superb atmosphere pieces, one (written much later) evoking the fearsome Strachey family home at 69 Lancaster Gate, the other a long piece simply entitled "Monday June 26th 1916", a sustained attempt "to come close to life, to look at it, not through the eyes of poets and novelists, with their beautifying arrangements or their selected realisms, but simply as one actually *does* look at it, when it happens, with its minuteness and its multiplicity, vivid and complete." Which means the typical Bloomsbury scene, the tête-à-têtes on summer evenings, days with the newspapers, daydreams of beautiful boxers and plans to waylay pretty postboys, who, judging from the productivity of Bloomsbury desks, must have brought something at every delivery.

Reading *Lancaster Gate*, moreover, it is not difficult to see how Strachey came to be what he was. The vast, ill-planned womb, housing hosts of hyperintelligent Stracheys and relatives in an endless succession of rooms, was his home from four to twenty-seven. If the eccentrically intellectual family atmosphere seems a little horrifying, Strachey threw on it, as he did later in Bloomsbury; except for one or two brief periods he was always blessed with company which pleased him and offered him a chance to shine (not that distinction is practical). He was painfully shy, conscious of his curious appearance and condemned often to love beautiful people who were fated to hurt him, but at the end he judged that "I have had a happy life." That he could say so is a tribute, not only to the reviving vitality of his curiosity as an observer of life and people, but to the strength he and his friends found in their very unusual ideals, and their considerable degree of liberation from fear and prejudice, which was at that time unique. Their freedom within society was, as Clive James entertainingly pointed out, founded beyond question on economic independence, on privilege in fact. But one must not be sidetracked by irritation at their complacency or simple pleasure in the apparent superficiality and mischievous fun of their writing into belittling their achievement, or misunderstanding its creed, which G. E. Moore expressed as "aesthetic experience plus personal relations equals the good life." That is something one can still believe in.

One last pleasure of this book is its nostalgic recreation of a period whose privilege Strachey, at the end, knew to be short-lived. Perhaps it is that which is occupying his mind in his strangely, and comically lugubrious portrait in the National Gallery. Nature's unkind elongation mercilessly exaggerated, flaccid and seemingly invertebrate; several yards of suit and shawl-muffled Strachey is deposited in a large basket chair. The ease of slippers (not quite concealing mischief in the shape of purple socks) and of idleness induces gloomy thoughts as he gazes past the painter, into the past, or possibly that inhospitable future. "Whether—*vu* [i.e., once one considers] the state of affairs in England and the world at large—such luxuries will be available very much longer remains to be seen. All the more reason to snatch them while one can—to plunge into a hot bath immediately, before the revolution comes and the water's permanently cold!" Or before a quieter revolution, no less irreversible, leaves us with water uniformly lukewarm, and one post a day.

TONY MASTERS

REVIEWS

CONSTANTINE AND THE CONVERSION OF EUROPE

by A. H. M. Jones. Penguin Books, 40p.

This study of the Roman Empire from the accession of Diocletian in A.D. 284 to the death of Constantine in 337 is well representative of the detailed and detached scholarship of the late Professor Jones. A brief summary is given of Constantine's struggles for power, involving him with Maximin, Maxentius, Severus, Galerius and Licinius—it is a complex drama, and the reader is easily bewildered. But most of the book is allotted to more interesting topics—the economic, social and intellectual state of the Empire just before these struggles, and the progress of Christianity after Constantine's conversion. This latter event, Jones insists, was an "accident". Constantine's vision of a cross of light in the sky with the sun in its centre was caused by rare but well-known atmospheric conditions (the fall of ice crystals across the rays of the sun). The Emperor was not interested in doctrinal niceties, but in a divinity who would give him victory and dominion. And he was convinced that he owed his power to the Christian God who had spontaneously offered him a sign. If his conversion was thus a fortuity, its effect was to make Europe permanently Christian. His own reign of twenty-five years, followed by that of his son, which lasted as long, consolidated the faith to such an extent that Julian, in his brief reign of eighteen months, was unable to reverse the trend, and thereafter no pagan was to wear the purple.

The effect on the Church seems to have been mainly bad. Constantine spoliated pagan temples to enrich Christian churches, and exempted the Christian clergy from taxation and public duties, with the result that hordes of self-seekers sought ordination. And when, under the Christian Emperor, Christians no longer suffered persecution, they began to hound each other. Jones' account of the Donatist and Arian controversies shows a harrassed Emperor, utterly unable to prevent his bishops from perpetual squabbling and worse. Jones does not disguise the importance of the motives of greed, superstition, jealousy and the quest for power; yet on the other hand he is not blind to the qualities of courage, resistance and independent thought which called forth and then endured persecution. These qualities were not the monopoly of any sect, but played an important part in the whole story. A book such as this brings us to recognise that human behaviour at all times rests on certain persistent tendencies or instincts, often in conflict with one another, and that all the evil as well as all the good is derived from these same sources. Religion is the source of many evils, but religion itself is a product of human nature, that same human nature which is the source of whatever good has appeared. History that deals with the major strifes of communities and rival doctrines naturally exaggerates the evil. The good is generally less conspicuous and it is to be looked for in the lives of unhistorical common men. Jones' book is helpful in this connection. He gives, for instance, the minutes of inconspicuous court cases in which Christians were tried for refusing to honour Diocletian—a record which shows men in difficult circumstances showing courage, good-temper and loyalty, as well as other less desirable qualities. The hero of the book is himself shown as a figure of similar ambivalence. Constantine was "in general a kind-hearted man", but of tempestuous temper, capable of

killing his son and his wife. His objectives were noble, but he lacked firmness of purpose to pursue them. This whole account makes sober reading.

G. A. WELLS

MARXISM AND CHRISTIANITY Part I

(Continued from page 163)

priesthood: the communist party, which is the sole repository of wisdom and the only legitimate authority on the interpretation of the sacred texts. There is even, as C. Northcote Parkinson has remarked, a place of pilgrimage: the mausoleum in Moscow where Lenin lies in state, visited by thousands each year. There is a body of doctrine, preached by the founder and subsequently amended by his followers. As with most theology, rival interpretations of what Marx and Lenin said, or are thought to have said, are manifold. Communism, like medieval Christianity, is marked by its doctrinal rigidity, each particular version of Marxism proclaiming itself to be the only true heir to Marx or Lenin, and denouncing all other interpretations as heretical. One need only mention the virulence of the Sino-Soviet dispute, which is based not just on power politics but a genuinely deep-rooted and passionate disagreement about the "correct" line to take on how to bring about the world revolution. Nearer home, any student of the various Trotskyite sects in this country will know that each considers itself to represent the real interests of the working class, and violently opposes any dilution of "principle" either *vis-à-vis* each other or the British Labour party. This is to move in the world of fantasy and paranoia, and to adopt the blinkered view of the world that we normally associate with religious bigotry.

But are these parallels merely verbal? Marxists do, after all, pride themselves on a thoroughgoing materialism, and expressly deny any objective validity to theology or ethics. Since all ideas are class ideas, religion just reflects the economic basis of society, Religion, for Marx, originates in primitive man's fear of the mysterious and potentially hostile forces of nature. To personify these in the form of a god who may be propitiated and appeased is, according to Marxists, the natural human response. But progress depends on men throwing off these shackles and learning to rely on themselves rather than a god, which is what Marx has in mind when he says that the criticism of religion is the starting point of all criticism. And for the Christian, of course, such an interpretation of his faith is utterly unacceptable. So here we seem to have a real difference.

Alienation

This incompatibility holds good, however, only in so far as both Christianity and Marxism remain complete systems of thought, comprising a more or less integrated view of reality. And it is precisely the collapse of these systematic, all-embracing and coherent world-views that has made possible a dialogue between the two faiths. If Christianity is to be reduced to a vague notion that God is love, and manifests himself in genuine love-relationships, then the "death of God" in modern society can conveniently be blamed on the dehumanising impact of capitalist technology. And if Marxism is to be shorn of its philosophical underpinnings, such as the dialectic and its materialist theory of reality, and degenerates into an amorphous critique of the "alienation" of bourgeois society, then it is easy to see how a dialogue may start. Hence the rediscovery of the "young" Marx and his fashionable theory of alienation by several Catholic new leftists.

(To be concluded)

LETTERS

The Derek Bentley Case

In my review of David Yallop's book, *To Encourage the Others*, I pointed out that Derek Bentley had been under arrest for at least 15 minutes when P.C. Miles was shot, and I commented: "It would seem self-evident that once Bentley was under arrest he could not justly be held jointly responsible for anything Craig did after that arrest." Charles Byass had disputed this, but when challenged by David Yallop to quote legal precedents to support his opinion, Byass admits his inability to do so; nor has he stated for which of Craig's actions, subsequent to Bentley's arrest, he does think Bentley jointly responsible, and why he does so. Perhaps he will now tell us.

Charles Byass also complains of my "insensitivity" and "ignorance" because I mentioned that Bentley was not only illiterate but also an epileptic. As it happens, I am not the first person to mention this in the *Freethinker*. In an interview, reported in the issue of 11 September, Mrs. Bentley, Derek's mother, said: "There were lots of other things that should have come out at the trial. Like the epileptic fits. . . And he was never able to read or write." I repeat this, at the risk of exposing Mrs. Bentley to the insults of Byass and Arthur Francis, because these facts deserve consideration.

In his excellent book, David Yallop points out that these aspects were not properly considered by the courts. In Bentley's medical report, drawn up for the court by the then Principal Medical Officer at Brixton Prison, Bentley's illiteracy is attributed to "an educational defect rather than an innate defect. . . I do not consider that he is a feeble-minded person under the Mental Deficiency Acts." In fact a great deal of evidence supports the contention that Bentley was feeble-minded, and that at least the issue of Bentley's fitness to stand trial should have been put before a jury.

The medical report also implied that Bentley did not have any epileptic attacks after the age of eight. This is not true. His last recorded attack was about a month before his arrest. The significance of all this is made clear by a passage in Yallop's book in which he refers to Sir Denis Hill, Professor of Psychiatry at the Institute of Psychiatry: "Professor Sir Denis Hill has assured me that a vast body of medical opinion believed in 1952, and still believes today, that if an epileptic person is involved in the type of act that Bentley had been accused of, the possibility of the disease being a direct causation can never be safely ruled out."

Charles Byass condemns the "implications in Mr. Lloyd-Jones's review that illiteracy and epilepsy are necessarily connected with diminished responsibility." In my review I did not give my opinion as to the existence of any relationship between illiteracy, epilepsy and diminished responsibility, and if I had done I would certainly not have maintained that they were "necessarily connected". Of course Byass does not actually state that I did say so; he merely pretends that I implied it. This is the sort of dishonesty which he excuses as "reasonable criticism".

When a man is on trial for his life he is entitled to have all the circumstances taken into careful consideration—including those that reflect upon his mental state. David Yallop makes it plain that the full facts about Bentley's state of mind were "not only kept from the jury's consideration, but also from the public's." It is sad to see that in 1972 there are still some people who call for the suppressions of these facts. MICHAEL LLOYD-JONES

Rationalism and Reality

As a reader of *The Freethinker* for the past couple of years, I feel I must express my growing irritation with the high proportion of articles and reviews written by self-styled rationalists who arrogantly assume that (their) rationalism is synonymous with external reality and dismiss with contempt any concept outside their own prosaic experience of inflexible patterns of cerebral activity.

The deduction of rationalism are always relative to the precepts of the mind that is reasoning, and are not therefore a true reflection of reality. Thus, a flat earth was a perfectly rational concept to a peasant in the middle ages, and equally a geocentric Universe to an academic of the period. Similarly, it may also be rational to some to deduce that there is no life after death; but this may not necessarily be the case in reality.

There is thus no justification for phrenetic condemnation of 'alien' concepts merely because the latter do not coincide with

narrow preconceptions as to the means of investigation available. It would surely be more "rational" if these writers were to give the verdict, used by Scottish courts, of "Not Proven", rather than give the impression they are sublimating some neurosis—even if they are.

The words of Shakespeare could well be addressed to these so-called rationalists. "There are more things in heaven and earth. . . than are dreamt of in your philosophy." IAN HARRIS

Euthanasia and Society

Mr. Ross's highly emotional letter (*Freethinker*, 6 May) can best be appreciated by noting that his "arguments" could be used in exactly the same way to appose all forms of abortion—every abortion being "the most horrible condemnation. . . of the whole of our society." Of course it is not; unwanted children exist, just as there are, tragically, people who die horrible, painful deaths every week, despite the administration of drugs. At the present time, no society can stop the latter—except by giving people a peaceful ending beforehand, when they request it.

As for those who are unhappy enough to commit suicide, we should all like to see a society where no-one feels the need to do so, and one in which all abortions are unnecessary. In the meantime, the present Abortion Law is doing much to eliminate misery and suffering. So could a Bill for Voluntary Euthanasia.

NICHOLAS REED

J. Stewart Ross's letter of 6 May seems to me to indicate an unreasonable reading of Peter Crommelin's "The Right to Die". Although the article touches upon some provocative issues, it expresses a life-enhancing concern for the quality of individual and collective life. Mr. Crommelin pointedly refers to tragic suicides, and, whereas Mr. Stewart Ross refers to the expression "supremely sad", Mr. Crommelin's words read, "Yet, life can become supremely terrible."

Given that an elderly person has "no hope of recovery to health and happiness" and that such a person desires to die, there surely comes a point when it is unloving to insist that "there are ways of making (that person) joyful"—rather than granting that person the right to die. The issues raised by suicide and euthanasia seem to me to involve questions of "The Right to be Selfish"—and the degrees of that selfishness.

Personally, I welcome Mr. Crommelin's article as a contribution towards more humane and rational laws—and as a challenge to those law-givers whose "love of life" would seem indifferent to its quality—for the individual concerned. CHARLES BYASS

Black and White Chestnuts

Talking of venerable chestnuts, may I comment on one of Mr. Lloyd-Jones's own in his review of my *Black and White Book*? I often heard Dr. Buchman speak firmly about the Nazis and, which is more relevant, his actions made them denounce him with persistent venom. All M.R.A. literature was banned in Germany before the War and many M.R.A. leaders in occupied countries were arrested and put to death.

The 126-page Gestapo report *Die Oxfordgruppenbewegung*, in 1939, stated that Buchman had "uncompromisingly taken up a frontal position against National Socialism" and was "working to bring about new political and ideological conditions in the Reich." "The Group demands the utmost watchfulness on the part of the State and has quite evidently become its Christian opponent," the report states. Was the humanist movement honoured with similar condemnation?*

Like Mr. Lloyd-Jones, I favour open debate rather than the suppression or censorship of views and, of course, neither Mr. Cook nor I had any part in prosecuting the *Little Red School Book*. But if Mr. Lloyd-Jones wishes to open his mind to all ideas, perhaps he might spend an evening at the Westminster Theatre and see the true story of Frank Buchman's life in the multimedia show *Cross Road*, now showing there. GARTH LEAN

*Yes! (Ed.)

"If I were a God I would make health catching instead of disease."

—Robert Green Ingersoll (1833-1899), American Freethinker.