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The FREETHINKER

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and Humanist
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N.S.S. SLAMS JESUS MOVEMENT!

—PUBLISHES "JESUS CHRIST SUPERSHAM"

"Orthodox Christianity is clutching at the latest Jesus movement like a drowning man at a straw as he goes down for the third time," said Miss Barbara Smoker, President of the National Secular Society in London last week. She was speaking at an N.S.S. press conference called to coincide with the London opening of *Jesus Christ, Superstar*; with the announcement that the Festival of Light would hold a Jesus Festival at the end of this month; and the publication of a new N.S.S. leaflet on the current Jesus-cult. Miss Smoker continued: "Even the sober Monday sermon in *The Times* was devoted this week to a cautious welcome of the Jesus Movement and a desperate attempt to squeeze a theologically acceptable message out of the new rock-musicals. But not only the ecclesiastics—another group of Christians has jumped onto the bandwagon; the neo-Puritan Festival of Light are trying to get in on the act; holding their noses with one hand, they are stretching out the other to the Jesus hippies for the sake of the Lord, muttering under their breath: 'For the Lord's sake get your hair cut!'—For there is more than a generation gap between the Longhouse elders and the long-haired youngsters."

Ignorance, absolute faith, "love" and drugs

Miss Smoker mentioned that an educational conference she had come across some of the new Jesus-evangelists and had been struck at their lack of biblical scholarship (as had an orthodox clergyman). On being asked what sort of a God they believe in, one of the members of a 'Jesus colony' had replied, "All I know is that God exists and he loves me."

"This simplistic faith," Miss Smoker added, "seems harmless enough, but like every absolute faith it is dangerous. It is this simple message of abstract love that appeals to young people who feel the universal need for love and have probably missed out on the real human kind. 'JESUS LOVES EVERYONE' has replaced the old-style graffiti in public places—and it has its own obscenity, since those who deface walls and railway compartments with this message believe that the Jesus who 'loves everyone' is also an all-powerful deity, but, for his own mysterious ends, allows huge natural disasters and countless personal tragedies to overwhelm his creatures."

The N.S.S. President went on to point out that "This belief in nebulous love is akin to sexual phantasy and also to dependence on drugs, both of which are a substitute for normal love. Indeed, a high proportion of the 'Jesus freaks' claim that they were on hard drugs before they 'found Jesus.'" To the extent that it had saved some young people, albeit temporarily, from physical drug addiction, the Jesus movement had been beneficial, but, Miss Smoker warned, "only as an antidote to something worse; not as something good in itself."

Spreading light by burning books

Mrs. Marion Boyars of the publishing firm of Calder and Boyars, and a co-founder of the Defence of Literature and the Arts Society, said that she was disturbed by the

involvement of the Festival of Light and the sort of people who "want to spread light by burning books". She did not mean that Festival of Light Members were Nazis, "but this is also what the Nazis did." The Festival of Light talked of 'moral pollution' but the term was always applied to other people, and we were probably far less 'morally polluted' than in mediaeval times or in the Elizabethan or Victorian ages. Ironically, she said, she had once refused to publish a lewd, and badly written book on prostitution in Soho only to find this later turning up in Lord Longford's lists—"It got appalling reviews."

Also present at the conference was David Tribe, a past-president of the N.S.S., who contrasted the "gentle Jesus, meek and mild" of his childhood with the "swash-buckling revolutionary" foisted by modern trendies. In fact Christianity had been 'all things to all men', sponsoring, in its time, slave empires, mediaeval feudalism, and modern capitalism so long as its power over social laws and education could be maintained. Jesus Christ has been and is, "a shibboleth for vested interests," though the trendy view of Jesus and his little band of cadging, parasitic hippies was perhaps more accurate than most, and could represent a return to Biblical Christianity.

Poisonous influence of Christianity

For over a century, said William McIlroy, General Secretary of the N.S.S., in a press statement, the National Secular Society "has been providing an antidote to the poisonous influence of Christianity" by attacking such nonsense as Jesus' virgin birth, the literal truth of the Bible, and the idea of "everlasting bliss in heaven and everlasting blisters in hell." The Society's latest contribution, also written by Mr. McIlroy, is aptly entitled *Jesus Christ Supersham*, and it describes the present mini-revival of the Jesus Movement as being "even more anti-intellect-

(Continued overleaf)

THE FREETHINKER

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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).

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National Secular Society. Details of membership and inquiries regarding bequests and secular funeral services may be obtained from the General Secretary, 103 Borough High Street, London, SE1 1NL. Telephone: 01-407 2717. Cheques, etc., should be made payable to the N.S.S.

Freethought books and pamphlets (new). Send for list to G. W. Foote & Co. Ltd., 103 Borough High Street, London, SE1 1NL.

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

Havering Humanist Society, Harold Wood Social Centre, Gubbins Lane. Tuesday, 15 August, 7.45 p.m.: talk on "The Rhodesian Situation."

(Continued from previous page)

ual and inane" than the revivals of Moody and Sankey or Billy Graham.

At various times there have been upsurges of interest in Christianity and its central figure, Jesus Christ. Such national aberrations usually appear during a period of crisis, such as wartime, when people are inclined to act less rationally than usual.

"But," says the leaflet, "(like so much of Christianity) the gentle, loving, socially concerned Jesus of the hippies and the Jesus Movement is a SHAM."

The tender, pacifist Jesus we hear so much of today is a figment of the collective imagination of stoned hippies, Jesus Freaks and American-style evangelists. Like many megalomaniacs, he was kind and patronising towards those who accepted him at his own valuation. But, like many of his trendy followers today, he was vindictive towards anyone who disagreed with him or questioned his claims.

Virtually worthless

"The teachings of Jesus are, at best, a hotch-potch of maxims either so vague or so unrealistic as to be virtually worthless. He and his deluded followers believed he would soon return to this world so there was little incentive to bother about society, culture or the family."

... His beliefs and teachings were based on supernaturalism, and the influence of those teachings through the centuries has been disastrous. They not only condoned slavery but relegated women to an inferior position, glorified suffering and lent authority to the witch-hunts of the 17th century.

"Jesus clearly accepted the awful doctrine of eternal punishment. This doctrine, the product of a disturbed mind, not that of a loving saviour, has caused incalculable misery to millions of his dupes."

Social improvement

The leaflet concludes by advising young people to devote themselves to working for social improvement. They should realise that "emotion should be grounded in reason if it is to be productive," and that cults of personality do not serve the true interests of humanity.

Since publication of *Jesus Christ Supersham*, William McIroy has been interviewed on the radio programme "late Night Extra" (2 August); David Tribe and Jesus' advocate, Lord Soper, spoke on "World at One" (3 August); Barbara Smoker took part in the Radio 4 programme, "Sunday" (6 August); and last Wednesday evening a group of N.S.S. members distributed copies of *Jesus Christ Supersham* outside the Palace Theatre, London, during the first night of the musical, *Jesus Christ Superstar*. There are plenty of copies still available for *Freethinker* readers!

Copies of *Jesus Christ Supersham* may be obtained by sending a 3p stamp to the General Secretary, National Secular Society, 103 Borough High Street, London, SE1 1NL.

TWENTY-FIVE YEARS AGO

... We learn that the superintendent of the "Dadaya Mission" has been charged with brutal beatings, with a rhinoceros stick, of girls from 10 to 18 years of age . . . The Christian gentleman is also a member of the Rhodesia Parliament. A witness, Dr. Millerick, declares that 53 native girls had bruises, cuts or weals . . . Perhaps if our leading princess [Elizabeth] visits South Africa again she will insist on seeing the real South Africa, which may open her eyes a little.

—From *The Freethinker*, 10 August 1947.

NEWS AND NOTES

TONY SMYTHE RETIRES FROM N.C.C.L.

We note with regret the retirement, after six years' service, of Mr. Tony Smythe as general secretary of the National Council for Civil Liberties.

Since 1966 Mr. Smythe has done much to promote and safeguard civil liberties in this country and his retirement will be keenly felt by the National Council and other sympathetic organisations. Both Mr. Smythe, and his successor as N.C.C.L. secretary, have our best wishes for the future.

WITHOUT COMMENT

Mrs. Mary McGee, of Skerries (Co. Dublin), has lost her case in the Irish High Court in which she tried to claim that the seizure of contraceptive jelly by the Irish customs and Revenue Commissioners was unconstitutional and legally invalid. Mr. Justice O'Keefe ruled that the laws prohibiting the sale or import of contraceptives were not inconsistent with the Irish Constitution.

Mrs. McGee is already the mother of four children, has suffered from toxæmia and cerebral thrombosis, and a further pregnancy could endanger both her health and her life.

CATHOLICS AND ABORTION

"Many Catholics are not opposed to abortion and some favour it, according to Lifeline, Britain's first anti-abortion pregnancy advisory service . . . Of over 500 inquiries received, a number were from Catholics seeking abortions."

—*Catholic Herald*, 28 July 1972.

THE TRAMP OF TROTSKYITE FEET

Mr. Harold Soref, M.P., has asked the Home Office to "inquire" into what he regards as the "subversive activities" of the Trotskyite Socialist Labour League, who held a summer camp recently near Southminster, Essex, allegedly under military-style discipline and with strong-arm guards and floodlights at the perimeter—hardly likely to entice the less masochistic thousands who normally prefer Butlin's for their annual vacations!

As the Hon. Peregrine Burke, editor of the People's Revolutionary Atheist Daily, *The Episcophophagist*, has observed:

Being a Jew, the Member for Ormskirk probably feels like a rabbit who has joined a nest of ferrets. For the Tory Party is still riddled with anti-Semites (though they are more genteel about it now than in the 1930s, and reserve their real nastiness for coloured people) and Mr. Soref must appear to be Righter than White to placate the old tabbies who run the constituency associations.

Since the Socialist Labour League will be in no fit condition to march on Whitehall after a bronchitic sojourn under the East Anglian summer drizzle, our own opinion is that Mr. Soref would be far better employed trying to get H.M. Government to exert its influence for alleviating the lot of Jews and Protestant dissidents in the Soviet Union, or of the coloured communities in South Africa, rather than panicking every time the Trotskyites play at boy scouts.

HITLER HARANGUED HERE

One tends to take revelations of the re-emergence of fascism with a little caution, especially when these are delivered via the propaganda machine of the glorious people's democracies. However, we are not altogether astonished to read in the 28 June number of *Democratic German Report* (Berlin) that a Florida publication, *National Christian News* is organising a tour of Nazi 'shrines' in Germany, including Nuremberg "and the actual places where Hitler spoke," and the sites of the former homes of Hitler, Bormann and Goering.

National Christian News has, we read, been publishing photographs of the old Nazi leaders, interspersed with such truly Christian comments as "The Jews created Communism"; "Don't let them take or register your guns" and "Seek ye first the Kingdom of God."

CREMATION INCREASINGLY PREFERRED

A significant rise, both in the number of crematoria, and the percentage of cremations in Britain is shown in the new fourth edition of the *Directory of Crematoria in the British Isles*.*

Cremation, as a hygienic means of disposal of the bodies of the dead, has long been advocated by many freethinkers; equally, opposition to its legalisation in the last century was predominantly religious. The Catholic Church, for example, opposed cremation totally until 1963, and it was not until 1966 that this church permitted its priests to conduct funeral services in crematoria. The latest figures, those for 1971, show that more than half of all disposals are now by cremation. The following figures, abstracted from the *Directory*, give some idea of this remarkable change in public attitudes:

Year	No. of Crematoria	No. of Deaths	No. of Cremations	Percentage of Cremations
1891	1	671,498	99	—
1901	6	631,692	445	—
1911	13	599,542	1,023	0.2
1921	14	534,839	1,992	0.4
1931	22	555,859	5,195	1.0
1941	57	607,738	26,221	4.3
1951	59	614,718	107,159	17.4
1961	161	615,680	224,560	36.5
1971	211	624,556	325,023	56.8

The publishers of the *Directory*, the Cremation Society, were founded in 1874 by Sir Henry Thompson (surgeon to Queen Victoria) and, amongst others, John Everett Millais, John Tenniel and Anthony Trollope; the movement's fascinating—and at times bizarrely colourful—history is given in the *Directory* and makes curiously interesting reading, especially the clerical opposition—for instance from the vicar of Woking to the first British crematorium; and the support of quaint protagonists like the "Druid High Priest," Dr. William Price. In this increasingly crowded and urbanised age, the advantages of cremation are becoming more and more apparent, and the Cremation Society deserves our high praise for a century of such hard work and conspicuous achievement.

*The *Directory of Crematoria* (4th ed.) is edited by Kenneth G. C. Prevette, and may be obtained (price 75p post free) from the Cremation Society, 47 Nottingham Place, London, W1M 4BH.

"If Truth cannot save Man, nothing can."
—John Mackinnon Robertson (1856-1933).

NATIONAL SECULAR SOCIETY EXCURSION

R. J. CONDON

The southern end of Buckinghamshire, where the Chiltern Hills slope down to the Thames Valley, has been chosen for this year's excursion of the National Secular Society.⁶ It is an area of great natural beauty, with historical associations of particular interest to secularists.

Marlow: the Shelleys and Byron

Shelley, after a period in Switzerland, returned to England in 1816 and settled in Marlow, in a house found for him by his friend and fellow-poet Thomas Love Peacock, who lived in the town. Here he composed his epic poem *The Revolt of Islam*, prompted by the failure of the French Revolution to usher in the millennium. In the preface to the poem Shelley wrote:

The revulsion occasioned by the atrocities of the demagogues, and the re-establishment of successive tyrannies in France, was terrible, and felt in the remotest corner of the civilised world. Could they listen to the plea of reason who had groaned under the calamities of a social state according to the provisions of which one man riots in luxury while another famishes for want of bread? Can he who the day before was a trampled slave suddenly become liberal-minded, forbearing and independent?

The strongly anti-religious tone of the poem was too much for Shelley's publisher, who suppressed it and demanded revision. Among the many emendations the word "atheist" has been softened to "unbeliever" and "infidel."

Mary Shelley wrote later:

Marlow was inhabited (I hope it is altered now) by a very poor population. The women are lacemakers, and lose their health by sedentary labour, for which they were very ill paid. The Poor-laws ground to the dust not only the paupers, but those who had risen just above that state, and were obliged to pay poor-rates. The changes produced by peace following a long war, and a bad harvest, brought with them the most heart-rending evils to the poor. Shelley afforded what alleviation he could. In the winter, while bringing out his poem, he had a severe attack of ophthalmia, caught while visiting the poor cottages. I mention these things—for this minute and active sympathy with his fellow-creatures gives a thousandfold interest to his speculations, and stamps with reality his pleadings for the human race.

Marlow today is a pleasant riverside town, with a wide main street leading to a chain bridge over the Thames. Shelley's house, now divided into two dwellings, is in West Street. A tablet at roof level records that Byron was a visitor here.

Last of the "Hell-fire clubs"

A few miles north of Marlow lies the National Trust village of West Wycombe. Here was the final home of the last and most famous of the eighteenth-century hell-fire clubs, the Mad Monks of Medmenham Abbey, founded by Sir Francis Dashwood, the squire of West Wycombe. Sir Francis' taste for the profane and sacrilegious had been demonstrated in early life, while visiting Rome. On Good Friday, the penitents in the Sistine Chapel scourged themselves, gently, with feigned cries of pain. Sir Francis entered the chapel, received a miniature scourge, and waited until the penitents had stripped to the waist. He then drew from under his coat a large horsewhip, with which he proceeded to lay about until the church echoed with screams of agony and terrified cries of "il diavolo!"

Established on the lines of Rabelais' Abbey of Thélème, the Medmenhamite order drew its monks from among the fashionable rakes of the day, and its nuns from local wan-

tons and the London brothel of which Sir Francis was part owner. At Medmenham, satanic rites were practiced together with the more interesting of the deadly sins. Eventually the attainment of high parliamentary office by some members of the order focussed unfavourable lime-light on their leisure activities, and the brotherhood went, literally, underground.

To provide work in the neighbourhood, Sir Francis had had a road constructed between his village and the town of High Wycombe, the material for it being obtained by tunnelling into the side of a hill. This left a network of caves, and here the last orgies of the Mad Monks were held. An underground stream was dubbed the Styx, and provided with a Charon to ferry the revellers across to the final cave. Today the visitor who penetrates thus far crosses by a bridge, to be rewarded by the sight of a wax-work orgy.

On the hill above the caves stood the ruined church of the vanished village of Haveringdune. This Sir Francis rebuilt to his own fantastic design, probably to provide a viewpoint for his estate. The church tower terminates in a short spire, incongruously topped with a gigantic gilded ball. Seating ten or a dozen people, the interior of this ball saw the final meetings of Sir Francis and his few remaining monks, now sobered by age and excess. When the writer first knew the church, it was still possible to get into the ball, via a ladder fixed to the exterior of the spire. It was not a venture for the nervous, for the ball had a pronounced rocking motion, being only loosely secured to its precarious perch. The interior of the church was decorated by the Milanese artist Joseph Borgnis, the most notable feature being a ceiling painting of the Last Supper. Alongside the church, and dominating the village, is the vast and roofless mausoleum of the Dashwood family, which also houses the remains of many of the monks of Medmenham.

Sir Francis Dashwood, later Baron le Despencer, managed to combine profligacy with a long and distinguished parliamentary career, becoming Chancellor of the Exchequer in 1762-3 and joint Postmaster-General from 1770 to 1781.

Associations with Wilkes and Franklin

One of the most prominent members of the Medmenham fraternity and a frequent visitor to West Wycombe was John Wilkes, known both for his freethinking and his reforming zeal. He took a full part in the orgies, but treated the satanic rituals with contempt. On one occasion, at the climax of the Black Mass, he terrified most of the company out of their wits by letting loose a baboon dressed up as Satan. Although he had entered Parliament as a supporter of Pitt, Wilkes clashed strongly with many members of Pitt's cabinet. He published a series of pamphlets which were damaging to the government, as a result of which he was outlawed and afterwards imprisoned. During his outlawry he lived in Paris, in the company of his friends and fellow freethinkers Diderot and d'Holbach.

Wilkes championed a programme of parliamentary reform, including the abolition of rotten boroughs and the safeguarding of individual liberty against ministerial autocracy. He supported colonial rights during the American Revolution, and secured the enfranchisement of the middle

and working classes, the freedom of the press to report parliamentary debates, and the abolition of general warrants. These last were warrants which gave their holders unlimited powers of arrest, search and seizure of goods, and were among the grievances listed in the American Declaration of Independence. A memorial tablet to Wilkes, in the Grosvenor Chapel, calls him "a friend to liberty."

Benjamin Franklin was another visitor to West Wycombe, though he is not known to have been a Medmenhamite. In 1773 he and Sir Francis produced a *Revised Book of Common Prayer* for the Church of England. Dashwood did most of the work, but Franklin cut down the Catechism, the Reading, and the Singing of Psalms. The preface explained that the purpose was humanitarian: to prevent the old and faithful from freezing to death through long ceremonies in cold churches; to make the services short in order to attract the young and lively, and to relieve the well-disposed from the affliction of interminable prayers. The Church was not amused, but after the War

of Independence the work was used in drawing up the American Prayer Book.

The excursion party will also visit the model village of Bekonscot, if a place with six railways stations and an airport can fairly be called a village. It is hoped to see in passing John Milton's cottage at Chalfont St. Giles, where he spent the Plague years and worked on *Paradise Lost* and *Paradise Regained*; the Quaker village of Jordans, where William Penn, founder of Pennsylvania, is buried; Cookham, the birthplace of artist Stanley Spencer; Boulter's Lock on the Thames; and Bray, the parish of the Rev. Simon Alleyn, whose agility in accommodating his principles to political change is celebrated in song. If time permits a stay will be made in Windsor.

* The outing will be held on Sunday, 3 September. The cost (including lunch and coach fares to and from London) is £2.25. Further details are obtainable from the General Secretary, National Secular Society, 103 Borough High Street, London SE1 1NL (telephone: 01-407 2717). *It is essential to book in advance.*

MARXISM IN PERSPECTIVE

JUDEX

Much has been written recently in *The Freethinker* about Marxism. But it would be interesting to know, in the first place, which version of Marxism is being referred to. As Professor Alvin Gouldner has put it:

Do we rally around the Marxism of Lenin? Trotsky? Lukács? Korsch? Della Volpe? Althusser? Sartre? Do we rally around the Marxism of Engels or of Marx and, if Marx, the young or the older Marx? Certainly we cannot rally around them all, for they are often mutually contradictory . . .¹

There is, in fact, a vast and erudite literature which demonstrates the mixture of myth and social science and the multiple ambiguity in Marxism, and its dual descriptive and normative character. As Lichtheim, Wolfe and others have shown, the writings of Marx and Engels have been interpreted in startlingly different and opposing ways by those who have claimed to be their heirs.

Again, in the case of Marx's biography, Blumenberg² has pointed out that even the literature favourable to Marx is heavily interspersed with legend and prefers to adopt an apologetic tone. Despite Gustav Mayer's emphasis on the importance of Marx's life for an understanding of Marxism, how many know, for example, about Marx's treatment of the problem of marital infidelity and of the illegitimate son he had by the maid, Helene Demuth?

As regards Marxism and its "immutable law" of "objective reality" it is of interest to note that Stalin announced that "The part played by so-called objective conditions has been reduced to a minimum; whereas the part played by our organisations and their leaders has become decisive."³ The Marxist thesis that it is not the consciousness of men that determines their being was thus inverted.

Marxism and metaphysics

Again, it has been argued that despite Marx's "materialist inversion" of Hegel the influence of the Hegelian dialectic continues to lend a touch of mysticism to the dialectical materialist view. Thus, Alfred Schmidt says that "Engels conceived the material unity of the world metaphysically rather than practically," and although Engels wrote a book entitled *Dialectics of Nature* Schmidt states that there cannot be a purely objective materialist dialectic of nature, independent of men.⁴

Marx's thought was undoubtedly strongly influenced by Hegel and we are informed by Lukács that

It is not the primacy of economic motives in historical explanation that constitutes the decisive difference between Marxism and bourgeois thought but the point of view of *totality*. The category of totality, the all-pervasive supremacy of the whole over the parts is the essence of the method which Marx took over from Hegel and brilliantly transformed into the foundations of a wholly new science.⁵

Indeed, Marx himself says that "Man is the human world, the state, society" and "The individual is the social being." And as Gregor has commented, the identification of the individual with a "totality" effectively empties the concept of freedom of any content and is one of the arguments used to justify totalitarian systems.⁶

For those who wish to learn more about Marxism I can strongly recommend, in addition to the authors already quoted, Professor Lewis S. Feuer's recent book of essays entitled *Marx and the Intellectuals* (Anchor Books, 1969). Feuer has also examined the Leninist theory of imperialism and drawn attention to its limitations and how it ceases to fit the facts of the real world—conclusions confirmed by a number of recent writers such as Professor Nove, Dr. Anthony D. Smith (*Theories of Nationalism*), and George Lichtheim (*Imperialism*).

NOTES

- ¹ "Sociology and Marxism." *New Left Review*. January-February 1972: p. 96.
- ² BLUMENBERG, Werner. 1972. *Karl Marx*: p. 2.
- ³ GREGOR, A. James. 1968. *Contemporary Radical Ideologies*: pp. 90-91.
- ⁴ SCHMIDT, Alfred. 1971. *The Concept of Nature in Marx*: pp. 59, 166 & 190.
- ⁵ LUKACS, Georg. 1971. *History and Class Consciousness*: p. 27.
- ⁶ GREGOR, A. James. 1969. *The Ideology of Fascism*: p. 344.

GOING DOWN . . .

"For the first time since 1949 the annual total of men ordained in the Church of England has fallen below the four hundred mark."*

—*Church Times*, 7 July 1972.

*Provisional figures for 1971 are 392 ordained; 443 pensioned off.

BOOKS

AUBREY ON EDUCATION. Edited by J. E. Stephens.
Routledge & Kegan Paul, £2.75.

In the summer of 1647, Robert Mathew was at Winchester College, about to proceed to New College Oxford and the inevitable fellowship and obscure country living. He amused himself by writing, in Latin verse, a lively account of his school and daily life. The picture is ingenuous and entertaining, but nevertheless emerges as pretty grim. Single-minded squadrons of clerics directed the school chiefly to replenish the clergy—the original impulse of William of Wykeham, but he had more cause since the Black Death left quite a lot of room for replenishment. “Learn or leave; or else get whipped” stood in large letters on the wall; and as the reward of scholarship was pictured a large and ornate mitre. “Bloodstained Friday” (whipping-day in memory of a greater punishment) dominated the week, and the endless round of prayers, parsimony and the lash, lots of Latin, not much Greek and of course no mathematics, fitted a man for little but the mitre, or smaller hats; after that and Oxford, “monkish mortification” and the bookish life became, first a habit, and at length a satisfaction.

What would Mathew have said to John Aubrey, born in the same year and presumably his contemporary at Oxford? Thirty years later, the famous antiquarian turned aside from his researches and the tireless pursuit of gossip to the composition of guide-lines for an academy of young gentlemen, with an eye to training them as successful and creative citizens and not as sterile drop-outs living apart from the mainstream, merely monastic. He was not alone in his aims (similar proposals were published by John Evelyn and a number of less well-known figures), but his notes, disordered and until now unpublished, overflow with the humanity and audacity that are his most significant, individual qualities. Since Roy Dotrice he is usually regarded as a kindly, if somewhat testy old dextral, shuffling around in a garret jam-packed with ancient, unsavoury curios, performing a totally incredible number of natural functions and retailing anecdotes of famous and obscure alike, mixed with shrewd observations of mankind at large. He is better known but I am not sure that he is better understood. The *Brief Lives*, lively and all too brief, are easy to pick about in, but difficult to read right through. In reading only the entertaining bits, you run the risk of regarding him as an entertainer. You really do have to understand the bits of Latin, the references to obscure authors and the argument behind that sweet discursiveness, and try not to be seduced by his “fun” qualities of gossip-mania, ribaldry and gift of phrase.

You also, and this has got to be said, have to have an editor sufficiently experienced to pick up and elucidate what you yourself cannot. I am afraid that even in a first, innocent reading, before the first rumblings from Professor Hugh Trevor-Roper, I found myself mentally making Aubreyesque jottings on the text—“Memo. inquire whether the learned Mr. Stephens hath not made some few booby’s errors of transcription; whether *de hiis* can be latin, or *Lipsy* English; N.B. *denique*, whether the Education Dept. in the University at Hull be the best nursery to seek an editor for Aubrey. (*Verb. sat sapienti!*)” Anyone who cares to can look up the fearful fracas that has been going

FREETHINKER

on in *The Listener*; it would be impudent for me, since I have not seen the manuscript, to express an opinion, but suspicions remain—that the task has not only been botched, but botched where no-one will care to follow.

But here at any rate is a text; one which is delightful, readable, and inspiring. Of the characteristic naughty gossip there is little, apart from the Duke of Buckingham’s strange inattention to Euclid, but life there is abundance of. One does not have to know much about the educational background (though Matthew makes an engaging comparison) to relish Aubrey’s distaste for pedagogy, for learning by rote, for any kind of grim unattractive approach to the task.

The windows should have clear glass panels, which do clear and comfort the spirits . . . On the wall I would have fine florid landscapes, some whereof should have prospects of Rome, Tivoli or Caerphilly Castle to heighten and enliven their fancies.

Excessive punishment, a thing he remembered too keenly, is forbidden; “let them not be crossed in things indifferent” (That could go for teachers too, incidentally). He adds, what no-one else, even if they had noticed it, would have thought worth remarking: “I have known some that, forty years old and upwards, when anything troubled them, they dreamt they were under the tyranny of their schoolmaster.”

Even more important, Aubrey wants to protect, not merely the “tender”, but the “ingenious”. “Whilst invention is in the flux, let it run. . .” Music—the “harpsicall or spinett” and not the fiddle which encourages the society of barbers and other bad characters—dancing, public speaking, drawing, watchmaking, bookkeeping, cookery, even buying food in the market, take their share of time. It is almost as if education was meant as a preparation for life. “Gamesters are the best managers of their business,” and cribbage, gleek and picquet “conduce to number”. The grind of grammar is pursued with tremendous *élan*. Aubrey’s booklists show clearly that brevity and simplicity were the aims; he culls the books he wants from everywhere, from friends and friends of friends, books still in MS., books yet to be translated, books he has seen or borrowed or heard of or thinks might be worth looking at. There was so much to learn, and in Quintilian’s phrase, a child’s memory is like “a great bottle with a little neck or mouth, into which you are to pour the liquor in gustations, or else more will fall than enter in.”

No doubt a human could take in all that Parnassian liquor, but not in the few years he allows. “Mr. J. Ward” (another of Aubrey’s numerous acquaintances whom he tends if anything to trust too much) “said by experience that the only time of learning is from nine to sixteen; afterwards Cupid begins to tyrannise.” Not only are the subjects multifarious; Aubrey also pleads for short lessons and classes that do not begin, like Mathew’s, with “a little bell at six”, and a Latin psalm before their faces are even washed. “What a preposterous way this is”, comments Aubrey. “One keen hour’s study as soon as they are up, is worth three hours at another time . . . The long, morning church service puts a damp upon their spirits.” As usual, and with good reason, Aubrey tends to see a cleric under every bed, behind every preposterous edict and at the man’s end of every birch. His scheme, as he predicted,

REVIEWS

THEATRE

MARY ROSE by J. M. Barrie. Shaw Theatre.

Though in many ways different from Coward, Barrie is another dramatist who burnishes everything he touches with a high professional gloss. Write out the plot of this tale of a fey female Rip Van Winkle and it seems impossible that anyone could make a long, engrossing, though occasionally dragging, play out of it. But Barrie does. "Frank" language was never further away, yet the dialogue is never twee. If they are right who say that the days of the stage defaecators and copulators are numbered (it will be no great loss) and romance is on the way back, then we are likely to see a lot of Barrie around.

Today I attend classical revivals with some misgivings. Will Mary Rose rise electronically and naked in the middle of a polystyrene island to belt out a rock ballad against a backing of electric guitars? In this production happily Johanna Bryant, John B. Read and Graham Murray combine to recreate the twenties charms of the original, though John Tavener uses electronics atmospherically in the music. It is a great tribute to the 69 Theatre Company that Mia Farrow should choose this vehicle to make her British stage debut, to which she brings an engaging innocence and spontaneity. Most impressive of a strong supporting cast is Ralph Bates in the demanding dual role of her husband and son.

DAVID TRIBE

LETTERS

The Marxist Controversy

While my emotional self would have long ago exploded Trevor Morgan-wise at the pontifications of Philip Hinchliff, my Marxist-scientific self cautioned me to wait. I hope that now, as an unrepentant "Commie" with, I hope, some "sense of humour" (H. W. Day's phrase), you will allow me to contribute my quota.

Though not long ago I debated Marxism with Philip Hinchliff at the invitation of the N.S.S., you did not invite me to contribute two articles on the subject.* Moreover, you recently printed editorially a vicious unconfirmed atrocity story about the North Vietnamese, and did not deign to print a letter from me likening it to the anti-Soviet "nationalisation of women" slander of the early years of the Russian Revolution. After these two indications of a possible slight bias on your part, I trust you will now make amends by printing this contribution in full.

Philip Hinchliff is obsessed by Hegel's "dialectic," Marxists are not. He declares that Marxists are unrealistically, unscientifically, nay, religiously, trying irrationally to fit social reality into Hegel's dialectic.

The fact is that Marx simply derived from Hegel the "dialectical method" of study and no more. This essentially is to see everything in its development, its internal contradictions, and its relation with everything else: not just to study *things in themselves*.

In formal logic an egg is an egg and not a chicken. But looked at dialectically an egg is both an egg and a "not-egg," that is, a chicken, at the same time. In real life the egg contains the embryo chicken which is itself both an *embryo chicken* and at the same time *the content of the egg*. The chicken grows within the egg as part of it until the "revolution" of bursting the shell and becoming a chicken in its own right. This *dialectical approach* can be of great usefulness in all sciences. For example; in capitalist economics capitalism is studied *as such*. In Marxist political economy, which is dialectical in approach, capitalism is studied as it emerged from previous social formations; the contradictions developing within it are analysed; and it is shown from a study of the facts and basic tendencies that sooner or later a "revolution" will be necessary in which an already socialised production will be taken under social ownership and control. It is also shown, from the facts, why the working class is conditioned by capitalism to work collectively and to be the agent of this transformation.

In his numerous parallels between Marxism and Christianity, Philip Hinchliff overlooks the fact that similar parallels can be drawn with the other sciences. Marxism and Christianity both had founders; so did Darwinism; so did the theory of relatively. So

never bore fruit, and on the last page he professes to glimpse Dr. Fell, the Vice-Chancellor whose unpopularity has passed into literature, and his black squadrons "marching from Oxford to discomfit this pretty little flock."

Well, pretty it is: what could be more delightful than the thought of pasty-faced, sleepy, grammar-crammed scholars learning the viol and cooking and dancing and the rest? And one cannot help asking the questions: what ought modern scholars to be doing? Ought it not to be possible to get to French "O" level in less than four years? Should they not learn practical skills? But one cannot also help asking how far Aubrey measured the powers of children by his own (which were unfortunately phenomenal); and how phenomenal Aubrey expected his teachers to be. Educationalists have a duty not to stunt children down to their own size, but education is still above all the science of the possible. Aubrey has a lively and humorous grasp of children's little ways, but he never really asks, or gives the impression of knowing, how much those reluctant, naughty, filthy-nailed and mucky-nosed creatures are really capable of. His school is a vision of heaven. Is it really a vision of Islington as well?

TONY MASTERS

TOWARDS DEEP SUBJECTIVITY by Roger Poole.

Allen Lane: The Penguin Press, £2.25.

"I think, therefore I am," was the famous starting-point of Descartes. "I think and feel, therefore I am," is how Roger Poole prefer to put it. Besides material space, which can be measured, there is also what Dr. Poole calls "ethical space": "not the spatial support of mathematically known extensions, but a world of interacting subjectivities which belongs to people . . ."

It is difficult, in a brief review, to do justice to a brilliant, if at times baffling, book. The professional philosopher—particularly perhaps those who hold "the complacent view that objectivity is alive and well and living in Oxford"—may pick holes in it. But Dr. Poole, lecturer in English at Nottingham University, is not writing only or even primarily for professionals. He is rather in the tradition of Coleridge versus Bentham, Dickens's Mr. Sleary against Mr. Gradgrind, Lawrence versus Russell.

Like Eliot, Dr. Poole thinks that a certain dissociation of sensibility occurred during the seventeenth century. But he goes further. "Apart from the world of the senses, seventeenth-century rationalism left one other vital element out of its philosophy: the thinker himself . . . Everything that belonged to him as an ethical being was swept out . . . and refused re-entry."

Dr. Poole sees the task of "re-integrating subjectivity into objective research" as urgent. "So much in the modern world forces us to the conclusion that philosophy is something done by the professionals," as "strategy is something done" by the Pentagon or the Kremlin.

Dr. Poole is thus a "free-thinker" in the fullest sense, holding to the right of every man to "a philosophy of his own," to "a space he can think in . . ."

My own space is now filled. But do read Dr. Poole: whether you agree with him or not, he will make you think.

R. C. CHURCHILL

what? Marxism too has rival interpretations. What emerging scientific theory does not? Marxism has a "sacred book." Yes, if you like to say that evolutionists have a "sacred book" in the *Origin of Species*, but in no other sense whatever. Marxism, we are told, has "myths." So have all sciences on those occasions where *undue* respect is paid at any time to the name or work of any particular individual. And if the respect is undue, it is not scientific, and we simply have a case of a bad exposition or application of science. When humanists *over-venerate* Huxley they too are myth-making, but this does not debunk humanism or Huxley.

The communists have their "priesthood" in the Communist Party. The academic sciences have their "priesthoods" in their professoriate and in the Royal Society. One could cynically comment on such humanist "bishops" as Blackham and Hawton, or "Mother Superior Barbara Smoker." It is easy to put anything you like into ecclesiastical terminology.

Hinchliff says that "Marxism has in fact filled the gap left by the decline of Christianity." Why not? Is this not precisely what humanists would wish that their brand of humanism had succeeded in doing? Sour grapes—that is all.

Philip Hinchliff finds Marxism "outdated," "impossible to prove"; Marx "simply rigged the dialectic to ensure that the proletariat would win." He appears to be totally blind to: the state of class struggle existing in Britain today; the recurrence of mass unemployment (Marx's inevitable "reserve army of labour"); the world-wide inflationary and currency crisis; the world-wide domination of giant international monopolistic companies and corporations; the cruelly intensifying exploitation of the "Third World;" and finally the assault of U.S. capitalism on Vietnam. Marx in his day was over-optimistic as to the rate at which the workers of the advanced capitalist countries would unite and replace capitalism: he did not foresee the extent to which the capitalist mass media would influence them. Apart from this, facts have proved him correct.

Mr. Low "answers" my reference to the profitability of arms *manufacture* by an irrelevant reference to arms *trading* which leaves my original statement untouched. Mr. Montague—while sharing my negative assessment of Mr. Hinchliff—dogmatically labels the U.S.S.R. and China as "state capitalist." This is like the mediaeval debate as to how many angels could dance on the point of a needle. In the modern world both the U.S.S.R. and China have made the bulk of the means of production public property not used for exploitation of labour for private profit. They have both abolished Stock Exchanges, and have made speculation in property illegal. They have both launched out on planning their economies so as to raise the material and cultural standards of their people as quickly as possible (while of necessity providing for their defence against possible imperialist intervention). They have both taken the profit out of war preparations. And both are aiming at such a level of production and education that people will be able to receive according to their needs and will contribute to society according to their abilities. For me, this is quite sufficient justification for calling their system "socialist," in contrast to the system under which we still, alas, have to live. PAT SLOAN.

*The Editor comments:

I confirm that I did not invite Mr. Sloan to contribute two articles on Marxism; the same applies equally to Philip Hinchliff. The latter asked if he could submit an article on the subject, and it was eventually published in two parts.

My distaste for atrocities does not depend upon whether they are committed by communists or capitalists: I have commented upon both brands in the past, and shall doubtless continue to do so.

Professor Levy on Marxism

Marxists persist in describing history as a record of dialectical development, each stage or jump being in some way "higher" than the last. The dialectic is not at all a bad way of illustrating the evolution of ideas, but it cannot be applied to history without a great many reservations of the kind that Marxists are not prepared to make. For, if they did, their ideology would suffer the same fate as God, the "death of a thousand qualifications."

I admit that if we do look at history through Marxist-coloured spectacles, then the Marxist "laws" of social change will appear pretty convincing. Yet when it comes to the crucial test of a scientific theory—the verification of its specific predictions—then Marxism fails disastrously. The Marxist revolutions have not been the work of the proletariat acting with one voice and consciousness, not even in Russia. The forecast that the class struggle would polarise between a large number of dispossessed proletarians and a tiny group of opulent capitalists has been disproved. The notion

that the growth of capitalism would lead to increasing class consciousness among the workers has been disproved. Whatever you think about trade union militancy, it is not *socialist* in content. And the idea that economic struggle alone—the fight for better pay and conditions—would give birth to socialist consciousness was bitterly criticised by Lenin himself. Yet if we dismiss the heresy of economism, it is not in the least clear how the workers are ever going to come to want socialism.

Professor Levy, in his "Marxism: Some Points of Theory" (29 July), takes me to task for claiming that Marxists believe in the coming revolution whatever the contrary evidence, since he feels that you cannot have evidence about the future. I am surprised that he should not see the point here, which quite simply is that a prediction of future behaviour (the coming revolution) based on an analysis of social forces which does not fit the facts is hardly scientific. In practice, Marxism has become an ideology which reconciles its claims and assumptions with the facts by pretending that reality is not what it is, but in the process of becoming something different. And since what reality is turning into is obviously the province of Marxists, who make large claims about the future communist utopia, their speculations become immune from falsification. The cost, however, is that Marxist theory then sheds any empirical content. Thus, if the workers are not revolutionary now, they will become so by the operation of this-and-this. When this-and-this fails to produce any effect, the Marxists draw attention to that-and-that which will not fail to lead to the revolution forthwith. The price of making the Marxist theory unfalsifiable is that it becomes reconcilable with anything whatever.

It is for this reason that I am not in the least impressed with Professor Levy's impressive list of "contradictions." It is significant that he ends his list with a comment that he need elaborate no further, for this is precisely what he does need to do to carry conviction. So "the car headlights that blind us" are one example of contradiction that Professor Levy feels relevant to his case that social change springs from inner contradictions. I must confess that I do not see how. Like other attempts to derive laws of historical change from the record of the past, Marxism fails because it disregards the complexity of reality and human society. This complexity means we do not understand the forces of history well enough to be able to predict large-scale social changes. The evidence does not allow us to formulate scientific hypotheses in this sphere, at the level of generality that Marxism formulates them.

Can the humanist movement learn anything from Marxism? Should it inspire the efforts of humanists to produce a better world? I think not, for Marxism can be criticised by the same arguments that we would use against Christianity. Either Marxism purports to be a scientific explanation of society and social development, or it does not. If it does, then as I have tried to argue it stands condemned by the ordinary tests of scientific method. If it does not, then how do we justify, as rational individuals, adherence to it? Possibly, I suppose, on the grounds that Marxism provides a faith to live by and that it allows us to retain our optimism about the future, for without this basic optimism no progress is possible. Yet this is very like the Christian argument that faith in God has beneficial results, even if it is intellectually indefensible. And what history has shown is that the alleged benefits of Marxist régimes have been bought at an unacceptably high price in blood, misery and tyranny.

Far from being a devotee of absolutes, as Professor Levy maintains, I find myself quite unable to accept the whole basis of the Marxist ethic that anything which furthers the revolution is morally good. It is the absolutists who, throughout history, have always shed the most blood. PHILIP HINCHLIFF.

Celtic Nationalism and Culture

I have read with interest the letters of P. Berresford Ellis and Pádraig O Conchúir, and as one who is as anxious as they are to preserve the heritage, culture and language of small nations, I think their slight over-reaction to my criticism underlines the point.

Indeed, had Mr. Berresford Ellis done his homework in this field, he would hardly have talked of a "Celtic hang-up" except in the sense of my strong sympathy for, and affinity with the Celtic people in their struggle to retain their individuality in everything from hurling and Gaelic games to the Welsh language, and my particular "hang-up" over Ulster and a United Ireland to replace the current artificial divisions.

But no good will come of an over-romanticism of the past or an uncritical analysis of movements which one supports. James Connolly on Nationalism and Socialism is perhaps the nearest thing to a bible that your Freethinking readers might consult on this delicate topic. PAUL B. ROSE, M.P.