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SECULAR EDUCATION FOR A SECULAR SOCIETY

THE UNFINISHED WAR AGAINST RELIGIOUS INDOCTRINATION

The campaign for secular education, for removing religious—almost exclusively Christian—indoctrination from the nation's schools, has been dear to the hearts of freethinkers for much longer even than this paper has been in existence. Despite the nineteenth-century campaigns for free, non-sectarian education, the present century in fact gave us the retrograde clauses of the 1944 Education Act which legalised compulsory religious "instruction" and Christian "Acts of Worship." Humanists have, quite rightly, continued to attack these on moral and civil liberties grounds, sometimes with the support of the occasional liberal Christian. The Labour Party's deputy leader and Shadow Minister for Education, the Right Hon. Edward Short, M.P., touched on this subject in a speech in Monmouthshire on 25 October. "The most important consequence," he said, "of the growth of secularity and the flood of radical theology has been the widespread, indeed almost universal, discarding of the view expressed by Mr. W. E. Forster [M.P.] in 1870 that morality can only be based upon religious belief."

Untenable to the majority today

"Plainly," Mr. Short said, "such a view is untenable to probably a majority of people today. The humanist or agnostic believes he can live a perfectly good life without Christian belief: and of course he is right."

"Rational judgment, and not religious belief, determines, for most people, what is 'right' and what 'wrong', although many would admit that the two are closely linked and that Christianity offers the deepest moral insights." (Mr. Short is, of course, himself a Christian.)

Secularisation "cannot be ignored"

"The simple assumption which lay behind many of the speeches on the passing of the 1944 Act that, to put it crudely, an extra dose of religious instruction was all that was needed to cure the moral ills of the nation is today seen to be invalid. Too many people have disproved it in practice by discarding the moral teaching they have received along with whatever they learnt at school at scripture; and many philosophers, such as Professor Hirst, have argued powerfully against it by upholding the autonomy of morality. The secularisation of society, the radical theology and autonomous morality are part of the contemporary scene which cannot be ignored."

But, of course, up to now they have been ignored, both by the present Government, and by Mr. Short himself when his Party was in power. We are glad, at least, for the admission. The fact is that the idea that religion in schools "would cure the moral ills of the nation" was seen through years ago, as was the old 'cultural heritage' rationalisation. The protagonists of religious privilege in education may say that religious education is culturally or morally important to the community, but they know, and we know that that is not why they want to retain it:

for them, religion in schools means a guaranteed captive audience and a means of perpetuating religious beliefs, and, just as important, it gives organised religion, particularly the Catholic Church, the illusion of having a modern 'rôle', without which it would be seen to be as socially bankrupt as it is philosophically.

Protests against compulsory religion in New Zealand

For every liberal Christian who recognises that the present set-up is unethical and basically intolerant, there are plenty of authoritarian religious educationists who believe in the philosophy of "compel them to come in," and who will continue with a what-we-have-we-hold policy. This whole problem is highlighted by recent events in New Zealand, which has a very similar education system to that in Britain, and where 32 fourth, fifth and sixth-form pupils of Christchurch Girls' High School staged a walk-out from assembly on 13 October as a protest against compulsory religious study. Two of them, sixth-formers, have been suspended from classes in consequence.

The school's branch of the Canterbury Secondary School Students' Association has issued a pamphlet setting out the girls' case. "Whether or not you are a Christian," it says, "we are sure you can see the moral illogic of those who are not Christians being forced to share your faith against their wills."

"Our democratic right to choose"

One of the suspended students is quoted (*Auckland Star*, 14 October) as saying, "There is a very strong feeling in the school about compulsory religion. Two hundred pupils have refused to take part in the morning service, but a lot of the girls are scared to take part in the protest because

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Editor: NIGEL SINNOTT

103 Borough High Street,

London, SE1 1NL

Telephone: 01-407 1251

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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 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.

Ashurstwood Abbey Secular Humanist Centre (founded by Jean Straker), between East Grinstead and Forest Row, Sussex. Telephone: Forest Row 2589. Meeting every Sunday, 3 p.m.

EVENTS

Brighton and Hove Humanist Group, Imperial Centre Hotel, First Avenue, Hove. Sunday, 5 November, 5.30 p.m.: S. V. Sandground, "Was the Christian Church a Force for Good?" Freethought History and Bibliography Society, Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London WC1. Saturday, 11 November, 2.45 p.m.: D. B. Moore, "James Thomson ('B.V.') and The City of Dreadful Night."

Leicester Secular Society, Secular Hall, Humberstone Gate. Sunday, 5 November, 6.30 p.m.: Christopher Brunel, "Behind the Scenes in Making Television Commercials."

South Place Ethical Society, Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London WC1. Sunday, 5 November, 11 a.m.: Prof. C. E. Carrington, "Rudyard Kipling and the Victorian Tradition." Tuesday, 7 November, 7 p.m.: Chief Inspector Sallabank, "The Role of the Police."

Voluntary Euthanasia Society, House of Commons, London SW1 (room booked in name of Lord Listowel). Wednesday, 9 November, 6 p.m.: Annual General Meeting and address by Margaret Rawlings. (Members and friends invited.)

Violin Recital in Aid of I.A.S.

A violin and piano recital in aid of the Independent Adoption Society will be given by Geoffrey Trabichoff and Catherine Dubois on Thursday, 9 November, 7.45 p.m., at the home of Mr. & Mrs. Anderson, 32 Highgate Avenue, Edgware, Middlesex. (For further details please contact Beryl Sabel, 01-368 2811.)

NEWS

(Continued from front page)

the U.E. [University Entrance examination] is coming up . . . We don't want to be coerced into religious study. It is our democratic right to choose, but the headmistress says we must go into the services if we are Christians or not."

This is clearly one of the 'old battles' against religion that is by no means 'over', notwithstanding witless nonsense to be the contrary. Discrimination against both humanist teachers and students is no less common here in Britain than in New Zealand—how many humanists get headships? At present a tiny majority of right-wing Christians is able to impose its propaganda and its bigotry upon what is now admitted to be the disbelieving majority; unless such Christians are staunchly and consistently opposed, they will be able to perpetuate the present situation. The need for a politically-conscious, frank, fighting freethought movement is as relevant, as necessary to the well-being and progress of society today as ever it was in 1870. The 'old' war was *never* concluded, and it is the *new* battles in that same war that we fight today. Who stands for freethought?

"When a religion does not support itself, and God does not care to support it so that its professors are obliged to call for State support, it is a sign of being a bad one."

—Benjamin Franklin (1706-1790).

CHURCH SCHOOLS ASK FOR MORE —AGAIN

In our 7 October issue we reported that Cardinal Heenan was angling for more money for Catholic schools. The chorus is now beginning to swell, and the Anglicans are rattling their begging bowl. A report by the Church of England's board of education says that unless another £18 million is forthcoming during the next fifteen years, some voluntary aided church schools may have to close.

These poor, impoverished church schools already receive from public funds, levied from believer and infidel alike, the whole of their teachers' salaries and 80 per cent of their building costs. £18 million seems an unacceptably high price for jacking up superstition and sectarianism; the money would be better spent on local authority and county schools and the social services.

CHRISTIANITY IN EAST GERMANY

Christian Action News is the title of a recent arrival on our desk whose August/September number carries several interesting items on South Africa, "Justice as a Social Service" and prison reform. To its credit, *Christian Action News* criticises President Amin of Uganda—"not the first in history to claim divine sanction for political pretensions or for political decisions that are inhumane;"—and also carries an informative article on the Protestant churches in East Germany, of which the following is but an extract:

. . . The East German Church's theological and political stance . . . bears little resemblance to Russian Orthodoxy or to Polish Catholicism. The Russian Orthodox Church in line with its own history takes no part in political discussion. It is subservient to the Soviet state even when that state subjects it to severe

S AND NOTES

humiliation. Polish Catholicism, on the other hand, almost proudly asserts its independence and authority. It is, as in the middle ages, a state within a state and has the allegiance of the masses . . . In East Germany where Luther lived and his tradition lives on, the Protestant Church's leadership walks the dialectical tight-rope of serving a communist-ruled community with constructive criticism. These Christians make no claim to power. They have no mass following. Their authority depends solely on the validity of their ideas and on their own spiritual integrity. They are a gift to world Christendom and to their own nation.

DIVINE RIGHT OF TYRANTS

"Even if those in authority are evil or without faith, nevertheless the authority and its power is good and from God . . . Therefore, where there is power and where it flourishes, there it is and there it remains because God has ordained it."

—Martin Luther (quoted by Arthur Burton in the March/April number of *The American Rationalist*).

CHARITY ENDS . . .

The Church Commissioners have decided to demolish St. Mary's Church, Savile Town, in Dewsbury, Yorkshire, rather than allow the local Moslems to buy the shell of the building to use as a mosque. This act of Christian charity has been decided upon despite recommendations from a British Council of Churches working party that redundant churches, once cleared of Christian ornaments, should be made available to other faiths.

BEARING DOWN

"I cannot help thinking that the present inequitable system of paying clergy has a bearing on the decline in the number of ordinands. Perhaps the Church [of England] should think in terms of a celibate ministry or revert to monastic priests living on charity."

—The Rev. Charles Lawrence, quoted by the *Western Daily Press*.

CHURCH SCHOOLS AND VOTES

When it comes to suborning the United States' secular Constitution and providing funds for denominational and sectarian schools we always thought that President Richard M. Nixon was the nadir; but we are informed by the *Times Educational Supplement* (13 October) that he has competition. Apparently Senator McGovern, in an effort to woo the Catholic vote (about 25 per cent of the electorate), has endorsed a system of tax credits "to aid parents of children attending parochial and other bona fide non-public schools." The strategy behind this particular little 'fiddle' is that the money is earmarked for individuals, not schools, and is therefore within the writ of the Constitution.

The main beneficiaries of the tax credits Bill would, need we add, be America's Catholic schools, which have suffered a 17 per cent decline in enrolment over the last ten years, and the closure of 500 (denominational) schools during the period 1970/71. Although the prospect of "Vote for the clericalist candidate of your choice" sounds

depressing, the tax credits Bill is being opposed by the American Federation of Teachers and the National Education Association, who point out that tax credits would divert money away from the public education system. We can doubtless rely upon Americans United for the Separation of Church and State and America's secularist organisations to come out fighting, as well.

... AND RUTHLESS

If the Church is to do its job properly, says the Bishop of Ripon, the Right Rev. John Moorman, in the first issue of the new *Ripon Quarterly*, it will have to be alert, self-critical and ruthless.

VASECTOMY BILL PASSED

We were caught napping last week: fifteen minutes after going to press we learned that the private member's Bill to allow male vasectomy on the National Health Service had received its second reading on 23 October. All that is now required is the Royal Assent. (No need to lobby Her Majesty for that!)

At its second reading the vociferous little gaggle of objectors (who had talked the Bill out on a previous occasion) appeared in force, being particularly incensed by the fact that it had been given extra time by the Government. The vote, however, was gratifyingly decisive: 173 to 16.

OBITUARY

Sydney Cecil Merrifield

We regret to announce the death, on 3 October, of Mr. Sydney Merrifield. He was 79.

Mr. Merrifield settled in Scotland after serving during the 1914-18 War in the Cameronian regiment, and was a postman until his retirement in 1955. He was a kind and gentle man, very popular with everyone, and an avid reader for many years of *The Freethinker*: only two days before his death he asked his daughter to read the latest issue to him.

Mr. Merrifield leaves a widow, three sisters, a son, daughter, and grandson, to whom we offer our sincere sympathy.

TWENTY-FIVE YEARS AGO

. . . Our Princess [Elizabeth], for her wedding hymn, chooses "The Lord is My Shepherd, I Shall Not Want." That must be a very cheerful item of news. We are not sure about "The Lord," but we think that some notice should be given to the Houses of Parliament who are also giving a *mite* to protect the Princess from starvation.

—From *The Freethinker*, 2 November 1947.

FIFTY YEARS AGO

We regret to publish very grave news concerning the health of Mr. J. W. Gott . . . As we are going to press we get a telegram from his daughter saying: "Dad weaker, sinking fast." I am afraid that by the time the next issue of the paper is out the end will have come, and the Christian bigots who rejoiced over the savage sentence of nine months' hard labour [for blasphemy] will know that one more enemy of their miserable faith has gone to his rest—and a few more enemies made.

—Chapman Cohen in *The Freethinker*, 5 November 1922.

REMEMBER, REMEMBER, THE FIFTH OF NOVEMBER

PAT SLOAN

I am sitting at my desk on a wet afternoon; it is 5 November, and I have beside me a leather-bound prayer book published in the year 1680, my wife's loot from a jumble sale some time ago.

In those days there was no pretence whatever that the church, or God, were non-political. Everyone knew that God was on our side; and so the Prayer Book contained a "Form of Prayer with Thanksgiving" to be "used yearly upon the Fifth day of November" and it was directed against "the most Traiterous and Bloudy intended Massacre by Gunpowder."

The prayers are accompanied by a charming black-and-white print showing both the moon and God's eye poised in the sky above Parliament; a ray descends from God's eye to the wicked Guy Fawkes as he approaches the House.

Thanks are offered up for deliverance from "Popish treachery" committed "in a most barbarous and savage manner, beyond the examples of former ages." "O Lord, who didst this day discover the snares of death that were laid for us . . . Be thou still our mighty Protectour."

There then follow lines very similar to those, now abandoned, which in the National Anthem used to confound

the King's enemies: the Lord is asked to "scatter our enemies . . . abate their pride, assuage their malice, and confound their devices."

In a flattering passage the Lord is told that

thou didst prevent the malice and imaginations of our enemies, by discovering & confounding their horrible and wicked enterprise, plotted, and intended this day to be executed against the King, and the whole State of this Realm, for the subversion of the Government, and Religion established amongst us . . . We confess, it was thy mercy, thy mercy alone, that we were not then consumed. For our sins cried to heaven against us; and our iniquities justly called for vengeance upon us. But thou hast not dealt with us after our sins . . . but didst in mercy deliver us . . .

"Turn thy face away from our sins, O Lord; and blot out all our offences."

Amen.

Which all goes to show just how political were the church and God in those days; and God even turns a blind eye to the 'sins' of the English Protestants, while the illustration shows the same eye very much alive to Guy Fawkes and his "Popish treachery." The Rev. Ian Paisley might find useful inspiration in exhuming this religious rubric of 1680!

SOME RELIGIOUS ANOMALIES

CYRIL MARCUS

Jacques Monod, in his book, *Chance and Necessity* (1972) writes, "The 'liberal' societies of the West still pay lip service to, and present as a basis for morality, a disgusting farrago of Judaeo-Christian religiosity, scientific progressivism, belief in the 'natural' rights of man, and utilitarian pragmatism." This view is shared by many, if not most, of the more serious philosophers of this country, and also by a large proportion of thinking people elsewhere.

Yet Christianity may continue for centuries to be the most widely held religion in the West, whereas Judaism, the religion of a comparatively tiny minority, is unlikely to grow, as in this case no proselytising is attempted. The fact is that, call it "lip service" if you will, the adherence to the Christian Church has definite social attractions, while dissension from it has undoubted social, not to say economic, disadvantages.

For example, it may be socially embarrassing not to have one's child baptised (I have heard this referred to as being "done"); it is socially more acceptable to be married in church than at a Registry Office; and to have funerals conducted in a Christian manner. The social life of a community centres largely around a Church background.

It is certainly easier for the ordinary individual to call himself a Christian. The economic disadvantages, the career drawbacks, for a man who dissents from Christianity are great, although for the strong-minded they do not seem to have had adverse effects. Some candidates for parliament have been reluctant to disclose that they are humanists, though strong characters like Richard Crossman, Michael Foot or Vic Feather openly avow that they are unbelievers.

I can remember once, when we were forming a Humanist Group in a town in which I happened to be

staying, there was great difficulty in forming the committee. A lawyer was afraid that if his name was associated with the movement this would adversely affect his practice; a Corporation Official had fears about his chances for promotion; and an accountant had qualms in case the connexion with humanism might not be viewed in a good light by his clients.

'Loving' one's enemies

Up in the mountains of Switzerland, I once happened to tune in to some station in America from which was emanating a religious programme. "The difference between Christianity and other religions," the speaker was saying "is that Christianity is the religion of love. Christians love even their enemies." Far below me, the castle of Chillon jutted into the Lake of Geneva; it was here that the Prior Bonivard was held captive in a dungeon, chained for six years, below the level of the water, for trying to introduce the Reformation in the region.

In their zeal to propagate the Christian religion, missionaries have sometimes used methods somewhat removed from love. Lord Minto, Governor-General in India (1807-1813) wrote to the Chairman of the East India Company complaining of some of the procedures used:

. . . The miserable stuff addressed to the Hindus, in which without one word to convince or satisfy the mind of the heathen reader, without proof or argument of any kind, the pages are filled with hell fire, and hell fire, and still hotter fire, denounced against a whole race of men for believing the religion which they were taught by their fathers and mothers.

So much for love. So many believers in other religions stress this as fundamental to their faith. A Hindu has read passages of the Bhagavat Gita to me on this, and the next day I have read in the papers of attacks on Muslims by Hindus.

To anyone not brought up in the Christian faith (although an atheist, I am a Jew) the concept of Christ being the son of God, and yet able to suffer like a man, is mentally unassimilable. In the same way, to one brought up in the Western tradition the idea of transmigration of souls does not make sense. I have heard a Buddhist from Ceylon say that life would be meaningless for her if she did not believe that when she died her soul would live on in someone else.

Christians aver that Christ died to save the world. The world is no more *saved* now than it was 2,000 years ago. One hates to think what it would have been like *without* religion! (Here I must point out that Christianity is the religion of less than a third of the population of the world.)

The Church and exploitation

Talking recently with a clergyman on *Human Documents of the Industrial Revolution*, by Royston Pike, I asked him if he knew of the practice and conditions of child labour in Britain little more than a hundred years ago; the man replied, with some feeling, "Yes, I should know about it,

considering the Church did so much to bring about its abolition." Did it?

In fact the Church had no effect in preventing the practice from beginning. Indeed, many of the factories were started by Christians; their religion had not instilled in their minds that they were doing wrong by exploiting children, any more than it had in preventing men from trafficking in slaves.

Clearly, though, I would prefer love as against strife and discord; but I would rather that morals were self-imposed rather than imposed by the straight-jacket of religious laws. I believe that the Epicurean concept should be cultivated as the guide to what is right and wrong: an action is right if it brings happiness; it is wrong if it brings sorrow to people.

Men of goodwill must strive for the good of all mankind and eschew all preconceived ideas. If men would accept that "people are people," and that differences of culture and belief are mainly superficial, there is every chance that peace would reign on earth.

THE PUBLICATION OF PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

ERIC GLASGOW

The recent rejection of televised proceedings by the House of Commons—albeit by a fairly narrow majority—is reminiscent of the controversy, just two hundred years ago, over the efforts to secure freedom for the publication of Parliamentary debates, and associated with the tempestuous career of John Wilkes (1725-1797). Then, as now, the argument was raised that, to permit such intrusion would destroy the proper rôle of the House of Commons as a place for serious and responsible discussion and decision; and it was suggested that the publication of Parliamentary debates could only excite an unhealthy, popular interest in the high affairs of government, destroying the character of the House of Commons as the "best gentleman's club in the Kingdom."

In the eighteenth century, the House of Commons still tried to prevent the publication of its debates, as a protection "against pressure from below" (J. S. Watson). It was not always good policy, because it encouraged the publication and the circulation of fictitious or garbled accounts, which were often more damaging, and certainly more inaccurate, than the originals could ever have been: thus, Dr. Johnson is said to have compiled such debates in his garret, "making sure that the Whig dogs got the worst of it." Often, the nominal breach of Parliamentary privilege was ignored; but the popular agitation from 1762 to 1774, associated with John Wilkes, caused the House of Commons to attempt to tighten up the rules.

Arrests and counter-arrests

In 1771, three prominent London publishers—Thompson of *The Gazetteer*, Wheble of the *Middlesex Journal*, and Miller of the *Evening Post*—were summoned to answer to the House of Commons for presuming to report Parliamentary debates. The Radicals took this as a challenge. The publishers refused to appear, and they were protected by the authorities of the City of London, amongst whom was Alderman John Wilkes, who since 1769 had been the

motive force behind the "Society of the Supporters of the Bill of Rights." Wilkes, as a magistrate, arrested the messenger sent by the House of Commons, and released him only after an arduous controversy in which the "whole issue of the Commons versus the People was reopened" (Watson again).

The House of Commons, however, continued the battle on a wider front. On 27 March 1771, it ordered "Brass Crosby, Esquire, Lord Mayor of the City of London" to attend "to answer for his insolence." Wilkes, too, was at first involved; but since he insisted that the summons must be made out to him as the M.P. for Middlesex, he was eventually left out on the urgent advice of the Prime Minister, Lord North. Brass Crosby, however, was committed to the Tower, and "the indignation of the people could hardly be restrained." Although his arrest was described by Lord Chatham in the House of Lords as the "act of a mob, not of a Parliament," it was upheld, on a technicality, by Lord Chief Justice de Grey, in the Court of Common Pleas, on 22 April 1771; and Brass Crosby was further remanded in the Tower, for a total of about six weeks, until the Parliamentary Session ended on 8 May—when he returned to the Mansion House in a "triumphal procession."

The popular rejoicing were widespread and sincere—there was some justification for them, for "no attempt has ever been made since to restrain the publication of Parliamentary debates." The House of Commons gained a nominal victory, which in fact turned out to be an effective defeat, since "attempts to prevent the reporting of debates were largely abandoned after 1771."* The controversy illustrates how impossible it is to hold on to any item of law not generally supported by public opinion as a whole; and that, in itself, was a significant advance towards British democracy.

(Continued overleaf)

THE PUBLICATION OF PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

(Continued from Previous page)

Eighteenth-century public opinion

The whole affair also shows that even the patrician England of the eighteenth century was amenable to the forces of popular will, despite the absence of any sort of universal suffrage. This was the curiously hidden side in the politics of Hanoverian England: the factor of public opinion, affecting, sometimes decisively, even the legislators of the realm, and so mitigating the possibilities of a new dictatorship by an over-mighty House of Commons.

John Wilkes was, in that struggle, more prominent and powerful than Brass Crosby (1725-1793); but, in the end, it was surely the general principle that mattered—that the House of Commons had neither the ability nor the right to insulate its proceedings from public scrutiny; and this proposition may well be as relevant and decisive, in relation to the advent of the new medium of television, in our own times, as it was to the circulation of printed words and the publication of the proceedings of the House of Commons, two centuries ago.

*Horn, D. B. & Ransome, Mary 1957. *English Historical Documents, 1714-1783*: p. 178.

REVIEWS

BOOK

ENGLISHMEN AND IRISH TROUBLES: British Public Opinion and the Making of Irish Policy 1918-22 by D. G. Boyce. Jonathan Cape, £4.50.

In 1867 at the time of the Fenian 'troubles' the radical newspaper *Beehive* commented that "the gross injustice inflicted on Ireland for so many years by the British Government and legislature, has created a deep rooted hatred of the English and . . . the perpetrators and abettors of this unjust Irish policy are now reaping the fruits of their bad legislation."

The same deep rooted feeling may be found in the Bogside or the Falls Road today, and there is little in the current 'troubles' that has not been a repetition of the continuing Irish cycle of repression and violent reaction. There is, therefore, a remarkably contemporary flavour in the debate which took place in the most formative years 1918-22 when the shape of modern Ireland was delineated, if not dictated, by the conflicting arguments, and threats of force, among the competitors. Notwithstanding the remarkable rush of books on Ireland that has hit the bookshops in the wake of the bombs, Mr. D. G. Boyce, a lecturer at University College Swansea, has produced a useful and welcome addition to the literature on this compelling topic.

Irish history, largely ignored or treated with little perception by English writers, frequently suffers from the absence of the important, if not crucial, dimension of English opinion. From the Corresponding Societies and United Englishmen of 1798 up and until the anti-internment agitation of 1972 there has been a continuing strand of opinion opposed to official policy in Ireland, often stimulated by the Irish themselves who settled in their millions outside their Motherland.

The argument against violence is more powerful than ever today as it is both futile and counterproductive, but

it is sad to say that those of us who raised our voices eight, or seven, or even three years ago were ignored until violent men made our pleas sound very moderate in retrospect.

Thus Mr. Boyce aptly quotes Joseph Biggar, the Irish Nationalist M.P., prefacing a key chapter on "The War of Words, Propaganda and Public Opinion":

The first thing you have got to do with an Englishman on the Irish question is to shock him. Then you can reason with him right enough.

Of course the Nationalist has traditionally failed to understand the basic identity of interest with radical organisations in Britain or the curious phenomenon of the liberal conscience which manifested itself among the pro-Boers and was particularly vulnerable in 1918 to the accusation of dual standards in fighting a war for the rights of small nations. Nothing, more than the counter-productive policy of reprisals, served to awaken that conscience. From the Devon Commission on treatment of Fenian prisoners to the recent Compton Report, the same liberal conscience has been shocked by what we were capable of doing to the Irish whom we claim as British citizens. The "Black and Tans" were as damaging to British interests as the vengeful hangings in Manchester in 1867 or the post-Easter executions in 1916. But this time it was Britain's self-esteem and self-respect that were affected rather than the stirring up of Irish feeling. Anyone with a sense of history would have avoided the equally disastrous policy of internment without trial used by the Conservative Government a half a century later.

Coercion and reform have been the two weapons, but what Asquith called "a naked confession of political bankruptcy"—the use of the Black and Tans to terrorise the Irish—was exposed by the Liberal and Labour press. However, according to Mr. Boyce, it was "the intelligentsia, the people who joined the Peace with Ireland Council or lent it their support, who were most deeply committed to the agitation against reprisals, and who felt that the government's policy was contrary to all traditions of British public and political life." Trade Unionists who boycotted the "Jolly George" rather than supply the arms to suppress the Russian revolution could not be called out to strike on behalf of their Irish brethren. The British have never been so myopic as in relation to their attitudes to the closest of their neighbours. The sorry tale of brutality and indiscriminate reprisals found its way increasingly into the British press. The Report of the Labour Commission to Ireland showed police complicity while Sir Philip Gibbs was "disturbed, distressed and filled with a sense of amazement and indignation that England, the champions of small peoples, the friend of liberty, pledged to the self-determination of peoples, should adopt a Prussian policy in Ireland."

The effects of reprisals on "the Englishman's sense of justice and fair play" are illustrated well, and the complicating factor of Ulster's fears is dealt with objectively. Therein lies the root of the problem we face a half a century later, for the pressure of Ulster was such that the problem thought to be solved by the Treaty was merely shelved for the grandchildren of those who faced it in 1918. With benefit of hindsight, the Treaty and Partition which brought a "sensible compromise" and peace in the best English pragmatic tradition was no more than a postponement of the solution to the problem which now faces us today. The chapter on "Englishmen and the Partition of Ireland" is therefore of more than historic interest.

Curiously, the Ulster case was not particularly well-known in Britain. Ulstermen who cross the sea are often

surprised to find themselves regarded as Irish by Englishmen, but in 1920 unlike 1972 "The Irish Unionists as a whole enjoyed an influential position in the Conservative Party." The Orange Card played by Lord Randolph Churchill; the tightly knit community and geographically defensible area of the six counties (excluding three Ulster Counties in order to preserve a permanent Protestant majority; while bringing in Fermanagh and Tyrone notwithstanding their nationalist majorities) was a clever move by men who resisted home rule as "Rome rule".

Had Sinn Féin opted for dominion status as a loyal member of the Empire, the division of Ireland might have been avoided. British politicians could not envisage the hitherto unknown concept of a Republic within the framework of the Commonwealth. This blockage prevented a permanent solution and the loss of six counties was the price paid by Ireland for its independence. Ulster had to be bought off and the war weary British were as anxious as the hard pressed Michael Collins and his Republican army to end the struggle. Faced with hostility on both sides to any other settlement the preservation of a truncated Ulster offered Lloyd George a way out of his dilemma, relying as he did on Conservative and Unionist support. The analysis provided by Mr. Boyce's painstaking research into contemporary sources is revealing.

J. R. Clynes, the Manchester M.P. still talked of by my older constituents, condemned partition "because it provides a form of partition founded on a religious basis and recognises neither the historic unity of the province of Ulster nor of Ireland as a whole." Prophetically the *Manchester Guardian* described the stillborn Central Irish Council as a "shadow" while Asquith foresaw the result of carving out the artificial entity as he saw the Unionists gloating over a "majority . . . able to defeat permanently a union between the two Parliaments" (Dáil Eireann and Stormont).

The expedient of partition led to subsequent wars in the Indian subcontinent and the Middle East, and a tenuous peace in Cyprus. It seemed to be the only viable alternative to civil war at the time; but voices (quoted by Mr. Boyce) were raised in England which wanted to leave the Irish to settle affairs between themselves. Those voices are sounding louder today as more than 500 deaths have made Northern Ireland the scene of more devastation than at any time in its troubled history.

In reading Mr. Boyce's voices from the past one cannot but conclude that in a scholarly and unpretentious way the author has made a valuable contribution to an understanding not only of the past but of the current problems facing any British Government with nearly 20,000 soldiers in Northern Ireland. What emerges above all is that far from employing the iron heel of unrestricted oppression, the British Government was constrained by a public opinion which was at least as decisive as the pressure of Unionism. Too many Irish Nationalists overlook the strange phenomenon of the nonconformist conscience in British politics, but how else can one explain the outcry at Hola or Cyprus; the relatively graceful departure from a quarter of the globe while Portugal continues its wars in Guinea or Angola? It is a side of British rule in Ireland which redeems, in part, an otherwise crassly stupid, bigoted and insensitive approach to a proud nation which had as much right to its Gaelic heritage as the Poles or Italians had to theirs. This was and still is not understood by Englishmen, Ireland's nearest neighbours, for we are too closely inter-twined to see the perspective of Irish history apart from our own.

This book will not help us to understand the Irish but it will help them to understand us, and help us to understand ourselves.

PAUL ROSE, M.P.

THEATRE

OEDIPUS NOW by James Roose-Evans.
Hampstead Theatre Club.

Presenting Greek plays and myths on the stage today raises several problems. If you attempt an authentic approach, you will never be able to re-create the festival atmosphere or vast area; but attempts at 'modern' productions can easily lead the director into trying too hard to be truly 'relevant' and to incorporate too eclectic an assortment of modern theatrical techniques. Generally, this production strikes a happy balance, interspersing mime and movement between chunks of Sophocles's original words.

A movement in the structure of the play, from wreaths of smoke through to clear pools of light at the end, parallels Oedipus's own movement from confusion to understanding. The final discovery that Oedipus makes, that he has killed his father and married his mother, is directed implicitly at the audience: "Look well into yourselves," Tiresias demands of the audience. Oedipus is not simply a romantic tragic hero, but an important representative of the whole city of Thebes, and in this production the people of the city are given much importance: as the chorus they do not merely observe and comment on events but share and experience them. The play opens with writhing men tortured by the riddle of the sphynx, and concludes with a group of chorus 'people' following the now blind Oedipus, linked to him by long white tapes, seeming to suggest the way in which the fate of the city and of Oedipus are inextricably linked.

The tendency to express metaphors in visual terms I found sometimes apt and sometimes unnecessary. I wonder if it is really important to show Oedipus curled foetus-like in his mother's long robes to remind us of Freud or to shine a mirror at the audience to remind them to look into themselves. But there were many moments of rich theatrical excitement: Oedipus struggling to escape from a knot in which he has become entangled or staggering blindly through a maze of boxes. Perhaps even more impressive, for me, was the quiet, still scene in which we hear how Jocasta has hung herself and Oedipus torn out his eyes. James Roose-Evans has explored the myth with much theatrical imagination, and the actors work together as a remarkably cohesive team.

JIM HERRICK

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LETTERS

The Realities of the Irrational

Charles Byass (letters, 21 October) asks whether there cannot be states of self-certainty that can be states of insanity, so that mere certainty of the self is no guide, since a self-certain person may be a fanatic. In any quest for meaning, he suggests, there may be the self-destructiveness of denying the doubt and uncertainty in which we live.

I think these are very valid points; and they are discussed with great clarity and perceptiveness in *Existential Neurosis* by E. K. Lederman. One cannot ever escape bewilderment and discomfort of conscience; but this is no reason to cease calling madness, madness, or to elevate it to a superiority over sanity. There is no justification for "giving oneself over to the joys of hating."

As Koestler said at the recent Teilhard Conference on "The Survival of Man" (at which I spoke), one may understand and pardon others in their false solutions: but one may not pardon oneself. Dr. Lederman, in a postscript on cultural nihilism, quotes Camus on the "desire for nothingness" and "the cry of the mind exhausted by its own rebellion." It is this that I am trying to diagnose. As Lederman says (quoting Ihab Hassan), "Radical solutions' should not turn out to be 'radical dissolutions'."

Lederman is much concerned, with Buber and others, on the need to embrace irrationalism. "The exclusive reliance on rationalism," he says, "must be abandoned, and irrationalism must be granted a place so that man can gain faith in his own potentialities and can overcome his existential neurosis." This does not, however, mean being irrational, but taking into account the realities of the irrational.

Another important book is Roger Poole's *Towards Deep Subjectivity*, which is an attempt to bring to our attention the philosophy of Husserl in the exploration of subjective realities. We have been too much attached to 'objectivity', he suggests, an approach to man and experience which too neatly cuts away from, and denies, the problems of our inward, whole experience, both quantifiable and unquantifiable. To rediscover the subjective is to rediscover and experience what Keats called "negative capability": the capacity to be in doubt and confusion, pain and distress, about problems of being and conscience. This, I believe, is what Mr. Byass is stressing.

However, to open ourselves to these doubts and despairs (as by re-integrating objective and subjective) is quite different from the kind of thing I attack in *The Masks of Hate*; there I attack the process of declaring for the solutions of hate—the false strengths of 'masculine protest' in the denial of the more feminine, creative, intuitive aspects of existence. And I especially attack the exploitation of this hate, moral inversion and primitive infantile phantasy, by the commercial misuse of symbols (as in James Bond novels).

What we are seeing now in our culture is a seemingly rational and 'objective' presentation of hate and dehumanisation, as if these were the most natural thing in the world, as in pornographic 'sex education' films. This kind of nihilism is exposed by such a sentence from Roger Poole as: "to insult the body is to insult the freedom within it." This only has meaning in terms of subjective realities which rationalism often cannot see, and I wonder how far 'freethinkers' are willing to see them?

DAVID HOLBROOK.

Literary Taurineocity

In the last paragraph of Nicholas Reed's letter about H. G. Wells and "cynicism" (21 October) there are many long words and much pompous pontificating but (like Jim Little) Mr. Reed does not make it clear what he means and he gives no facts or arguments in support.

The assumption is that Mr. Reed's remarks (and Mr. Little's) are simply a concentration of taurineocity (a lot of bull).

I. S. Low.

Squarely in Agreement?

Dear Mr. Reed, when you quote Mr. Reader (in 21 Oct.) I should like to point out That your opening statement is apt to mislead a Poor reader, and make him your arguments doubt. Four squares, each with a 200 yard side, Form a square of 400 (not 800) wide. Having made this small comment I'm rather agreed With the rest of the things you have said, Mr. Reed.

STANLEY WATKINS.

The World Malaise and Human Numbers

The first paragraph of Mr. Reed's letter of 21 October shows that he has not grasped even the bare bones of the reasoning of "The World Malaise in Space" (25 March).

Total world population (3,000 million) divided by inhabitable world area (40 million square miles) gives 75 person per square mile, assuming uniform distribution of population. Dividing 1 square mile by 75 gives about 40,000 square yards, that is, a square of 200 yards side for each person.

Next, assume uniform distribution of all resources throughout inhabitable world land area. It must then follow by any normal processes of thought that each 200 yards square must, by itself, supply all the necessities of one person.

We next consider what are these necessities, taking housing first. If four persons live in a house, one person takes a quarter of a house, namely one quarter of the land surface covered by the house, say, one quarter of 80 square yards = 20 square yards. This 20 square yards must therefore be deducted from our 200 yards square to allow for housing. (Where Mr. Reed's 800 yards came from I cannot even hazard a guess.)

Similarly for every other necessity of which our hypothetical person stands in need. In the case of a factory covering 3,000 square yards and supplying 300,000 people with a product, the appropriate deduction is only 1/100 of a square yard. In itself, it is not much, but the number of factories involved is enormous. Furthermore, each of these factories requires several other factories to manufacture its machines, or process raw materials.

Make some rough calculations on this basis, and you will see that 200 x 200 yards is hopelessly inadequate for a person living far below British standards. This is why nearly three quarters of world population are "have nots."

If Mr. Reed and Mr. Little (letters, 28 October) are still with me, they will now appreciate that no changes in "distribution," "capitalism," "communism," illusory "sexual freedom" (the clap-trap at present being used by religious neurosis to offset effective birth control) "youth," "the aged," "protest meetings," "sit-ins," "sit-outs," "social engineering," or even hair cut long or short, can ever overcome these sinister and implacable figures. Only one thing can affect them: the drastic reduction of human numbers. Exactly the opposite is occurring, and the 200 x 200 yards square is shrinking daily under the impact of economic "expansion."

Hence my "pessimism." But before I die I should like someone to tell me (perhaps Messrs Reed and Little) how on earth certain of the predictions of my articles, dating from 1954, were borne out by subsequent events? Surely, if the articles were tissues of erroneous reasoning, this would not have been the case?

R. READER.

Secularism—Without Fear or Favour

In his visions of "secularist racialism," Gerald Samuel (letters, 21 October) appears to have lost sight of secularist rationalism. Surely one of the worthy characteristics of secularists is to oppose the privileges, indoctrination and sectarianism of religious practices in schools. Indeed, it would seem unworthy of secularism to refrain from opposing additions to such practices for fear of some irrational charges of racialism.

May the N.S.S. General Secretary continue in a forthright way to practise worthy characteristics—without fear or favour as regards majorities or minorities!

CHARLES BYASS.

Joad and Cohen

John L. Broom (letters, 21 October), in criticising my recent article on Chapman Cohen, takes exception to my description of the late Dr. Joad as "successor of Mr. Facing-Both-Ways."

Contrarily, your correspondent asserts that Joad had the prominent characteristic of "complete integrity."

Now as I explicitly stated in my article (7 October), I was not myself present at the Cohen-Joad meeting, so I obviously could not give an opinion on the outcome of what appears to have been a remarkable debate. Be that as it may, I recall that in (I think) the early 1930s Joad moved at the Oxford Union a then very famous resolution which ran, "This House will under no circumstances fight for King and country" (I think that was the exact wording). When, however, World War II arrived, Dr. Joad continued his 'pursuit of truth' (so much admired by Mr. Broom) by becoming an ardent propagandist for the "Second Front."

Might we not have expected Mr. Facing-Both-Ways to have acted in a similar manner?

F. A. RIDLEY.