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EVEN MORE RELIGIOUS HATRED

—SECTARIAN RIOTS IN EGYPT

Truth will out, goes the old saying; and in addition to the daily round of murders of Protestants and Catholics in Northern Ireland we hear of religious strife in Egypt which has, in fact, been simmering for some months, though the government's censors have been trying to prevent the news reaching the outside world. Egypt is normally thought of as a Moslem country, but in fact a sizable minority—about 20 per cent—of that country's 30 million inhabitants are Coptic Christians. Following recent riots at Khanka in which houses, shops and a Coptic church were looted and burned, President Sadat has now been obliged to issue a strongly worded statement threatening harsh measures against anyone who foments sectarian hatred and violence in his country. A number of fanatics, both Moslem and Christian, have already been arrested.

The spread of religious unrest

According to John Bulloch of the *Daily Telegraph* the present troubles began when a young Coptic priest in Alexandria attracted some 300 converts by virtue of his reputation for healing the sick, and in doing so raised the ire of extreme Moslems in the city. Rioting broke out, a church was burnt down, and a Coptic mob retaliated by destroying a mosque. At that point religious unrest began to spread throughout Egypt.

The latest outbreak of violence and lawlessness is yet another illustration of the harmful divisiveness of organised religion in different societies throughout the world, from Ulster to Vietnam, from India to the Philippines. It also demonstrates the curiously high level of bigotry and intolerance associated particularly with monotheistic sects, which like to pride themselves on being, as they suppose, the "highest" form of religion. As ever, the fanatics are able to indulge their taste for melodrama and hysteria in the name of God, and the innocent suffer. Will humanity ever learn—even the hard way?

CHARITY AND CHURCH SCHOOLS

On 14 November the House of Lords gave a second reading to an Education Bill which proposes to transfer educational charities from the Department of Education and Science to the Charity Commissioners. According to *The Times* of the following day:

Lord Platt said that the Bill seemed positively to encourage the continuance of denominational education at a time when a large proportion of the population would seek to discontinue this kind of teaching, as it tended towards fixed attitudes in young children. There were the lessons of Northern Ireland.

Similar sentiments were expressed by Kenneth Furness, General Secretary of the British Humanist Association, who said that Clause 2 of the new Act would, in some cases, provide a vast profit to church organisations through the sale of now redundant school property, "the money

then being ploughed back into the provision of church schools, presumably even better equipped to produce their quota of religious bigots."

Criminal lunacy

"Surely," Mr. Furness suggested, "the tragic example of Northern Ireland today is sufficient to convince the most devout believer that segregating children by religious belief is not only educationally unsound, but the act of criminal lunatics. Money—often collected through tithes and threats of eternal damnation—can surely now be put to better uses."

Kenneth Furness also pointed out that the present Bill highlighted both "the extraordinary anomalies of the present law on charities" and the special privileges given to the organised churches in Britain. "For four years," he said, "the Humanist Trust, a body solely engaged in educational activities, was registered with the Department of Education and Science as an educational charity, and was similarly accepted by the Inland Revenue. Yet early in 1971 the Humanist Trust was arbitrarily removed from the Register of Charities; the excuse given by the D.E.S. spokesman being that a mistake had been made by his department in the first place. No precise definition of an educational charity has been forthcoming from the D.E.S., in spite of repeated requests. Similar activities by church organisations go unchallenged."

Thorough revision of Charity Law needed

Commenting on the proposal to transfer educational charities to the Charity Commissioners, the B.H.A. Secretary added: "In view of this pathetic history of muddle, incompetence and indecision by the D.E.S., it is not perhaps surprising that they are shedding their responsibilities on to other shoulders.

"What, however, is now needed is a thorough revision of Charity Law. It is not right that religious sectarianism should flourish at the expense of the rest of the community."

THE FREETHINKER

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ANNOUNCEMENTS

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National Secular Society. Details of membership and inquiries regarding bequests and secular funeral services may be obtained from the General Secretary, 103 Borough High 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 Humanism Centre (founded by Jean Straker), between East Grinstead and Forest Row, Sussex. Telephone: Forest Row 2589. Meeting every Sunday, 3 p.m.

EVENTS

1972 CONWAY MEMORIAL LECTURE, Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London WC1. Tuesday, 28 November, 7.30 p.m.: Professor Edmund Leach, "Humanity and Animality."

Leicester Humanist Society, Vaughan College, University Centre, St. Nicholas Circle. Monday, 27 November, 7.45 p.m.: Dr. Martin Cole and Mrs. Dorothy Stamp, "Freer Contraception?" (debate).

Leicester Secular Society, Secular Hall, Humberstone Gate. Sunday, 26 November, 6.30 p.m.: Roger Machin, John Bloxson and Gabriel Machokas, "Pupil Protest: the School Students' Case."

South Place Ethical Society, Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London WC1. Sunday, 26 November. 11 a.m.: H. J. Blackham, "The End of Intellectual Laissez-Faire"; 3 p.m.: David Holbrook and Barbara Smoker, "Pornography" (forum). Tuesday, 28 November: Conway Memorial Lecture [see above].

Worthing Humanist Group, Burlington Hotel, Marine Parade. Sunday, 26 November, 5.30 p.m.: Dr. David Stark Murray, "Health Care: the Democratic Ethic."

NEWS

"The man who does not do his own thinking is a slave, and is a traitor to himself and his fellow men."

—Robert Green Ingersoll (1833-1899).

EQUAL RIGHTS FOR NATURAL CHILDREN

The Guardian (15 November) reports that the Jersey parliament has approved a motion which will give an "illegitimate" child the same rights of inheritance as one born in wedlock. This seems an eminently sensible step in the right direction, and it is to be hoped that all the remaining legal disadvantages of bastardy will soon disappear from these islands.

POPULATION PRIORITIES

We are not altogether surprised to hear that a recent conference in Tokyo decided that the world's problems could not be solved by birth control alone, without proper education, housing and social services. Despite misrepresentations by the anti-contraception lobby, no sensible person has ever claimed that birth control was the one-and-only answer. The real danger still lies on the other side of the coin: that of supposing that problems of, particularly, the Third World can be solved merely by irrigation, high-yield crop varieties, and better medical care *without* backing all these with a competently co-ordinated family planning service to stabilise human populations.

CIVIL LIBERTIES

The parent of a five and a half year old boy rang to ask whether she could stop the local authority and his headmistress sending him to a school for the educationally subnormal (his symptom was 'hyperactivity').

—From the first number of *Civil Liberty*, a new monthly bulletin published by the N.C.C.L. to publicise the problems the Council has to tackle, and its policies for dealing with them.

Single copies of *Civil Liberty* cost 4p. For further details, contact the National Council for Civil Liberties, 152 Camden Street, London, NW1 0NN.

"PROVEN" PLATITUDES

Old-fashioned rationalists who read *The Freethinker* will be surprised to hear that, one by one, "the platitudes of Christian morality are being proved true," according, at any rate, to the Bishop of Bristol.

In the November number of his diocesan newsletter the Right Rev. Oliver Tomkins writes:

Religion has always maintained that you cannot indulge in greed and rapacity and get away with it for ever; the pollution of earth, air and water shows that it is true. Christian ethics have always insisted that you cannot use sex for mere self-indulgence without destroying it; rampant V.D. shows that this is true.

—This looks strikingly like 'the mixture as before': banal truisms adulterated with finely ground arrogant poppycock!

Firstly the statement about religion and greed is laughable: any reasonable person, with or without religion, quickly learns that greed is counter-productive and harmful without having to sit at the feet of a bishop; and organised religion has found it particularly hard to resist indulging in "greed and rapacity" for furthering its own ends, whatever the cost to unbelievers or society at large. An ethic based on "The Lord will provide" is hardly conducive to frugality, foresight and planning.

AND NOTES

The only thing, my Lord Bishop, that "rampant" V.D. shows is that if you are sexually promiscuous in a society where venereal disease is endemic, then you are very likely to contract it. An average healthy, faithful couple probably "indulge" themselves far more often sexually than the promiscuous individual going from partner to partner, yet they run no risk whatever of venereal disease!

Among some of the old platitudes beloved by Christians, and now markedly unproven, were that masturbation was harmful, and that sexual intercourse was 'sinful' unless specifically "indulged" in by a married couple for the express purpose of begetting a child. Christian ethics, particularly by opposing birth control in its early days, have left an immense legacy of misery and degradation from which mankind, even in the twentieth century, is still in the process of recovering, hence some of the more bizarre and regrettable manifestations of the so-called permissive society. It is a healthy sign, however, that more and more people are seeing through the Christian platitudes, which are anti-sex, anti-life, and anti-happiness, and based upon irrational and superstitious tenets that fly in the face of common sense and common decency.

NO GOING DUTCH WITH THE CHURCH

According to the *Billericay and Wickford Standard Recorder* (27 October), a local councillor, Mr. Terry Dove, has "called for a financial crusade against the Church of England" following an application from St. Catherine's Church, Wickford, for a grant of £250 to remove trees with Dutch Elm disease from the churchyard.

"I'm a regular churchgoer," said Mr. Dove at a recreation committee meeting, "but why should Basildon Council give £250 to the Church, which is one of the richest fraternities in the country? The Church can't be hard up for a few quid. It's not up to the ratepayers to have to provide money to remove these trees."

A good point. The Lord, after all, is supposed to do most, if not all, of the Church's providing; and one would have thought that an institution that has no qualms about praying for rain could also have had the foresight to ask the Almighty to keep a few elm trees free of disease-carrying beetles. The Church's failure to draw upon its founder's omnipotent and omniscient resources strikes us as sheer negligence.

However, the rector of St. Catherine's was not impressed by this rebuff: "Councillor Dove's outburst is farcical," retorted the Rev. Frederick Prance. "The Church might own a lot of land, but the Church Commissioners need every penny to pay the clergy."

Therein lies a tale. But, as the *Standard Recorder* so rightly comments, "It is debatable whether or not the ratepayer should have to subsidise an organisation that he or she may not believe in anyway."

MAMMON INTERNATIONAL

That lurid evangelical corporation, the Osborn Foundation Ltd., is not getting any poorer, judging from the latest number of its publicity magazine, *Faith Digest*. The state governor of Oklahoma recently presided over the opening of the "enlarged" Osborn Foundation World Headquarters at Tulsa; and there is no sign, as yet, of a take-over bid by Billy Graham, Inc.

The impressario of this ghastly machine for Christian imperialism, T. L. Osborn, obtains funds for his missionary

journeys and soul-winning apparatus by sending out slips ("First Fruits") to his faithful. In return for their money Mr. Osborn prays for their material welfare, with, it would appear, some success:

After writing you for prayer and remaining faithful with my 'First fruits' for God's work, I received notice from the company who was buying my home that I would be receiving \$1,000 more than I asked for the property. This was a real miracle. It is wonderful to know that God is my silent Partner in every transaction.

... Since becoming partners in the 'Pact of Plenty' and sending our 'First fruits' for His No. 1 Job, we have gotten a beautiful home and have been blessed with good jobs ...

[My mother] asked for prayer when she mailed her 'First fruits', and now God has answered her request and given to her a chicken farm with 30,000 chickens.

—And so on, *ad nauseam*.

Evidently God, as we have long suspected, is on the side of the big corporations both here in the decadent lil' ol' U.K. and also in his 'own country' across the waves. And with charity status, and a plethora of tax concessions, it is little wonder! Only one thing remains to puzzle us: what price now the trendy Christians who tell us that Jesus was the first socialist? (That would give 'em apoplexy in Tulsa!)

ONE HUNDRED YEARS AGO

The Church people of Oldham have just shown their charity and consistency. Their new mayor, Mr. William Wrigley, is an Unitarian. Now, it would be impossible to find a body of men, taken as a whole, more intelligent and tolerant in this country than the Unitarians. Mr. Wrigley has been in the habit of attending the local Unitarian chapel, and on doing so last Sunday week was mobbed by the pious Church of England Christians, who were indignant that the mayor did not go in procession to the parish church. Moral: "Love thy neighbour as thyself," but do not reckon heretics as neighbours.

—From the *National Reformer*, 24 November 1872.

FIFTY YEARS AGO

Atheism is not a substitute for religion, it is its negation. And the Atheist, the logical Freethinker, is not out providing substitutes for religion for the reason that he does not admit religion plays any useful part in social life ... The essential, the primary question is not what is going to take the place of religion, but whether there is anything that really belongs to religion that is worth keeping ... Our work is not to provide a substitute for a decaying creed, but to bring about the conditions that will permit human qualities to express themselves apart from the confusing and belittling influence of superstition.

—Chapman Cohen in *The Freethinker*, 26 November 1922.

"England is a post-Christian nation; a land of former believers."
—Cardinal Heenan, March 1971.

"The plain fact is that unless more money is found we shall have to stop building schools ... with unpredictable effects on Christianity in this country."
—Cardinal Heenan, September 1972.

PUBLIC MEETING:

THE SOCIAL AND FINANCIAL COST OF CHURCH SCHOOLS

Speakers:
EDWARD BLISHEN PATRICIA KNIGHT
LORD RAGLAN

Chair: BARBARA SMOKER

Organisers:
NATIONAL SECULAR SOCIETY
103 Borough High Street, London, SE1 1NL. Tel.: 01-407 2717
WEDNESDAY, 6 DECEMBER 1972, 7.45 p.m.

DISTRIBUTIVE TRADES COLLEGE
30 Leicester Square (near The Odeon), London, (Meeting hall on 4th floor; take lift to 5th floor and walk down.)

ADMISSION FREE QUESTIONS AND DISCUSSION

CHARLES BRADLAUGH AND NORTHAMPTON

ERIC GLASGOW

Finding myself in Northampton recently, I could not fail to be reminded of Charles Bradlaugh (b. 1833), since there is still so much of him, if not in the place itself, then at any rate in the local records. Nowadays, perhaps, the sort of freethought and determination which Bradlaugh embodied has become old-fashioned and little regarded; but it is so easy to assume the present benefits of individual liberty, without acknowledging what they have owed to him.

No one who is interested in Northampton should overlook Bradlaugh's long struggle to become its M.P. between 1880 until 1886. For, in comparison, Bradlaugh's earlier activities, as editor, from 1862, of the *National Reformer*, and as the associate of Mrs. Annie Besant, pale almost into insignificance. (Though they should not be neglected.) Nevertheless, it is true that Bradlaugh's fame still chiefly depends upon his efforts to ensure the legitimacy and the acceptability of secular politics, from 1866, and especially his contests for the Parliamentary representation of Northampton: always, in all the devious avenues of history, a centre of radical nonconformity. He had been unsuccessful in standing for Northampton in 1868, "but he was returned by that constituency to Parliament as an advanced radical in 1880" (*Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 1972 ed.).

The right of M.P.s to affirm

It was Bradlaugh's principal task, as is well known, to

THE NECESSITY OF ATHEISM

PERCY BYSSHE SHELLEY

In 1968 the National Secular Society republished Shelley's famous essay, The Necessity of Atheism, as a pamphlet, together with some of the poet's revolutionary verse and a foreword by David Tribe. Stocks of this are now exhausted, and as this year marks the one hundred and fiftieth anniversary of Shelley's death (1822) we feel that this is a suitable occasion to re-issue the essay as The Freethinker's tribute to a great poet and a stalwart freethinker.

For issuing The Necessity of Atheism as a sixpenny tract in 1811 Shelley was promptly expelled from University College, Oxford; when his student friend Thomas Jefferson Hogg protested at this action, he was expelled likewise.

Shelley wrote the pamphlet under the nom de plume of "An Atheist." He explained this action as follows: "I used it to express my abhorrence of superstition: I took up the word as a knight took up a gauntlet in defiance of injustice. The delusions of Christianity are fatal to genius and originality: they limit thought."

Advertisement

As a love of truth is the only motive which actuates the Author of this little tract, he earnestly entreats that those of his readers who may discover any deficiency in his reasoning, or may be in possession of proofs which his mind could never obtain, would offer them, together with their objections to the public, as briefly, as methodically, as plainly as he has taken the liberty of doing. Thro' deficiency of proof.

AN ATHEIST

THE NECESSITY OF ATHEISM

A close examination of the validity of the proofs adduced to support any proposition, has ever been allowed to be the only sure way of attaining truth, upon the advantages

assert his right to affirm as an M.P., and this he at last achieved in 1886. It marked a new stage in the secularisation of British politics, and it liberated the country's public life from the bonds of hypocrisy, convention, and meaningless jargon.

In the end, of course, the British public accepted Bradlaugh, and the initial horrors of his opinions wore away. He even won public respect, with his "transparent honesty, and courageous contempt for mere popularity," which went a long way to balance his defects: arrogance and dogmatism. His obvious sincerity ultimately matched his sheer and persistent combativeness.

The news of Bradlaugh's death, in 1891, was received with copious—and fairly charitable—comments in the *Northampton Mercury* (6 February). Even the Churches—Anglican, Congregational, Unitarian, New Jerusalem, and the rest—responded to it with due deference to his indomitable and scourging will; and one obscure local poet, given perhaps too much publicity for the occasion in the local newspaper, even suggested that Bradlaugh, as an iconoclast, had fulfilled the purposes of the Lord: it was curious that the professed atheist, at the last, should have been even temporarily honoured as a worker for God!

Be that as it may, Bradlaugh's life profoundly affected both the local records of Northampton and the larger annals of English social, legal and political theory and practice. It was truly an heroic achievement; but, after all, Charles Bradlaugh was a highly heroic and dominant man.

of which it is unnecessary to descant; our knowledge of the existence of a Deity is a subject of such importance that it cannot be too minutely investigated; in consequence of this conviction, we proceed briefly and impartially to examine the proofs which have been adduced. It is necessary first to consider the nature of Belief.

When a proposition is offered to the mind, it perceives the agreement or disagreement of the ideas of which it is composed. A perception of their agreement is termed belief, many obstacles frequently prevent this perception from being immediate, these the mind attempts to remove in order that the perception may be distinct. The mind is active in the investigation, in order to perfect the state of perception which is passive; the investigation being confused with the perception has induced many falsely to imagine that the mind is active in belief, that belief is an act of volition, in consequence of which it may be regulated by the mind; pursuing, continuing this mistake they have attached a degree of criminality to disbelief of which in its nature it is incapable; it is equally so of merit.

The strength of belief like that of every other passion is in proportion to the degrees of excitement. The degrees of excitement are three.

The senses are the sources of all knowledge to the mind, consequently their evidence claims the strongest assent.

The decision of the mind founded upon our own experience derived from these sources, claims the next degree.

The experience of others which addresses itself to the former one, occupies the lowest degree.

—Consequently no testimony can be admitted which is contrary to reason, reason is founded on the evidence of our senses.

Every proof may be referred to one of these three divisions; we are naturally led to consider what arguments we receive from each of them to convince us of the existence of a Deity.

1st. The evidence of the senses.—If the Deity should appear to us, if he should convince our senses of his existence; this revelation would necessarily command belief;—Those to whom the Deity has thus appeared, have the strongest possible conviction of his existence.

Reason claims the 2nd place, it is urged that man knows that whatever is, must either have had a beginning or existed from all eternity, he also knows that whatever is not eternal must have had a cause.—Where this is applied to the existence of the universe, it is necessary to prove that it was created, until that is clearly demonstrated, we may reasonably suppose that it has endured from all eternity.

—In a case where two propositions are diametrically opposite, the mind believes that which is less incomprehensible, it is easier to suppose that the Universe has existed from all eternity, than to conceive a being capable of creating it; if the mind sinks beneath the weight of one, is it an alleviation to increase the intolerability of the burden?—The other argument which is founded upon a man's knowledge of his own existence, stands thus.—A man knows not only he now is, but that there was a time when he did not exist, consequently there must have been a cause.—But what does this prove? we can only infer from effects causes exactly adequate to those effects;—But there certainly is a generative power which is effected by particular instruments; we cannot prove that it is inherent in these instruments, nor is the contrary hypothesis capable of demon-

stration; we admit that the generative power is incomprehensible, but to suppose that the same effect is produced by an eternal, omniscient, Almighty Being, leaves the cause in the [same] obscurity, but renders it more incomprehensible.

The 3rd and last degree of assent is claimed by Testimony.—It is required that it should not be contrary to reason.—The testimony that the Deity convinces the senses of men of his existence can only be admitted by us, if our mind considers it less probable that these men should have been deceived, than that the Deity should have appeared to them—our reason can never admit the testimony of men, who not only declare that they were eye-witnesses of miracles but that the Deity was irrational, for he commanded that he should be believed, he proposed the highest rewards for faith, eternal punishments for disbelief—we can only command voluntary actions, belief is not an act of volition, the mind is even passive, from this it is evident that we have not sufficient testimony, or rather that testimony is insufficient to prove the being of a God, we have before shown that it cannot be deduced from reason,—they who have been convinced by the evidence of the senses, they only can believe it.

From this it is evident that having no proofs from any of the three sources of conviction: the mind *cannot* believe the existence of a God, it is also evident that as belief is a passion of the mind, no degree of criminality can be attached to disbelief, they only are reprehensible who willingly neglect to remove the false medium thro' which their mind views the subject.

It is almost unnecessary to observe, that the general knowledge of the deficiency of such proof, cannot be prejudicial to society: Truth has always been found to promote the best interests of mankind.—Every reflecting mind must allow that there is no proof of the existence of a Deity. Q.E.D.

REVIEWS

BOOKS

THE TRIALS OF THE LANCASHIRE WITCHES: a Study of Seventeenth Century Witchcraft by Edgar Peel and Pat Southern. David & Charles, £1.95.

In this book the authors attempt to disentangle, and place in its context, the confused story of the Lancashire witches. Nine women and two men were hanged in 1612 for the alleged murder by witchcraft of a total of 17 victims over the previous 17 years; another old woman would certainly have been hanged with the others, had she not died in prison before trial.

The story is as strange as it is horrible. Several of the accused confessed—though there is no suspicion of torture having been used to extort confessions—but most died still protesting their innocence. The three who made full confessions probably really believed in their own guilt. Of these, one was an old woman of eighty, one an apparently feeble-minded youth, and the other his sister, Alison. Alison admitted to maliciously laming a pedlar, who would seem to have had a stroke after an argument with her about some pins. Though part of their confessions related to devils and familiars, and cannot be taken seri-

ously, that of making and crumbling clay images of their enemies is more plausible. They may well have cursed people they disliked, and when the misfortune of death befell those cursed the 'witches' may have agreed with their neighbours that their own powers were responsible. Even today, if one said to anyone, "Drop dead!" and he promptly did so, one would probably feel qualms of conscience, and one can readily sympathise with poor Alison, who begged the pedlar's pardon for laming him.

That England was extremely fortunate in the matter of witch trials is something that those unfortunates facing hanging for crimes of which they knew themselves innocent can hardly be expected to have appreciated. Nevertheless, there is perhaps no single fact in English history on which one can look with such satisfaction as our relative freedom from witch-hunting hysteria. Doubtless the prohibition of judicial torture and of the confiscation of the goods of the condemned for the benefit of their accusers had much to do with it. (In France and Germany those accused of witchcraft were relentlessly tortured until they named 'accomplices', who were in turn tortured until they named more.)

Those accused of witchcraft in England had fair trials, allowing for the fact that judges at the time seemed generally to dispose of capital cases with a haste which to us seems indecent. A number of those accused at the Lancaster assizes with our witches were acquitted. Ap-

(Continued on next page)

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parently the fourteen-year-old witness against some of them had been coached by an illegally-operating Jesuit, presumably because they had gone over to the established Church; perhaps an ingenious—though fortunately unsuccessful stratagem to arrange the hanging of those he believed should by rights have been burned as heretics. At least this and other cases showed that English judges were alive to the possibilities of malicious accusations.

Thus, while the number of alleged witches slaughtered in Western Europe may run into millions, all subjected to torture and many burned alive, the English victims numbered about a thousand spread over the hundred and eighteen years between 1566 and 1684, and were nearly all hanged. (Burning alive was the punishment reserved for women convicted of the murder—whether by witchcraft or otherwise—of their husbands.)

The authors' interest in their subject arose from their knowledge of the locality, and the book contains details and pictures of what traces of the 'witches' remain today. The book is very well documented, with many quotations from contemporary sources, and it has a most comprehensive index. It will please anyone interested in the past, and in the extraordinary workings of the human mind.

MARGARET McILROY

THE WICKEDEST AGE: The Life and Times of George III by Alan Lloyd. David & Charles, £2.95.

More perhaps than any other century, the eighteenth was a dramatic blend of the elegant and the seedy. One thinks of shapely stuccoed façades disgorging sewerage, not only in its architecture but in all aspects of its life. In retrospect it seems an age of stability and calm before the intellectual and political storms of the nineteenth century, but close to the surface lay all the forces, and many of the events, that have shaped the subsequent world: the rise of deterministic science, republicanism and atheism, the decline of theology, monarchy and imperialism. Even the Romantic Movement and the Gothic Revival began within its confines.

Alan Lloyd's book is not, and does not pretend to be, a scholarly tome. It is a workmanlike popularisation of existing knowledge on the subject, that manages to keep a limb in every ideological camp: radical and conservative, dynastic and social. A good measure of this skill is shown by his introductory account of Boswell's confrontation with a London prostitute. What better way to establish impeccable literary credentials while at the same time providing salacity for the plebs? The title, by the way, has nothing to do with this aspect of Georgian England, but is an echo of George III's own lamentation on hearing of the mob's hostility to his favourite, the Earl of Bute (represented in cartoons of the period by a boot). For this was the Hanoverian who was both virtuous in his private life and anxious to restore monarchical prerogatives in his public.

While granting the strictly limited objectives of Mr. Lloyd's book, one cannot be entirely indulgent to its manifest inadequacies. It is certainly readable and I did not notice any specific errors (other than printers'). But it is strangely lopsided, with long accounts in the beginning of the sexual activities of Mad George's father and grandfather while the final decades are squeezed in to a few pages at the end. Though the Royal Proclamation against "divers wicked and seditious writings" is cited, it is strange that Thomas Paine and his followers are not mentioned by

name. And, even in a populariser, is it good enough to have no references whatever for the many lively and apposite quotations?

DAVID TRIBE

THEATRE

AFTER MAGRITTE and **THE REAL INSPECTOR HOUND** by Tom Stoppard. Shaw Theatre.

"There's no need to use language," says one of the characters in the first of these two one-act plays. Such a phrase could be a philosophic aphorism in one context; in another, as here, it is no more than a trivial comment on a mild piece of swearing. This ambiguity between the ridiculous and the serious is one of Tom Stoppard's greatest strengths. He also has the ability to take an absurd premise and pursue it with rigorous logic well beyond the realm to which logic is relevant, often to hilarious effect.

The title *After Magritte* suggests surrealist influences, the opening and closing frozen tableaux resemble a Magritte painting. In between we have arguments about who has seen what, and bizarre questioning from a heavy-handed policeman; Granny plays her tuba, when she gets the chance. It is all delightfully zany, in the Ionesco vein, each member of the audience is free to take it at whatever level they wish.

The Real Inspector Hound was a delicious parody of the traditional stage who-dunnit, complete with a cut of country house, radio announcements about a strange dangerous man in the area, and, of course, French windows. Each of the characters manages to remark that he would like to murder someone in the very obvious presence of the maid; but there is a second level to this play, for backstage are two drama critics carefully preparing orotund phrases for their reviews—this mercilessly exposing the standard clichés of the drama critic. The level of interest and humour was sustained by the fact that the two critics literally become involved in the play within the play. I suppose this play can be seen as an attack on a fading theatrical tradition, and a comment on the flow of platitudes which drama critics offer, without ever becoming remotely involved in the play.

JIM HERRICK

THE GREAT NORTHERN WELLY BOOT SHOW

by Tom Buchan and Billy Connolly; directed by Robin Lefevre. At the Young Vic until 25 November.

In the same way that Brecht constructed his play *Arturo Ui* upon the rise of Adolf Hitler in the guise of the Chicago cabbage king, so *The Great Northern Welly Boot Show* traces on fairly obvious lines the recently-ended Clydeside work-in. To some the analogy of a work-in at a wellington boot factory following the management's callous declaration of massive redundancies may appear over-simplified, but there were indeed, and still are, strong feelings felt by the people of Scotland on this matter, and these were bound to be reflected in contemporary theatre.

The critical point about this theatrical event is whether or not such strong political theatre can or should be conveyed through such entertaining channels. Is it right to glamorise and create heroic figures out of working men and wee Glasgow lassies, while mocking to an almost excessive degree management and rulers? I have a feeling the *Welly Boot Show* goes a wee bit overboard in its highly biased account of successful defiance against the capitalists

who would have thrown a huge work-force on the scrap heap. However, we can expect all writing to reflect some kind of belief, and the beliefs here are sincere and very convincing. The show is full of great good humour if you can take the raw Glasgow variety delivered through joke and song in the purest Clydeside dialect.

The company of actors and musicians who perform this show work on a co-operative basis (naturally)—sharing any profit or loss equally, and their London visit is the result of two highly successful runs in Glasgow and Edinburgh.

LINDSEY HARRIS

LETTERS

Human Numbers and Available Resources

It is unfortunate that Mr. Reader (letters, 4 November) could not see where I obtained my "800 yards": Mr. Watkins saw and corrected it at once. If each person is allowed a 200 yards square, then, if four people are living in one house (as Mr. Reader imagines), each of them will be allowed a 200 yards square, and so their house will be in a square with 400 yard sides. This gives four times more room than Mr. Reader imagines.

I too have made some "rough calculations" on the basis of the figures and 'facts' given by Mr. Reader. I conclude that this country should contain approximately 10 billion factories to support our standard of living, so until Mr. Reader produces detailed calculations, and fewer gross overestimates and simplifications, I remain unconvinced.

However, since Mr. Reader is so eager for a "drastic reduction in human numbers," perhaps he would care to oblige us, and assist humanity, by following the example of Cato.

NICHOLAS REED.

The Answer is World Government

In his letter of 21 October Nicholas Reed says there is not much chance of an atomic war because "we have all too much to lose." Perhaps; but the people who press the buttons do not necessarily realise that, and they think they are going to win anyway. Mr. Reed also says that with the U.S.A. and the U.S.S.R. co-operating in space "the situation looks better than it has for twenty years." Russia and America co-operated before—during the Second World War; and what followed? The Cold War, Korea, Vietnam. And let us not forget my friend Tony Mills's forecast that one nation may develop a super-weapon and thus be able to dominate the world. The lesson is not to engage in fatuous complacency but to try to get a world government.

Jim Little (letters, 28 October) tacitly admits Mr. Reader's point in praising Communist China because "birth control is well organised." Apart from saying that the other fellow is an elitist, Mr. Little has only two arguments to support his views: (1) he is a very practical worker in touch with nature and the elements, etc.; (2) Communist China is just wonderful. I am not impressed by the first and I do not believe the second. In reality the Chinese Communist government is one of the most reactionary in the world because it only allows one system to be discussed in public, thus preventing the freedom of thought vital to progress. A Marxist friend (yes, I have friends who are Marxists!) says that China is state-capitalist (elitist?) and that as a result of the Cultural Revolution the army is moving to a position of dominance.

Man can solve his problems—but only if he adopts new ideas (—world government, as Wells said) and not if he gawks through rose coloured spectacles at governments that go in for brain-washing.

I. S. Low.

Fundamentalist Secularism

Charles Byass (letters, 4 November) is quite right in suggesting that it would be unworthy to refrain from any action which appeared to be correct if the action was in danger of bringing some irrational charge. The reaction to my first letter in this exchange of views demonstrates that. Further, since he suggests that I may have lost sight of secular rationalism then I must be motivated by the very principle which Mr. Byass elucidates. Rationalism is as much a stranger in the columns of *The Freethinker* as

is love among those Christians who use it so freely. The impossibility of a rational exchange of views in these columns must lead to only one conclusion.

It is up to those who believe in rigid fundamentalist secularism in the name of rationalism for which they appear to have no use to rise to the support of their secretary. Let him or them make out a rational argument to support his fond contention that the Northern Ireland situation is not unique and might occur in Great Britain if we give Muslim children equal rights to religious instruction in schools.

There are no visions of secularists racialism?—Only a knowledge of the words of Bradlaugh, Voltaire, Mencken, Winwood Reade and Gibbon, all of whom might be quoted with as much fun as you quote Christians for your purpose.

Charles Byass suggests that secularists should oppose privileges; what about the privilege which allows the representative of scarcely 200 people (the chairman or secretary of the N.S.S.) to be consulted to balance the representative of millions (any leading Christian figure)?

Humanism should be about situational ethics and in the situation in which Muslim children find themselves it is the lesser of two evils to allow them equal rights in religious education.

GERALD SAMUEL.

Commemorating Britain's War Dead

I can never make out what people say to God when they go to church on Remembrance Sunday. Do they thank him for stopping wars, or do they ask him not to let us be so stupid in the future? Whichever it is, God does not seem to listen. (He certainly does not help Ireland where people so badly need help.) I think it is high time we left God alone and replaced him with common sense.

It is worth keeping Remembrance Day only if we all remember what little good was achieved by any of the past wars; and only if we do all that is possible to prevent such disasters happening again. If the "Glorious Dead" could tell us what they think now it would probably prevent human beings killing each other in the future.

We badly need world disarmament so that we can get on with living together, instead of preparing to die (and it is no good leaving that to God).

KATHLEEN TACCH-MORRIS,

U.K. President, Women for World Disarmament.

Invoking the "God of Battles" may not be the most acceptable way of commemorating our war dead, not all of whom, after all, were Christians or theists. Equally, however, many freethinkers may still wish to honour those who lost their lives in the last two World Wars, particularly the Second, which prevented Corporal Hitler ruling Europe. (Ed.)

In Defence of Popper

In reply to Peter Cadogan (letters, 28 October) I want first to show that he agrees with Popper on many points where he has attempted to disagree. For instance, Popper does not make the national state fundamental to his theory and he has suggested that some kind of international police force is required to control international violence and crime (see note 7 to Chapter 9 of *The Open Society and its Enemies* hereafter referred to as *O.S.E.*). When Popper talks about "the protective theory of the state" he means that we should aim to design institutions, on whatever scale is required, to provide necessary services. Beyond this the state should not go, and so the use that we make of our freedom and our particular talents depends upon our own aims and purposes and our own visions which we form and develop together with our immediate friends and co-workers.

Nor does Popper expressly deny passions because he has written that it would not be worthwhile living in a world without love, and on another occasion he suggested that nothing is likely to be achieved without a "modicum of passion." So far as rational vision and moral fervour are concerned, I recommend Popper's contribution to *The Humanist Outlook* edited by A. J. Ayer, in which Popper suggested that we can, and should, attempt to give meaning to history and our own lives by striving for the realisation of our principles even if this means working against historical trends such as the proliferation of bureaucracy and the centralisation of political power.

Now I want to expose a fundamental disagreement between Peter and Sir Karl concerning rationality and the attitude which we adopt towards arguments. Peter Cadogan, in "The Sovereignty of Good" (in *The Ethical Record* for October 1972) appeared to endorse some very dubious ideas. He appeared to favour the use of dogmatic assertion: "this is my belief, take it or leave it,"

which is used by intuitionist moralists. These assertions are based upon direct experience, not upon argument, and the diligent use of this method is likely to lead to disastrous consequences. Popper has argued at length against this method in *O.S.E.* Chapter 24. Quite apart from the dangers of the intuitive method the problem of sovereignty is one of the pseudo-problems which have so often caused moral philosophy to degenerate into hot air without giving rise to constructive proposals (see *O.S.E.* Chapter 7). Humanism at present may be shallow, confused and divided but to remedy this we need to be more critical and argumentative, not more religious.

RALPH CHAMPION.

The Exploitation of Sex in Culture

I am sure readers of *The Freethinker* are tired of me and my present subject; but I still feel it necessary to make one important point, about dogma.

I have just read through *The Freethinker* dated 11 November 1972. In the comments on Lord Longford's Inquiry, and on the attitudes of W. H. Smith and Sons to certain magazines, there is a definite implication that to be a person with a 'religious faith' or a Catholic is to be paternalistic, and to be in favour of the suppression of libidinal material—while to be a big magazine-selling organisation is to be reactionary, and to menace free speech if one ever bans a magazine for unsavoury contents, like *Time Out*. On the other hand, to be a rational, freethinking, humanistic, atheistic kind of person, is to be in favour of the total permission of any kind of expression, however vile, or anti-human.

I believe in that such papers as *The Freethinker* put forward this kind of view, by their tone and manner, they have been sadly conned or deluded by pseudo-revolutionaries and commercial pornographers. It is interesting to see Mr. Tribe struggling with the persuasions of Mr. Girodias in the same issue: Dr. Raymond Williams, reviewing my own book in *The Guardian* alongside Mr. Girodias's said, simply, "The commercial pornographer has nothing to contribute to the debate." I agree.

Anyone really reading the Longford Report (and I mean reading it, and not simply taking over Fleet Street's view of it) must surely acknowledge that there is a problem. David Boadella, a Reichian, and editor of the *Energy and Character Journal*, has said that it contains some valid arguments. C. H. Rolph, that distinguished legal writer for the *New Statesman* said that it was good and valuable reading, in the *Trade Press*—the journal of W. H. Smith. The *British Medical Journal* has said that pornography could damage health. In three books I have tried to demonstrate that pornography has elements in it of sadism, and a schizoid reduction of human attitudes, which menaces healthy sexuality with distortion and even forms of crippled limitation.

In one symposium on the subject I have collected the serious views of a number of leading American and English philosophers and psychologists. Reviewing this Colin Wilson has said that he agrees with them that pornography is "nasty, infantile and vicious."

I am therefore writing to suggest that it is urgent for humanists, atheists, freethinkers, rational people, left-wingers, revolutionaries, and other critics of our society to stop their blanket pretence that the only sane way to deal with pornography is to allow it complete tolerance, and to pretend (as they are pretending) that there is no problem or question of harm being caused by the exploitation of sex in culture. As Professor Eysenck has said, the argument that sex and violence in culture do not cause effects can no longer be sustained. It is not true that everyone who is worried is a reactionary, or morally hung-up, or simply authoritarian.

There is cause for concern, on the part of anyone who believes that human beings are entitled to a rich and full life, in which the fulfilment of their sexuality is an important part. There is plenty of serious evidence—of a phenomenological, literary-critical, insightful, and psychotherapeutic kind—that the negative dynamics in pornography can do harm to certain categories of people. There is no call for complete freedom for anything that can do harm, and has never been in any society.

So can we please be more responsible about this complex and grave subject—which is not to be laughed out of court, as the Oz faction, and the pseudo-revolutionaries, want to laugh it out. It is always important to remember that the more aggressive pornography of our era was that produced by Julius Streicher, who was dragged to the gallows, on behalf of humanity, screaming "Heil Hitler!" It is not fortuitous that the underground press so often resembles *Der Stuermer*: and who would give that complete freedom?

DAVID HOLBROOK.

The Editor comments:

Since our correspondent has criticised some of my News and Notes items, I should like to make a few observations in a purely personal capacity.

If Mr. Holbrook thinks that I have been "conned" by "pseudo-revolutionaries and commercial pornographers" because I stand up for freedom, he does not know me very well. (Incidentally, in dealing with Lord Longford [News and Notes, 11 November] I used the word 'catholic'—quite deliberately—with a small 'C'.) It could just as plausibly be argued that Mr. Holbrook himself has been conned by the forces of repression, suppression and paternalism.

Personally, I am by temperament a secular puritan. I find pornography either repulsive or pathetic, to the point of sharing David Holbrook's loathing of the James Bond ethos, and for many of the same reasons. As a matter of fact I do not like *Time Out*, so I do not buy it, but that does not give me any right to stop other people buying it if they want to. I find the attitudes of the pornographers and their camp-followers pretty repulsive; but I am equally disgusted by the tactics and attitudes of those who are trying to suppress pornography and with it, inevitably, a good deal else of value besides. 'Nasty, infantile and vicious' indeed: "I don't like it so you shan't have it!"

Mr. Holbrook's citing *Der Stuermer* is a real gem! This nasty, twisted, anti-Semitic rag is a splendid example of what was left to German literature after the Nazis had expunged and suppressed everything and everybody that represented what their cruel little minds regarded as "degenerate", "negative" or indecent. If only *Der Stuermer* and its ilk had been ridiculed and laughed out of court!

The Date of the Gospel of Mark

Professor G. A. Wells's otherwise excellent article, "Form Criticism and the Date of the Gospel of Mark" (11 November), is marred by a grave flaw in its logic. Quoting Mark 13, in which Jesus predicts the fall of the Jewish Temple at Jerusalem, Professor Wells argues that "only those who credit Jesus with divine insight can believe that, about A.D. 30, he was able to foretell this event which occurred in A.D. 70." Rather, this prophecy was put into the mouth of Jesus by Mark, thus permitting us to date Mark's gospel as a post-70 creation. Furthermore, the saying of Jesus, "Not one stone shall be left upon another," on which Mark 13 is based, "could not have come into being until the destruction of the Temple was imminent" (my italics).

Note that "could not"—not "did not." As I have pointed out before about Professor Wells's writings, to say that something is logically possible—in this case, that Jesus' prophecy about the Temple was invented by those Christians preaching their master around the year 70—is not to provide decent evidence for it. To Professor Wells, it seems impossible that Jesus could have prophesied the destruction of the Temple forty years before the event. He thus bases his entire argument on an unjustifiable assumption.

The history of first-century Palestine is dominated by the revolts and uprisings of the Jews, led by the Zealot nationalists, against the occupying forces of Rome. In A.D. 6, a few years after the likely date of Jesus' birth, a massive revolt took place when Judaea became a Roman province, suppressed with difficulty by the Roman legate of Syria. The procuratorship of Pontius Pilate (26-36) was marked by at least two major clashes with the Jews and Samaritans. Another revolt in A.D. 40 was narrowly averted only by the assassination of the emperor Caligula. In A.D. 62, a Jewish peasant Jesus ben Ananias was scourged by the Roman procurator, Albinus, for foretelling the destruction of the Jewish people and their Temple. Josephus reports in his "Jewish War" the speech of Agrippa to the Jewish insurgents in 66, predicting the inevitable collapse of any Jewish revolt in the face of the mighty power of Rome.

How, therefore, can it seriously be maintained that a prophecy of the fall of the Temple, rooted in the convulsions that shook Jewish life for this entire period, "could not" have come into being until shortly before 70? And to maintain that nonetheless it did not involve Professor Wells in further difficulties, for as the late Professor Brandon cogently argues in his *Trial of Jesus of Nazareth* (1968), the bulk of the Jewish Christian apologia concerning the trial consists in rebutting the charge that Jesus had prophesied against the Temple (see Mark 14: 57-59). To suppose that the saying of Jesus about the Temple is a much later fabrication also requires one to suppose that Mark invented the entire incident, when there is no reason why he should. I do not accuse Professor Wells of this particular sin, but blanket scepticism about the gospel narratives is as unhelpful as blanket endorsement.

PHILIP HINCHLIFF.