

THE

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ETHICAL RECORD

Vol. 79, No. 2

FEBRUARY 1974

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SOUTH PLACE ETHICAL SOCIETY

Conway Hall Humanist Centre

Red Lion Square, London, WC1R 4RL

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Coming at Conway Hall

Sunday, February 3

- 11.00 a.m.—**Sunday Meeting:** NIGEL SINNOTT on "The Flower of the World"—The Roman Republic of 1849. Tenor solos: David Waters
6.00 p.m.—**Bridge Practice** in the Library
6.30 p.m.—**Concert:** Lindsay String Quartet and Janet Hilton. Haydn Bfl Op 76 No 4, Bartok No 1 Ami Op 7, Brahms Bmi Op 115 Clarinet Quintet.

Tuesday, February 5

- 7.00 p.m.—**Discussion** introduced by Douglas Holly, *Beyond Curriculum*. (Subject for month: Is Education Divisive?)

Sunday, February 10

- 11.00 a.m.—**Sunday Meeting:** RICHARD CLEMENTS, O.B.E. on Margery Fry—Social Reformer. Flute: John Cowdy.
3.00 p.m.—**Forum:** Foreign Aid as Enemy to the Third World with Satish Kumar
6.00 p.m.—**Bridge Practice** (Continued on page 19)

CURRENT SPES PUBLICATIONS

THE SECULAR RESPONSIBILITY	Marghanita Laski	10p.
THE ALTERNATIVE SOCIETY	James Hemming	10p.
THE BREAKDOWN OF GREAT BRITAIN	Leopold Kohr	10p.
MAN AND THE SHADOW	Laurens van der Post	10p.
WHAT ARE EUROPEANS?	G. K. Young, CB, CMG, MBE	10p.
THE ORIGINS OF CHRISTIANITY FROM PAGAN AND JEWISH BACKGROUNDS	G. A. Wells	20p.
HUMANITY AND ANIMALITY	Edmund Leach	10p.

3p postage for one — 6p for two or more

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The views expressed in this journal are not necessarily those of the Society

EDITORIAL

A Sorry Mess

WHAT IS WRONG with the country in which we live? Why are we living with subdued lighting, under electricity rationing, faced with the prospect of petrol rationing when almost every other country in Europe has hardly any petrol shortage? Why are most people working for three days a week? Why is travelling such a problem?

The answers of course are individual and varied, and perfectly common knowledge. But what lies *beneath* the plain facts, and what lies even further behind that? Can it be the attitudes of millions of British people whose sole aim in life is their own personal gratification—the satisfaction of the cravings of the taste buds, the desire for constant lavish excitement, and plain greed?

Few of these facts attach themselves to the poorly paid workers who are making their protests felt just now, but while ordinary people are having to run their heating at a low level, Centrepont, that empty monstrosity in London is being kept warm day and night with thousands of gallons of central heating oil delivered each month. And while food rationing coupons have already been printed and are sitting in government offices, politicians and high-power businessmen daily sit down to sumptuous multi-course calorific orgies, which would feed most people for a week.

It has been said before on this page that the worst aspect of British life is the inequality which is manifest in every facet. Saloon and public bars, first and second-class transport, public and private education, public and private medicine are just a few examples which are daily taken for granted. There are thousands of examples never even thought of by most people.

The Establishment has paid lip-service to the working population of this country with trade-unionist Vic Feather's peerage. (What an example of class-splitting, "The Establishment" and "the working population").

Ethical humanists surely ally themselves with progressive attempts to reform society into a more egalitarian environment. Can it be tolerated that some directors, chauffeur-driven from one luxury office to another, can receive pay increases of several thousand pounds a year, while those who are physically exhausted after a day's hard work for those directors are refused increases of more than a pound or two a week, when prices are soaring?

The conclusion must be that till Britain treats its people with more equality, there will be trouble.

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BECAUSE of the fuel and transport crisis, production of the *Ethical Record* is adversely affected. While the emergency continues, this

journal is likely to suffer delays, and will have fewer pages than usual. There may be some combined issues and there are contingency plans for duplicated broadsheets. Everything possible will be done to keep members informed of the Conway Hall programme.

Conway Hall is functioning more or less normally, and telephoned and written enquiries will be dealt with as expeditiously as possible. Society functions will take place unless extreme difficulty is experienced in particular cases.

Is a Secular Religion Possible?

BY

DR. JOHN LEWIS

THE QUESTION as to whether a purely rational and ethical attitude to life is consistent with religion or on the other hand excludes it altogether is by no means a new one; though it is a question very relevant to the SPES just now. What I have to say is not the advocacy of either view but aims at bringing before us all certain movements in religion on the one hand and in secular ethics on the other that may not be very well known.

On the one side we find, in the last half century or so, a powerful movement in the Church (of all denominations) to rid it of the miraculous and develop the philosophical and the ethical as themselves embracing all that religion really means. *The New Theology* of the Rev. R. J. Campbell in the first decade of the century reduced theology to a doctrine of immanence. The Universe was the manifestation of a principle of reason and goodness which inspires the minds of men, and is embodied supremely in the great souls of the ethical and rational tradition: Plato, Buddha, Jesus and the social pioneers of succeeding ages. At the same time the Modern Churchmen's Conference produced Anglican theologians who rejected miracles, the virgin birth, the resurrection, but still found in the Christian tradition a core of vital truth. In France, more recently, the ruthless iconoclasm of existentialism appeared in a Christian form in the philosopher Marcel, and earlier in the Dane, Kierkegaard, who both saw man as the creator of his own authenticity by his decision at every point in his life to make the choice of Either/Or. Finally, only ten years ago, the *Honest To God* controversy launched by the Bishop of Woolwich, denounced the conception of a God "up there", or even "out there" in the infinite of the philosophers, but located it in the experience of "man's ultimate concern".

If on the other hand we turn to the ethical movement, while we have a kind of "orthodoxy" that rejects every suspicion of religion, much as the orthodoxy of the Church rejects ethicalism, an orthodoxy perhaps best represented by the National Secular Society, both the South Place Ethical Society and the Bayswater Ethical Church always associated with their belief in reason and right an attitude of dedication and commitment that to the founders of both institutions represented a religious attitude.

I find it quite impossible to distinguish this attitude from the views of those theologians of the Christian Church for whom religious faith is stripped of everything but the sacred obligation to cherish and defend humanity. One recalls in that great tradition William Blake at the beginning of the Industrial Revolution: "God only exists in actual human

beings" and in our times Dean Inge, the Bishops of Birmingham and Hereford, Dr. Major, the Rev. R. J. Campbell, the Bishop of Woolwich and hundreds more.

More recent members of the SPES do not always know that we originated in the famous South Place Chapel which remained in the tradition of Nonconformist places of worship unfettered by theological trust deeds which restricted them to specific Christian beliefs. There are still many of these Open Trust chapels, notable among them the Octagon Chapel, Norwich, and Old St. Nicholas Meeting House, Ipswich, which date back to the refusal of their ministers and congregations to submit to the Act of Conformity of 1660.

Even when South Place moved to the Conway Hall, its Sunday Mornings still took the form, if somewhat emasculated, of the old South Place ritual of congregational hymn singing and readings from the scriptures—albeit "scriptures" which were extended to include inspirational works of every religious persuasion and none. We still have a collection of hymn books which were in use when I first lectured for the Society.

The Bayswater Chapel was very definitely a place of worship both in its Gothic design, its pews and pulpits, and in its liturgical services, robed choir, hymns and fine musical service of anthems and litanies. The musical director was that distinguished musician Kennedy Scott. I myself took the "service" during the early years of Mr. Blackham's Ministry, and I knew its well known minister, Dr. Stanton Coit. We were fellow students in University College.

The Ethics of Ultimate Concern

Is this the reduction of religion to ethics? No, it is the lifting of ethics on to the level of religion, but without the least suggestion of theology or metaphysics. You don't reduce religion to ethics *you locate it there*. The ultimate demand of our loyalty and devotion is in the ethical demand, not in general, not in theory, but in actual fact, in the specific occasions on which we are confronted with our responsibility for and to actual people in their sacredness as persons. A demand not to be argued about as an ethical theory, not just to be only *formally* recognised, but *felt* in the way religious people feel the command of God's will: "Here stand I, I can no other."

It is in this spirit that non-theological ethics has maintained a tradition of its own parallel to but distinct from secularisation on the one hand, and the modernist Christians of the successive "new theologies" on the other. The follower of this tradition regards himself as both the subject and object of history, and he refuses all appeal to transcendence or the supernatural. He accepts no model for humanity outside the human condition.

Stationed as it were between the secularist and the theologically oriented, the prophets of a wholly secularised religion, or a religiously felt ethical declaration, are men of intellectual courage, profound ethical conviction, and religious devotion. We have first the American Paul Tillich, originally Professor of Theology in Marburg. In his book *The Shaking of the Foundations* he declares "You must forget everything traditional that you have learned about God, perhaps even the word itself. . . . Speak of the depth of history, of the ground and aim of our social life, and of what you take seriously without reservation in your moral and political activities. . . ." When Tillich speaks of this "something not ourselves" he is not speaking of another Being at all. He is speaking of "the infinite and inexhaustible depth and ground of all being, of our ultimate concern, of what we take seriously without reservation".

A still more remarkable man was Pastor Bonhoeffer who was executed by the Nazis for his complicity in the plot against Hitler's life. He combined an overmastering sense of social responsibility, a profoundly felt ethical sense and an almost mystical devotion to the demands these placed

on his conscience. "Man has learned", he said, "to cope with all questions of importance without recourse to God as a working hypothesis".² Bonhoeffer speaks of the God of 'religion' as a *deus ex machina*. He must be "there" to provide the answer and explanations beyond the point at which our understandings or our capacities fail. Such a God is constantly pushed back by the development of science and rational history until we reach what we must call "The Death of God".

"The God hypothesis is no longer any pragmatic value for the interpretation or comprehension of nature, and indeed often stands in the way of better and truer interpretation. God's will doubtless survives, but only as refuges for unhappy and ignorant souls."³

Bonhoeffer therefore demands that we should boldly discard "the religious premise".

The line between those who believe in God and those who do not bears little relation to their profession of the existence or non-existence of such a being. It is a question of their openness to the sacred in the depth of the most secular relationships of everyday life.

The third considerable figure in this group is John Robinson, the former Bishop of Woolwich, and author of the book *Honest To God*. Published in 1963 it sold half a million copies, and created world wide interest and discussion. No attempt has ever been made to deprive him of his ecclesiastical position on grounds of heresy. Supporting Tillich and Bonhoeffer, he sums up his position in these words:

"In pure personal relationship we encounter, not merely what ought to be, but what is, the deepest veriest truth about the structure of reality. This is a tremendous act of faith. But it is *not* the feat of persuading ourselves of the existence of a super-Being beyond this world endowed with personal qualities."

What then is our faith? It is the trust that to give ourselves to the uttermost in love is to find a certain base to rest on, for this is "the ground of our being to which ultimately we come home". This develops into a philosophy which in the United States, under the influence of Harvey Cox and Leslie Dewart, speaks of man as a responsible agent of history before an open future. Not an acceptance of the present or a worship of the past but unleashing the potentialities of the future. What is transcendent—above and beyond us—is not God's existence but our own future which lies beyond present existence, "a future that is pregnant in the present, but belongs to the future",⁴ impelling us to go beyond man as he is today. The world is open to the future creation of man, who controls and makes his future. We are responsible for history.

Here is a religious faith, dedication and impulse, wholly within the human enterprise. The sacred is *within* history, not above it. It is in its deepest reality a pressure for human maturity and responsibility.

We have no business to make this a religion again. We must "de-religionize" Christianity, and create a secularised faith finding the sacred wholly in man's ultimate concern.

(Summary of a lecture given on November 11)

¹Tillich. *The Courage To Be*.

²J. M. Godsey. *The Theology of Dietrich Bonhoeffer*.

³Julian Huxley. *Religion Without Revelation*.

⁴Dewart L. *Theism in a World Come of Age*. See also Harvey Cox: *The Christian Century*.

Achievement and Failure of the Ethical Movement

BY

H. J. BLACKHAM

THE FIRST Ethical Society was formed in London in 1886, as an outcome of a meeting of teachers of moral philosophy in the universities of Cambridge, Oxford and London which was addressed by Stanton Coit, who gave an account of the society formed by Felix Adler in New York. Felix Adler, son of a leading Rabbi in New York and destined to succeed him, went to Germany for his higher education, like all other able students in the United States at that time, and, influenced mainly by the philosophy of Kant, he returned to New York having lost the faith of his fathers. His agnostic moralism, insistence on the independence and supreme importance of ethics, attracted a following among his father's congregation, and he was induced to found an independent movement on this basis.

Ralph Waldo Emerson, an American oracle in the 19th century, had prepared the ground. He himself had been influenced by German transcendental philosophy, and had moved as a Unitarian minister right out of Christian orthodoxy to become a moral essayist and the boast of American letters. Coit, as a college teacher of English literature steeped in Emerson, heard of Adler, went to New York, was sent to Germany for a doctorate in philosophy, spent three months afterwards at Toynbee Hall, and returned to found settlements in the slums of New York. In the following year he was invited at Moncure Conway's suggestion to succeed him at South Place, and he agreed to do so on condition that the name was changed to South Place Ethical Society. Four years later he left and founded the West London Ethical Society, and later the Union of Ethical Societies (afterwards The Ethical Union). In 1896 there were four societies, in 1904 there were 25; in 1915, 15. Over the years, 74 local societies or groups existed, and by the end of the first world war fewer than a dozen survived.

Dual Aim

The two main objects of the Ethical Movement were to proclaim the independence of ethics and the moral necessity of social justice. By the independence of ethics was meant that personal judgements of right and wrong are independent of beliefs about the way things are (religious or metaphysical views); and that all persons are equally capable of making their own moral judgements, and no authority can take away from anyone his responsibility for his own moral judgements. This insistence on the rights and responsibilities of the individual conscience was matched by equal recognition of the claims of the disinherited, the exploited classes, women, labour, colonial peoples. Hermann Cohen, Adler's philosophy teacher, had said to him sharply that if there was to be anything like religion in the modern world, socialism must be the expression of it. Adler himself initiated major reforms in New York city, acknowledged 75 years later in a leading article in the *New York Times*.

J. H. Muirhead, first secretary of the first (London) Ethical Society and later professor of philosophy at Birmingham University, was eager to establish a moral basis for socialism. This first society was twin-born with the Fabian Society, and the movement grew up with the nascent Labour Party. Coit started what he called a Neighbourhood Guild in Kentish Town. "The very name 'Neighbourhood Guild', suggests the fundamental idea

which this new institution embodies: namely, that irrespective of religious belief or non-belief, all the people, men, women and children in any one street, or any small number of streets . . . shall be organized in a set of clubs, which are by themselves, or in alliance with those of other neighbourhoods, to carry out, or induce others to carry out, all the reforms—domestic, industrial, educational, provident, or recreative—which the social ideal demands." The settlements of this kind which he had established in New York became models for some 400 others subsequently established in American cities.

At this time it seemed certain that science would overtake and destroy theology and that democracy would overtake and destroy the established order. Therefore new foundations had to be found for social and personal life; these foundations could only be science and democracy understood as moral concepts requiring certain commitments. The Ethical Movement was working out this thesis in practical ways that came home and gave purpose to ordinary lives.

Emerson had written: "pure ethics is not . . . formulated and concreted into a *cultus*, a fraternity with assemblings and holy-days with song and book, with brick and stone. Why have not those who believe in it and love it left all for this, and dedicated themselves to write out its scientific scriptures to become its Vulgate for millions?" (*The Sovereignty of Ethics*). Coit, with this in mind and with his organic concept of society, coming to this country and finding an established Church, picked up the idea of Coleridge, elaborated by Sir John Seeley, that the Anglican Church is primarily the organization of the nation on its ideal side, its moral interest, not primarily a Christian witness and mission.

Three Faces of Clergy

There had always been three parties in the Church—Broad, High and Low—and, since the Broad church or Modernists were then in the ascendancy, he worked in partnership with Kennedy Scott (a musician who had refused the organ of Westminster Cathedral to work with him) a liturgy for the prototype Ethical Church as a model for the way things might go. He insisted that this was not in any way a new sect, one more heretical or peculiar denomination, but a leaven of development within the established institution. For his purpose he bought a church in Bayswater, employed talented and enthusiastic artists, and introduced in the London scene before the first world war a thriving experiment (expounded in his books) which demonstrated the vitality of his ideas (and personality) and attracted interest, many visitors, and some sympathisers—including Gandhi. Since a great many of his adherents were pacifists and he was a militant opponent of Germany, the war scattered his congregation. Coit, as his own testament, devoted himself to a three volume translation of Nicolai Hartmann's *Ethics*, which Muirhead published in his Library of Philosophy.

In 1898 the Ethical Union formed a Moral Instruction League to campaign for systematic moral education in schools, at first in place of religious teaching, then, when this was judged impolitic, independent of and in addition to religious teaching. The campaign prospered. Augustine Birrell as Education Minister wrote detailed recommendations on moral instruction into the *Code of Regulations for Public Elementary Schools* (1906). In 1909 the historian Dr. G. P. Gooch, then a Liberal MP, introduced a debate in the House on moral instruction which drew impressive support for the work of the League. By that year more than 50 Local Authorities had syllabuses in moral education, most of them provided by the League. F. J. Gould was employed to give demonstration lessons and write school texts, and he visited thousands of schools and training colleges and his books were translated into a dozen languages. One outcome of this

initiative was an international inquiry into moral training in schools, published in two volumes in 1908. The Ethical Union founded also the Secular Education League in 1907, at the instance of Harry (later Lord) Snell to campaign against religious indoctrination in schools. The two most notable of the devoted secretaries of the Ethical Union were Harry Snell (1906-1919) and Miss Nellie Freeman (1923-1943).

Trans-Continental Ethics

In 1896 an International Ethical Union was instituted at a Congress in Zurich, devoted to moral improvement, social justice, and international peace. The International brought together societies in the USA, England, Germany, Austria, France, Italy and Switzerland. A reputable and lasting quarterly journal was founded, the *International Journal of Ethics*.

Any assessment of the achievement of the Ethical Movement must recognize a substantial success. In the first place, it met the need of those who could no longer subscribe to theological beliefs, at a time when church membership was a normal and necessary part of social order, and in any case the loss of belief was personally distressing. As Lord Snell, not himself from a background of middle class respectability, expressed it: "How shall I attempt to recall and reveal the spiritual anxieties and perplexities, the temporary accommodations and renunciations, the searchings, and the final discovery, 30 years ago, of an abiding peace in the Ethical Movement?" It inspired and created opportunities for pioneer social work, in day nurseries, in settlements, in housing, in education, in labour relations. It provided a few distinguished careers of public service and several useful publications. As one of its members described it: "our movement has been an organ for the social assimilation of modern experience, the development of an outlook adequate to its comprehension and of a practical attitude to it which will satisfy our conscience". With all this, it helped to establish the main truth for which it contended, the independence of ethics. Today in this country it is established policy in all the social services, including education, to respect the moral independence of every individual and help him to be responsible for his own conduct.

To speak of its failure is a mistake. Rather, its purpose was achieved and its usefulness superseded. The total emphasis on morality, which was corrective, is inappropriate. The formidable global problems of our time which have brought mankind together in face of critical cultural tasks dominate our situation and change the perspective. That is why, after the war, I felt that the movement should shed its ambiguities and claim its whole humanist inheritance, so that as full-blooded and declared humanists we bear witness to the sufficiency of the world and play our part in helping to make human existence an achievement worthy of contemplation and of service.

(Summary of a Lecture given on December 2)

For the Record

BY

THE GENERAL SECRETARY

AT THE last meeting of our General Committee Eric Willoughby our Editor, gave us a ghastly account of what the three-day week is likely to do to printers' schedules over the next few months. Our printers, David Neil and Company of Dorking, do a first class job for us (as you see every

month) but even they can't beat the crisis, so we and they will just have to do all we can and see what happens. But will you, as our members, take your share of responsibility? This means that if the *Record* is late will you ring or write to get up-to-date on our programme? The state of the country makes our activity more important, not less. If there was ever a year that called for islands of sanity that year is likely to be 1974. We are making provision for an emergency means of communication and only hope that we shall never have to resort to it.

Mr. Perry Retires

After 40 years of service to South Place and Conway Hall Mr. Edwin Perry has just retired as Head Caretaker. All those years he has lived for the place as well as in it and it is sad that he has had to depart at last—Mrs. Perry, too, has an association with us that is as long and as close. He finally made up his mind on Wednesday January 2 and it so happened that the General Committee was meeting in the Library that same evening. We asked Mr. Perry in and Rose Bush, on behalf of the Committee and of the whole Society, told him how much we appreciated all he had done and what we proposed to do for him in return to help to ensure the security and happiness of his retiring years.

The Camden Council has been most helpful in finding a flat for Mr. and Mrs. Perry and that problem has been happily resolved. They both wanted to go on living in this vicinity with all its long connections for them, and their new flat will be in the Brunswick Centre, the latest and most interesting new piece of architecture in London. It is in Bloomsbury and only five minutes from Conway Hall.

Bill Brown and his wife Evelyn move into the flat in Conway Hall where Bill takes over from Mr. Perry as the caretaker-in-residence and as Assistant to Colin Greaves who now becomes Head Caretaker. This is a happy arrangement; Bill and Evelyn were married here three years ago (it was the first ceremony I conducted after taking office as General Secretary) and Bill has since served on the General Committee.

Reflections on a Party

The party we had on Christmas Eve was an unqualified success—after all the argument about it! I have never seen any function at South Place in which so many people contributed in time, talent and kind. The preparations began about midday. Iris Mills came along in the afternoon and her mother came to help as well. Then Philip Buttinger arrived with a mass of decorations including a silver Christmas/Yule tree and with the help of his son transformed the library into a candlelit cavern. People arrived about seven and brought food, drink and presents (that were put under the tree). For an hour or so we just sat round and talked while Denis Campbell and John Hargreaves saw to it that everyone had some good cheer in hand.

Then Philip placed a table in the middle of the room with three large candles on it. Out of the semi-darkness at the far end of the Library came his little daughter wearing a Yule crown on her head in which were set five burning candles. Her father then explained that in Scandinavia Yuletide was a time of reconciliation when people who had fallen out deliberately took steps to make friends again and how the three candles symbolised Yules past, present and future. As he did this his daughter with a sparkler lit the candles one after another. It was a simple, charming and gentle ceremony and everyone was delighted. Then Peter Rutherford gave us a couple of well chosen readings and we sang two songs of his choice accompanied by Evelyn Brown at the piano. The MC (myself) read his ghostly *Ballad of Conway Hall* after pointing out that Red Lion Square is

reputed to be the most haunted square in London! And finally, going round the tables in turn, nearly everyone collected a present from under the Christmas tree.

It was about nine o'clock then and appetites and expectations were suitably whetted. The covers were taken off the tables and all the "goodies" revealed! There was then a very good tuck-in to background music and lots of chatter and laughter. When I went into the kitchen at 10.30 to have thoughts about the washing-up I found to my astonishment that it was all done—the kudos for that, I gather, belongs mostly to Mrs. Mills and Mrs. Buttinger.

It is clear that we have started something—and can look forward to the next December 24. Some people suggested an Easter party—and why not? Eostre was, of course, the Anglo-Saxon goddess of spring.

The Humanist International

The Sixth Congress of the International Humanist and Ethical Union, to which South Place is now affiliated, will take place in Amsterdam from August 5 to 9 this year. Its theme will be "The Humanist Revolution" and it will be broken down as follows: Democracy, State and Individual—Equality—Human Fulfilment and the quality of Life—Ecology and Economic Growth—Strategy and Tactics of Humanist Social Change—Education.

This will not be a delegate conference as such and individual humanists are very welcome to attend in their personal capacities and at their own expense. The various societies in this country will be sending their official representatives as well. The General Committee has decided that I shall go on behalf of South Place and I hope to make a comprehensive report-back, so that those that don't go will hear all about it in due course.

There could hardly be a better rendezvous than Amsterdam. The Netherlands is just full of ideas that are important to us and in the fairly relaxed atmosphere of a five day conference, with plenty of breaks and no buses and trains to catch, there is time to meet people properly and discuss things in depth.

Further details from me. The cost will not be light and is made heavier by the deteriorating rate of exchange. It can hardly be less than £100.

Coming in February

Nigel Sinnott's last lecture (on Bradlaugh) was so good that he just had to come back. He is a perfectionist however and refuses to talk about anything until he has lived with it for years. I had to lean on him (over the telephone!) to get him to come at all. He eventually admitted that there was a subject dear to his heart, on which he had worked for ages and about which he had not so far spoken and that was "*The Flower of the World*"—*The Roman Republic of 1849*. This worried me slightly at the outset. What could be its connection with what we are about at *South Place*? Then I remembered three things: firstly what the powerful example of Garibaldi, Mazzini and others had meant to people like us in their day; secondly the almost mysterious role long played by things Italian in the thinking of the educated Englishman (the Grand Tour reached its climax in Italy); and thirdly the current importance of the Italian contribution to the idea of regionalism (with its implications concerning the redundancy of the nation-state). So the lecture is on and I am certainly looking forward to it on the 3rd.

On the 10th Richard Clements will talk about the social reformer Margery Fry. On the 17th I shall take on *The Case for a New Puritanism* a frontier exercise that has nothing to do with the bastard puritanism of the nineteenth century.

I don't quite know why we have never considered the ideas of Max Weber before but we shall certainly do so now with Dr. John Lewis on the 24th—his subject *Max Weber and Value-Free Economics*.

It may come as a surprise to some people to learn that aid to the Third World is possibly one of its worst liabilities. This is the view taken by Satish Kumar from India. In the early 'sixties Satish and E. P. Menon walked round the world without a penny or a passport in their pockets. Back in London Satish founded the London School of Non-Violence and worked for Christian Aid. He is now editing the journal *Resurgence*. He is someone that South Place members really should meet and the opportunity will be on the 10th. On the 24th the other Forum will ask the question *Is Humanism Too Tame?* and we can all let our hair down!

In terms of numbers our best Tuesday series every year is always the one on education. Young teachers pour in from all over the place. We only wish a few more of them would stay with us. Last year we had a phenomenal series on the free schools and this time the theme is: Is Education Divisive? Douglas Holly from Leicester opens on the subject of his new book *Beyond Curriculum* (that is on the 5th); Michael Duane follows on the 12th on *Social Conditioning*; Graham Murdock, who also lectures at Leicester, will open the discussion on the 19th; he specialises in education and pop culture. The final meeting will be done by Peter Norwood, of the Bootstrap Union, on *An Anatomy of Deprivation*. This meeting is the result of the Open Door programme that the Bootstrap Union did on TV, you may have seen it.

My thanks to Nigel Wright for help in working out this education series.

Reflections on a Recent Forum

We're told that the Bard of Avon
Gave thirty-six plays to the nation
A butcher's boy's wit?
The critics say it
Just proves that he knew his bacon!

Ah well, and until next time. . . .

PETER CADOGAN

CONWAY DISCUSSION

The Function of a Common Language

TONY CROSS, after being in the Unitarian Church for 15 years, both as layman and minister, has now returned to the Church of England—his childhood church. Not that all his doubts had miraculously vanished, but he is happy to belong to a church which makes abundant use of the historical creeds. He recognises the need in himself for a language of worship into which he may enter with others; at Easter join in with those who proclaim their joy that "Christ has risen" and on the first day of the week he wishes to receive the Holy Communion.

He served the Unitarian Church conscientiously, but believes now that, because it is anti-credal and so "liberal" it only knows what its members do *not* believe in, it has difficulty in sustaining a sense of community. It offers little in the way of a *lingua communis*.

At present he is a schoolmaster at a school in Croydon and as an

example of how a common language functions Mr. Cross told us of his first experience of being for once on the other side of the private-language barrier put up by schoolboys between "them" and "us". The boys had inscribed their desks with slogans disrespectfully incorporating the nick-names of one of his colleagues, mild expletives and discourtesies. It took him a long time before he could read it off, decipher the code and understand to whom the words refer.

The story of the Tower of Babel—a parable expressing different layers of meaning—illustrates how divisive a plurality of language can be. God, displeased with man's arrogance in building a city with towers pointing into the sky solely for his own glorification, caused them to speak with many tongues. They became unintelligible to one another, were scattered and had to abandon their task.

Through a Glass . . .

Mr. Cross then read an excerpt from *Alice through the Looking Glass* to show that Humpty Dumpty, incorporating a combination of logic and madness in his usage of language, was inviting the same alienation, personal and social. To a bewildered Alice he says in a course of a conversation "When I use a word . . . it means what I choose it to mean—neither more nor less". Later on he blandly asserts to Alice that "brillich" means four o'clock in the afternoon—the time when people start to broil food for their evening meal; "gyre" means to go round like a gyroscope and "gumble" is to make a hole like a gimlet.

One is, of course, perfectly free to use language any way you like provided you accept the consequences of such an attitude. Humpty Dumpty's declaration is one of war upon the fundamental function of language—communication—the articulation of our common experiences by an agreed symbiology.

To illustrate a response on a much deeper level Mr. Cross handed round copies and read Christina Rossetti's poem *In the Bleak Mid-Winter*. The previous Christmas when he listened to it being sung as a carol, he found himself deeply moved by it. The lines "In the bleak mid-winter/A stable place sufficed/The Lord God Almighty/Jesus Christ" express for him the paradox that lies at the very heart of the Christian Faith. The majesty of God is contrasted with the poverty of the setting; the Lord of Life is born a little child, the almighty made vulnerable, the omnipotent, helpless. Not the legions of heaven—"Angels and Seraphim"—but "the ox, camel and ass came to adore". The tenderness of the poem and the simplicity with which the theology is handled speak with eloquent directness to the heart.

It is Mr. Cross's contention that with the increasing secularisation of the world this poem will become more and more "Jabberwockian" as fewer and fewer people will be able to respond to its complex meaning and message; for an adequate response a knowledge is necessary of—or at least a degree of sympathy with—what orthodox Christianity believes about the Triune nature of God, the incarnation and virginal conception of Christ.

"But only his mother
In her maiden bliss
Worshipped the Beloved
With a kiss."

as well as a deep acquaintance of both the Old and New Testaments and with the great classical representations of the Nativity in medieval and renaissance art.

The poem was written from faith and addressed to faith. It is a clear example of the fiduciary (to hold in trust) use of language. In religion we are required to make a complex act of inference and assent, *take on trust*

expressions which are really in analogical and symbolical form, and act out the claims they make.

Mr. Cross believes that the secularisation process of the world will spread. But, although he sees no sign of a revival of traditional Christianity, neither does he for one moment envisage its dying. Christians will not be unaffected by the "God is dead" movement, but they will continue to worship in their *lingua communis* in enclaves gathered together out of secular society. In time, the fascination of the esoteric, combined with the example of the quality of Christian lives, will once more do its work and draw in outsiders into that "willing suspension of disbelief" which alone allows us to enter into an appreciation of what Christians are all about.

Peter Cadogan led in the discussion by saying that some of us still seem uncertain about the positive content of our message but this was something we could resolve. Mr. Cross said that there was no denying the "rationality" of many a Christian religious thinker, but religion should not be defined in terms of, or reduced to, one or other philosophy.

In reply to Miss Smoker who said the language of the Rossetti poem was very beautiful, but a bit of a fraud in everyday life; when she held those beliefs as a child, she believed in them literally, Mr. Cross replied that, although not the same, there was an analogy between the language of poetry with its use of imagery, simile and metaphor and that of religion. It is expressive of different levels of experience and meaning. In his view the statement, in the creeds, that Christ was crucified under Pontius Pilate is a statement of historical fact. The following sentence "He descended into Hell" is expressive of a different level. If you took it literally, or if you were hostile to it in any way, you would never understand it. Why one person responded, while another remained closed to it, was one of the many mysteries of life. Perhaps, if we looked deep inside ourselves, we might come up with an answer.

TINA DELIUS

BOOK REVIEWS

Humanism by Barbara Smoker. Ward Lock Educational Ltd., 40p.

AT A TIME when many humanists are uncertain about what humanism really is, it can be considered courageous of Barbara Smoker to write a book in Ward Lock's *Living Religions* series. The book is designed for use in schools, as a guide to what humanists believe, and though this would be a daunting prospect for many humanists, there is little in this book with which the majority of humanists would disagree.

Barbara Smoker deals with the development of humanism through the ages, skilfully relating this development to history as a whole.

Eminent humanists throughout history are shown in the context of their times, and of course the South Place Ethical Society figures in the pages too.

It is an ideal book to pass to someone wanting to learn about humanism as a whole; it could prove of great value to established humanists who find some searching questions difficult to answer, and to those a little confused by modern humanism. Like *What Humanism is About* by Kit Mouat, Barbara Smoker's book gives facts, opinions and anecdotes which will all help individuals to make up their own minds about what they mean by humanism.

This is one of those books which should be on every humanist's book-

shelf, though it is not generally available. The publishers will no doubt be able to supply a copy, and Barbara Smoker herself has a number of copies for distribution to the movement. A few copies are on sale at Conway Hall.

ERIC WILLOUGHBY

What is Science for? by Bernard Dixon. Collins, £2.50.

AS BEFITS his education in science and his experience in scientific journalism, the editor of *New Scientist* gains our attention from the start and sustains it to the end of this very informative and readable book. The question mark at the end of the title is to be seen as the symbol of his aim and intention: the question still awaits an answer, which is not really his task but ours.

We all know there can be no single answer, since this is not in truth a single question. The word *science* itself has come to be used in such a way that one man's science is another man's technology, and inevitably opinions also differ about their worth.

Some scientific work is chiefly concerned with the advancement of technology—and some is not. Some technology is (*and some is not!*) directed primarily to broad service for mankind. Some of each is directed to the desires of certain minority groups with a common interest, whether self-chosen (e.g. trades, professions) or imposed (e.g. the sick, the aged).

Clearly, science is a complicated affair; it does not fit into rigid categories of the sort which, in some circles, are still respected as a hallmark of scientific method. Instead of this, Dr. Dixon puts at the reader's disposal brief, lively and comprehensible science case-histories to demonstrate *the social aspects of science* with which he is concerned. As a result, he has provided a concise source-book for all who wish to appraise the risks attendant on man's so-called mastery over nature, brought about by scientific endeavour.

Judged on this basis, the book passes with flying colours. Pesticides, pollution control, penicillin, nuclear power and radiation risks, the evolution of the Pill, drug use by athletes, and a dozen or so other topics already made familiar by the Media are given fresh statement and significance in this wide and well-balanced context. The firm, clear and unpretentious style is attractive on first acquaintance, and the pithy, apposite commentaries and citations of other literature add a lasting value to the work for reference and further reading.

We can understand science more sympathetically and more wisely when we read about the nature and consequences of Perkin's chemistry, or Andrew Nalbandov's classical instance of the "Sherlock Holmes" element in front-line research. We can understand the inevitability of conflicting interests when we read of the Warwick University clash, the Cublington campaign, the Teesdale reservoir proposal. This is a book which helps us to grow up!

Do not mistake me—there are many other books of course, and Dr. Dixon would be the first to acknowledge the contributions made by Ravetz, Popper, Bernal and a host of others in their own ways—but not all of these are equally assimilable "on the Clapham bus".

On the other hand, many an individual scientist, intent on his own speciality, will resent the "summing-up" attitude as such. So much the worse for him. Why should scientists wish to behave like medieval monks, each in his own cell or team, devoted to a single task, *laborare est orare*, meekly submissive to Orders that were never of our own *period*, let alone our own making.

To contribute nothing more than highly-skilled professional service would seem a barely tolerable fate for a lively, human scientist even if he worked

in an ideal Order or Establishment, universally respected for doing a Good Job. It is sad to have to say that few and fortunate are those whose paid employment is anywhere near that standard. No wonder, then, that scientists of worth and character (Shapiro, Galston) may feel obliged to *rebel*, whilst writers (without such personal experience) lament the effect of science on human life and its values.

In this predicament, has Dr. Dixon a message? I think he has, although he does not proclaim it. On p. 210 he says: "If one must choose between the contemporary camps of optimism and pessimism towards the use and abuse of science, I fear one must opt for pessimism. We have learned not to accept the reassurances of experts about future developments, dangers (or promises) of science. . . . Despite the gargantuan positive achievements of science, we have made ghastly errors in the past and risk worse mistakes in the future because of our greater dependence on science. . . . At the point of application, the products and processes of science are deployed ever more quickly and extensively."

Besmirched Boffins

Very nearly the same can be said about economics, industry, finance, politics, even religion. Let us turn back to p. 35 and see if the similarity still applies: "We tend to see scientists as remote, driven into isolation by the pioneering nature of their occupation, and the high intellectual demands it makes upon them. Of all the misunderstandings about scientists and how they work, this is the most pernicious. It is dangerous because it obscures the most valuable aspect of scientific inquiry—its *continual momentum towards self-correction*, which propels scientific interpretations of the world more and more closely towards the *trustworthy and reliable*—towards what we call the truth."

On the whole, we must admit that this particular momentum is not so well shown by bankers, lawyers, clergy, politicians, to name but a few "top people", and it is reasonable to ask why this is so. In reality, one of the great illusions or common fallacies is the demarcation of Science with a capital S. It is far more sensible to recognise instead the distinction between scientific and unscientific attitudes; this means something attributable to *persons* rather than to disciplines. Waddington saw it as an attitude to the world, a way of living, and not just a *method* of handling information. Scientific method, being no more than *scrupulously applied* commonsense, is used in many other jobs and professions. "It is characterised by a certain *rigour* of thought and reflection, in contrast to ill-informed guesswork or prejudice", and clearly that can describe an attitude to life in general.

"Far from being amoral and coldly logical, science actually generates values. These include intellectual humility, an unusually acute regard for honesty, respect for the revolutionary and the apparent crank, and stress on the importance of co-operation. These are not optional extras for the scientist; they arise directly out of the pursuit of science . . . science simply cannot progress unless honesty and humility before the facts are cultivated and adhered to by its practitioners."

The book throughout testifies to these values, and to the current general consensus that scientists must be on tap, not on top. These are realities which go a long way towards dispelling the myth of a scientific despotism with only a handful of rebels conscious of social responsibility. The latter are, in the main, quite as willing to be on tap but not for the exclusive benefit of those on top. That is why much of the disagreement is about the use made of scientific information—disclosure, interpretation, application.

Because it is a social activity, we cannot answer the question "What is Science for" without deciding also, *Who* is it for?

DR. A. L. LOVECY

Your Viewpoint

Rational Religious Rejection?

In the fourth paragraph of Laura Campbell's letter (January), there would seem to be the implication that, for Humanists, the "cause" will be "won" when "it can be shown that the majority of people reject religion". But surely, even Humanists with rational religious sentiments would agree that there is more to being a Humanist than rejecting religion!

CHARLES BYASS

Farnham Common, Bucks.

Marriage Mixtures

Mr. Warwick poses the possibility of what he calls "homosexual ceremonies of intent" at Conway Hall. If we are to have ceremonies designed for sexual deviates, why single out homosexuals?

Why not stage, for example, a simple ceremony for sado-masochists, with a tasteful interlude of ritual flagellation? Or why not put on a fetishist wedding in which bride and groom are swathed from head to foot in rubber mackintoshes and plight their troth with a rubber ring? Or, again, why not a transvestite nuptial with the bride immaculately attired in morning dress, topper and tails and the groom in white veil, dress and train?

There are all sorts of possibilities. Why these dreadfully abnormal people should want to mark their abnormalities with ceremonial celebrations, one wonders. But if they do, we have a wide field to explore and one which calls for imaginative skills. It is, of course, just possible that a sane ethical society might decide it could find better things to do.

J. STEWART COOK

Windsor

South Place News

New Members

We are pleased to welcome the following new members: Miss J. Dixon, Bournemouth, Hants.; Mr. R. R. Roberts, Buckhurst Hill, Essex, and Mr. S. Touray, London W9.

Obituary

It is with great sadness that we report the death of Phoebe Snelling. Rose Bush writes:

Phoebe Snelling died in hospital after a painful and frustrating illness which she bore with cheerfulness and patience.

Many people know Phoebe as a very forthright person of unusual uprightness and integrity. She was always ready to frown upon actions and behaviour not up to her own high standards. But what was not so generally perceived was that when privileged to know her more closely one encountered a sweetness and warmth of character not so readily apparent to all the world.

Phoebe has been associated with South Place all her life and she was well known for her work on the Social Committee, being responsible for catering especially for the At Homes and the Annual Reunions. She was for many years a valued member of the General Committee, not having a lot to say but when she did speak it was always to the point and to good purpose. She was for many years on the Concert Committee and rendered

self-sacrificing service by forfeiting her own enjoyment of the music to sell programmes in the vestibule.

Ten years ago she came to live in Blackham House in Wimbledon where she was well-known as a good companion and kindly neighbour.

We have been seeing little of her at Conway Hall during the last few years on account of her poor health which hampered her movements, but we shall continue to miss her and remember her as a good friend and a stalwart support of the Society over very many years.

Mrs. L. L. Booker adds:

"Miss Phoebe Snelling gave devoted service to South Place for very many years. She was a pillar of the Society, serving on Social, House, Library and Concerts Committees, and ably organising the catering for meetings and functions. Even in the last months in hospital she still retained her sense of humour, and her interest in history and literature and not least in South Place. She was a personality we shall greatly miss."

Sunday Social

Sunday, February 17, at 3 p.m. Laurence Griffiths will show coloured slides "To Helsinki and Stockholm with the International Friendship League". Tea at 4.30 p.m. 10p.

Annual Dinner

The 1974 annual dinner will take place on Friday, February 15, 7.00 for 7.30 p.m. The guest speaker will be Christopher Macy, Editor, *New Humanist*. Tickets are £1.75 from the office.

Energy Crisis

Delays in production and distribution are likely during the present electricity and transport troubles. Members with material for publication in the *Ethical Record* are earnestly requested to regard the *first* day of the preceding month as the copy date for any particular month's issue, and to make every effort to send in material as soon as it is available. Issues are likely to have fewer pages than usual, and articles, reviews and letters are likely to be held over. All regular items will be published wherever possible. The printers are working under an imposed three-day-week, and disruption in normal production is inevitable.

Bridge Drive

The February bridge evening will be the 21st. as always a Thursday. at 6 p.m. in the Library. Light refreshments are available and new members are welcome.

Kindred Organisations

An SPES Appointed Lecturer, H. J. Blackham, has again been appointed President, **British Humanist Association**, in succession to George Melly.

The **Glasgow Humanist Society** is holding its annual conference in Stirling, Scotland, in co-operation with the BHA on March 30. Full details from BHA.

Humanist Holidays is taking bookings for its five-day Easter centre in Eastbourne. A week in Hunstanton, Norfolk, is planned for August 17-24. Enquiries to Mrs. M. Mephram, 29 Fairview Road, Sutton, Surrey.

The annual dinner of the **National Secular Society** is scheduled for Saturday, March 30. It will be at the Paviour's Arms, Page Street, Westminster, S.W.1. The speakers will be Tony Smythe, Arthur Davidson, M.P., Madelaine Simms and Bill McIlroy. Barbara Smoker will be in the chair. Reception from 6 p.m. Tickets £2.40 from 698 Holloway Road, London N.19.

(Continued from page 2)

Sunday, February 10

6.30 p.m.—**Concert:** Tunnell Trio, Thea King. Mozart E K542, piano trio, Mirtinu Duo violin and cello, Brahms Ami Op 114 trio for clarinet, cello and piano, Bartok contrasts for clarinet, violin and piano

Tuesday, February 12

7.00 p.m.—**Discussion** introduced by **Michael Duane. Education—Social Conditioning**

Friday, February 15

7 for 7.30 p.m.—**Annual Dinner.** Guest Speaker: **Chris Macy**

Sunday, February 17

11.00 a.m.—**Sunday Meeting:** **PETER CADOGAN** on **The Case for a New Puritanism.** Violin and piano: Margot McGibbon and Fiona Cameron

3.00 p.m.—**Sunday Social**

6.00 p.m.—**Bridge Practice**

6.30 p.m.—**Concert:** Robles Trio, Galina Solodchin. Debussy sonata Gmi, Leclair trio sonata D Op 2 No 8, Papastavrou Spinks St. Nicholas Suite for flute, viola and harp. Saint-Saens Fantasie Op 124 for violin and harp, Beethoven serenade D Op 25 for flute, violin and viola, Hasselmans "La Source" and C. Salzedo "Song in the night" harp solos.

Tuesday, February 19

7.00 p.m.—**Discussion** introduced by **Graham Murdock. Education and Pop Culture**

Thursday, February 21

6.30 p.m.—**Bridge Drive** in the Library

Sunday, February 24

11.00 a.m.—**Sunday Meeting:** **DR. JOHN LEWIS** on **Max Weber and Value-free Economics.** Soprano solos: Linda Rands

3.00 p.m.—**Forum:** **Is Humanism Too Tame?** with a panel of speakers

6.00 p.m.—**Bridge Practice**

6.30 p.m.—**Concert:** Georgian Quartet, Kenneth Essex, Olga Hegedus. Webern Five Pieces Op 5 string quartet, Brahms G Op 36, Dvorak A Op 48 string sextets

Tuesday, February 26

7.00 p.m.—**Discussion** introduced by **Peter Norwood. An Anatomy of Deprivation**

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South Place Ethical Society

FOUNDED in 1793, the Society is a progressive movement which today advocates an ethical humanism, the study and dissemination of ethical principles based on humanism, and the cultivation of a rational religious sentiment free from all theological dogma.

We invite to membership all those who reject supernatural creeds and find themselves in sympathy with our views.

At Conway Hall there are **opportunities for participation** in many kinds of cultural activities, including discussions, lectures, concerts, dances, rambles and socials. A comprehensive reference and lending library is available, and all Members and Associates receive the Society's journal, *The Ethical Record*, free. The Sunday Evening Chamber Music Concerts founded in 1887 have achieved international renown.

Services available to members include Naming Ceremony of Welcome to Children, the Solemnisation of Marriage, and Memorial and Funeral Services.

The Story of South Place, by S. K. Ratcliffe, is a history of the Society and its interesting development within liberal thought.

Minimum subscriptions are: Members, 75p p.a.; Life Members, £15.75p (Life membership is available only to members of at least one year's standing). It is of help to the Society's officers if members pay their subscriptions by Bankers' Order, and it is of further financial benefit to the Society if Deeds of Covenant are entered into. Members are urged to pay more than the minimum subscription whenever possible, as the present amount is not sufficient to cover the cost of this journal.

A suitable form of bequest for those wishing to benefit the Society by their will is to be found in the Annual Report.

MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION FORM

TO THE HON. REGISTRAR, SOUTH PLACE ETHICAL SOCIETY,
CONWAY HALL HUMANIST CENTRE, RED LION SQUARE, LONDON, WC1R 4RL

Being in sympathy with the aims of South Place Ethical Society, I desire to become a Member and I enclose as my annual subscription the sum of £..... (minimum 75p) entitling me (according to the Rules of the Society) to membership for one year from the date of enrolment.

NAME
(BLOCK LETTERS PLEASE)

ADDRESS
.....

OCCUPATION (disclosure optional)

HOW DID YOU HEAR OF THE SOCIETY?

DATE SIGNATURE

The Ethical Record is posted free to members. The annual charge to subscribers is 75p. Matter for publication should reach the Editor, Eric Willoughby, 46 Springfield Road, London E17 8DD, by the 5th of the preceding month.