

The MONTHLY RECORD

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Published by

SOUTH PLACE ETHICAL SOCIETY

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SOUTH PLACE ETHICAL SOCIETY

SUNDAY MORNING MEETINGS AT ELEVEN O'CLOCK

December 3—**RICHARD CLEMENTS, O.B.E., J.P.**

"The Humanist Frame" and the Critics

Piano Solos by JOYCE LANGLEY

December 10—**REGINALD SORENSEN, M.P.**

Morality—Relative and Absolute

Soprano Solos by DAPHNE SHANDLEY

December 17—**PROFESSOR HYMAN LEVY, M.A., D.Sc.**

An Unbeliever Looks at Death

Bass Solos by G. C. DOWMAN

December 24—No Meeting

December 31—**F. H. AMPHLETT MICKLEWRIGHT, M.A.**

1861 - 1961; Retrospect and Forecast

Piano and Cello Solos by FJONA CAMERON and LILLY PHILLIPS

January 5—**DR. JOHN LEWIS (MORLEY COLLEGE)**

Is Progress Inevitable?

SOUTH PLACE SUNDAY CONCERTS, 71st Season, 1961-1962

Concerts at 6.30 p.m. (Doors open 6 p.m.) Admission 2s. 6d.

December 3—**MARTIN STRING QUARTET**

Mozart in D, K 499; Shostakovich No. 6; Schubert in A minor, Op. 29

December 10—**LONDON STRING QUARTET**

Haydn in G, Op. 77, No. 1; Mozart in C, K 465;

Beethoven in F, Op. 59, No. 1

December 17—**AMICI STRING QUARTET**

G. B. Vitali Capriccio; Mozart in E flat, K 428;

Beethoven in B flat, Op. 130, with the original fugue ending (Op. 133)

The Objects of the Society are the study and dissemination of ethical principles and the cultivation of a rational religious sentiment.

Any member in sympathy with these objects is cordially invited to become a Member (minimum annual subscription is 12s. 6d.), or Associate (minimum annual subscription 7s. 6d.). Life membership £13 2s. 6d; Associates are not eligible to vote or hold office. Enquiries should be made to the Registrar to whom subscriptions should be paid.

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

EDITORIAL

A Great Freethinker

THERE WAS A GOOD MUSTER of people attending on November 8, the unveiling of a plaque to honour Charles Bradlaugh. The ceremony was performed by Mr. Anthony Wedgwood Benn. It was placed in Turner Street, Stepney, at one of the houses where Bradlaugh had lived.

Afterwards, the party adjourned to the House of Commons to partake of tea in the Members' dining-room. Here Mr. Joseph Reeves introduced Mr. Wedgwood Benn, Mr. Reginald Paget and Mr. Charles Bradlaugh Bonner to the assembled company. Mr. Wedgwood Benn delighted those assembled with a forthright speech, referring to himself as another rebel. Mr. Paget, the present member for Northampton, in a modest talk, spoke of the good work accomplished by Bradlaugh in Northampton, recalling how, after refusing to indulge in the hypocrisy of taking the oath, Parliament evicted him from the House, and the people of Northampton re-elected him three times before elementary justice was done and he was allowed to affirm.

As a grandson of Charles Bradlaugh, Mr. Bradlaugh Bonner revealed.

at some length, some interesting family history and a pleasant afternoon closed in a manner which would have pleased Bradlaugh himself.

Miss Barbara Smoker reports that "just when, ironically enough, the plaque was being ceremoniously unveiled, in another part of London a witness called for the defence of George Clark (a member of the Committee of 100, charged with incitement) was not allowed to give evidence because he said he would prefer to affirm rather than take the oath, since he is a humanist. The judge simply told him to stand down—and the judge's personal prejudices apparently count for more than established civil rights. The prisoner was then sentenced to nine months' imprisonment on top of the two months he was already serving for a similar conviction.

The Work of the Society

Our good and enthusiastic friend Mr. J. W. Leslie comments that much effort by Mr. Hutton Hynd and members of sub-committees is put into the work of running the Sunday morning meetings and Tuesday evening discussions at Conway Hall, providing some of the finest speakers in London to address a handful of people—so much given for so few!

South Place Ethical Society is obliged to obtain outside lettings of its premises to provide the finance to run these excellent meetings, and publish a journal which reports these activities. *The Monthly Record* costs more money than is provided by members' subscriptions.

This Society is unique in a large city, and providing so much that is of real value to the community, is surely worthy of far greater support than it receives.

Mr. Leslie remarks that members and readers of *The Monthly Record* outside Great Britain might also supply notes about their activities and their views about the Society. These, of course, would receive careful consideration by the Editor.

The Committee of 100

We have just come across a leaflet published by the Committee of 100 entitled *Act or Perish*. It is "appealing for support for a movement of non-violence to nuclear war weapons and weapons of mass extermination". This committee has been very much criticised recently for their anti-legal activities, yet, as many of them have sacrificed much, even to imprisonment for resistance to what they consider the danger to the future life for all on this planet, we must respect them for a courage and sincerity that perhaps we ourselves may not possess.

It is fairly evident that they have made an appreciable impact on world opinion which may bear fruit in the future. As they say in this leaflet: "Much has been accomplished towards making a public opinion opposed to nuclear weapons, but not enough, so far, to influence governments." Like most of us, the Committee have that appalling sense of frustration which afflicts the world when "the great powers remained stubbornly determined to prevent agreement".

"The opposition to mercy and sanity on the part of those who have power is such as to make persuasion by ordinary methods difficult and slow, with the result that, if such methods alone are employed, we shall probably be dead before our purpose can be achieved."

I.H.E.U. Congress

The next conference of the International Humanist and Ethical Union will take place in Oslo, Thursday, August 2 to Tuesday, August 7, 1962.

The overall title of the Congress will be "In search of long range goals for Ethical Humanism". Subjects will be, "Towards the mature personality" and "Towards Freedom in an organised world".

For each subject one main paper and two commentary papers will be prepared.

The Congress will break up into four sections which will meet simultaneously. The sections will report to the plenary meetings, after the four rapporteurs on each subject have consulted together. The four working parties will report to the final meeting.

The main language will be English: summaries in German and French.

Accommodation

All members, who express such a wish, may be accommodated in student homes. This accommodation, although simple, will be adequate. A limited number of youthful members can be accommodated in a youth hostel.

Persons wishing to be accommodated in private hotels are expected to make their own reservations.

Congress Fee

To meet part of the cost of the Congress, the members will be requested to pay a fee of fifty Norwegian kroner, which sum entitles them to admittance to the meetings as well as to the Papers and the Proceedings.

Notes by Custos

Blackmail

ALL INTERESTED IN SOCIAL PROBLEMS will be grateful to the Odeon cinema circuit for screening the film *Victim*, which has recently been showing in the London area. The story is very simple at root. A small gang of blackmailers have fastened themselves upon a number of homosexuals and are demanding money under threat of exposure. As a result of driving a young man to suicide by forcing him to embezzle to meet their demands, the gang is pursued by a well-known barrister whom they have also tried to enmesh. The peril facing his reputation and career forces him to weigh up the question whether or not he shall go to the police. His only alternative would be to succumb to the demand with the bondage which this would mean for the future. In the end, he communicates with the police and the gang are speedily arrested. As a film *Victim* might possibly be accused of a rather strained melodrama and it is at least dubious whether, on the facts as stated, the reputation of the barrister was ever in such peril as the film story implies. But some obvious social lessons stand forth which are important to the humanist concerned with problems of practical well-being. The first is that blackmail is a dastardly crime deserving the fullest penalties which the law permits. Any hint of it should at once be reported and prosecuted. It cannot be too widely known that, in modern times, the police usually protect the complainant, whatever his offence may have been, and identities of prosecutors are hidden in court. The other lesson is that the Criminal Law Amendment Act of 1885, which penalises all homosexual relationships between male persons, was an incursion into English penal procedure rightly labelled by one judge as "the blackmailer's charter". It has been estimated that some 90 per cent of blackmail offences have their roots in conduct penalised under this Act. The Wolfenden Report advocated its repeal so far as acts between consenting male adults are concerned but the recommendation still awaits implementation. *Victim* drives home the lesson that

opposition to this proposal or failure to implement the Report plays straight into the hands of the blackmailer, a fact which in real life is being daily brought out in the courts. It is good that such a film should challenge the public to make up its mind whether it is not a far less social evil to condone homosexuality than to make life relatively easy for the blackmailer to pursue his vile trade of "moral murder", the phrase which the late Mr. Justice Avory once applied to it.

Archibald Robertson—A Personal Tribute

BY

CUSTOS

IT WAS A SAD MOMENT when, opening the *Daily Worker* for October 18, we read that Archibald Robertson had passed away. For some minutes, we found it impossible to realise that when we said goodbye to him after the social at South Place on September 24 it was to be for the last time and that a platform to which he had conferred both high distinction and outstanding ability would know him no more. Robertson was possibly among the best regular lecturers that South Place Ethical Society has known. Scholarly material was the background for a lecture delivered in popular language and with a forthright manner. One of his outstanding characteristics was his essentially honest intellectualism. There was no attempt to hedge or to mitigate his conclusions because feelings might be ruffled. He believed that the Church had been an evil influence in the history of Europe and said so, backing up his conclusions with a mass of factual evidence which ended by presenting an unanswerable case. In the same way, he believed that capitalistic social orders were the cause of human suffering and oppression and said so, ruffling to fury those who lacked both his knowledge and insight. Robertson's great ability lay in the strength with which he could present a factual thesis. Indeed, had life decreed otherwise, he possessed the type of mind which could have won him high distinction as a jurist and as a pleader in courts of law.

Archibald Robertson came of a highly distinguished family. His father, who bore the same name, was a theologian of strictly orthodox views who crowned a most successful academic and ecclesiastical career by becoming Bishop of Exeter. The son was a Wykehamist who succeeded his father by earning scholastic distinction at the same source, Trinity College, Oxford. Before leaving school, the reading of history had convinced him of the rightness of an atheistic outlook which he never abandoned. Concern with social matters led him into socialism and into membership of the old Social Democratic Federation. He was an intense admirer of one of the most distinguished historical writers to serve in the socialist ranks, Ernest Belfort Bax, and there is not a little community of approach between Bax's writings and the historical studies which Robertson himself was later to produce. A highly distinguished career at the Admiralty did not permit much polemical activity and it was only after his father's death in 1931 and his subsequent retirement from the Civil Service that Robertson became an outstanding and active figure in the worlds of socialism and freethought even though, for some years, he had already written penetrating studies under the pen-name of "Robert Arch".

Freedom to order his life as he would enabled Robertson to devote his last thirty years to the work dearest to his interests. An important series of books on matters of religious controversy came from his pen. His *Jesus—Myth or History?* was not only a definite contribution to a discussion

which has long agitated free thinkers but showed the width of his reading. An important work, *The Origins of Christianity* related his subject to the economic and social background out of which Christianity arose. Robertson had no patience with any philosophy which demanded some transcendent theory of morality, and his *Morals in World History* was a challenge to any viewpoint regarding ethical valuations as other than relative to a particular society. As a historian, Robertson published outstanding monographs upon both the French Revolution and the Reformation. Gradually, he had passed over to a fully Marxist position and the Munich *débauche* of 1938 led him to join the Communist Party for whose publications he came to write regularly. From a historical angle, he probably became one of the best Marxist theoreticians in the country and he applied his understanding to each new issue as it arose. Few who heard it will forget his masterly analysis at Conway Hall of the Berlin crisis and the sincerity with which he urged the case against going to war over Berlin. Robertson had visited the Soviet Union upon several occasions and had come to respect the stronger features of Soviet civilisation. He felt strongly that he had twice been fooled in his life by the politicians, in 1914 and again in 1945. It became with him a moral duty to see that another generation was not so fooled as had been his own.

At South Place, Archibald Robertson will long be remembered and respected for his lectures on the platform and for his writings, notably his monthly notes as *Custos* in the *Monthly Record*. Indeed, the present *Custos* always feels that it was a declension when circumstances into which it is not necessary to enter made him relinquish this column and created his far less adequate successor. Robertson was probably one of the ablest writers that the *Monthly Record* has ever possessed and the scaling down of his efforts in this direction was not only a loss to the intellectual life of the society but a very real loss to clarified and honest thought in general.

Robertson's position had not really altered over the years. As a rationalist, he related a nineteenth-century background to twentieth-century conditions. Anti-religious and anti-clerical, he represented a tradition which had been understood in their generations by W. J. Fox, Moncure Conway, Charles Bradlaugh, G. W. Foote and Chapman Cohen although it has never been in favour with the "reverent agnostics" or "liberal religionists" who, through the years, have attempted to equate religious heterodoxy with social respectability. Radical through and through, Robertson stressed the oneness of knowledge and experience. He sought to apply the same scientific method which he used in anti-theology to social or political considerations, an undertaking in which he was aided by his very real understanding of economic science. In many ways, he represented the best side of an older secularism whilst relating its essential positions to present-day issues. Of course, such a man had his critics and his opponents but it can only be said that not only was he well able to hold his own when attacked but that the content and method of the opposition merely illustrated the poverty of thought and lack of intellectual courage which lay behind it.

A great leader in the freethinking and humanist movements has passed away after a life which never stinted itself in any cause which he believed to be right and just. South Place can best honour his memory and such of his work as it was privileged to enjoy by carrying on the causes which he sought to forward at the point where the passing of life compelled him to lay down his arms. It is perhaps characteristic that his last public words were spoken at South Place, that his last article printed in the *Daily Worker* a few days after his death dealt with his old foe, the Church of England, and that his will directs his body to be given for purposes of medical research. Such was Archibald Robertson, forthright and thorough to the last.

Daniel Defoe: Journalist and Novelist

BY
RICHARD CLEMENTS

PART II

ABOUT THE MIDDLE of King William's reign, Defoe began his career as journalist and author. This meant that he was back on the course which would lead him to literary success and enduring fame. His germinal mind teemed with ideas to advance the economic, social and cultural progress of the English people. In 1698 he published his *Essays on Projects*, which, as G. D. H. Cole aptly wrote, "foreshadows much of his later economic and social writings".* The book contains suggestions, some of them centuries in advance of the public opinion of his time, on such matters as banking, the making and upkeep of a nation-wide network of roads, mutual aid provisions by and through friendly and insurance societies, asylums for the care of mentally sick persons, military colleges, academies, high schools for the education of women, and reforms of the law and practice in regard to bankruptcy.

Mr. Brian Fitzgerald, in his admirable study of Defoe,† has made an interesting comparison between the *Essays on Projects* and the *Anticipations* of H. G. Wells. "Both Wells and Defoe," he wrote, "were workers in the cause of human progress. Of Defoe, not less than of Wells, one can say that his genius was the sublimation of common sense, with the zeal of the reformer and the constructive power of the artist."

Time after time, in his prolific outpouring of minor writings, pamphlets and short treatises, of which some three hundred and fifty are known to exist, he explains, rounds out and applies a fertile stream of ideas and suggestions on science, trade, politics, government, war, peace, the reformation of manners, religion and the conduct of man's personal and social life. The broad spirit of this mass of writing is liberal, humanistic, and modern-minded. For confirmation of this view the reader has but to turn to such characteristic writings as *The Complete English Tradesman*, *New Voyage Round the World*, *A General History of Discoveries in the Useful Arts*, *A Plan of English Commerce*, and *The Family Instructor*. How topical some of these titles sound!

His aim was to write for, and be read by, the masses; and he succeeded in securing an enormous circulation for his ideas and opinions, as well as for the information and advice he circulated amongst his fellow-citizens during more than three decades. In those years he became the authentic voice of public opinion in these islands.

Reference must be made here to his founding and conducting of *The Review*. It "had its birth in tenebris", in other words, while he was in prison; it appeared at first as a small weekly of about eight pages; then within a year it came out on Tuesdays, Thursdays and Saturdays, and continued in that form for the next seven years. He introduced new and striking features into its pages, for example, polished essays on foreign affairs, trade and topical events, together with comments on home and foreign news. One new departure was the *Scandal Club*, a mixture of gossip and notes on the foibles, manners and morals of the time. This side of Defoe's work as a journalist was later to have its influence on both the form and contents of *The Tatler* and *The Spectator*. The success of *The Review* becomes all the more remarkable when we remember that, in the main, its many and varied articles were the products of Defoe's fertile brain and tireless pen. In those

**Persons and Periods*, p. 5.

†Daniel Defoe: *A Study in Conflict*, p. 213.

years he was also writing books and pamphlets on a bewildering range of subjects.

III. "THOSE SPLENDID YEARS"

His most famous work, *Robinson Crusoe*, appeared in the spring of 1719, when he was fifty-nine years of age. It was at once bought and read by thousands of people, especially amongst those of the middle and working classes, and has since kept its place in the lives and homes of English people, in this country and overseas, along with the Bible, Shakespeare, and Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*. The story was based upon Defoe's reading of Dampier's *Voyage Round the World* and the adventures of Alexander Selkirk, who himself related them to our author.

The events and incidents recorded in the book, such as the wreck of the ship, the description of the desert island, Crusoe's thrilling struggle for survival—symbolic of mankind's conflict with the blind forces of nature—and his tireless ingenuity in the adaptation of means to ends, his perseverance in building his "fortress", planting his fields, making his boat, and in the production of pottery, clothes, bread and weapons, his discovery of the footprints on the seashore, the battle with the savages, the meeting and companionship with his man Friday, and finally Crusoe's miraculous rescue and homecoming—these, and a hundred other strange adventures and coincidences, all combined to give the book an imperishable place in world literature.

We come now to the last splendid years in Defoe's life. They reveal no failure in his creative powers. Indeed, it seems by this time that writing had become second nature with him, for in this period he created one masterpiece after another. There were, to mention only his major creations: *Moll Flanders*, *A History of the Plague*, *Memoirs of a Cavalier*, *Roxana*, *History of Colonel Tuck*, *The Political History of the Devil*, and *A Tour Through the Whole Island of Great Britain*. The writing of almost any one of these works would have given the author reputation and fame in the annals of literature.

His brilliant successes brought into his personal life some measure of prosperity and quiet happiness. In 1724 he had built for himself a large and comfortable house in Stoke Newington, with good stables, a large and pleasant garden, and a library containing a fine collection of books. He had friends and admirers about him in retirement. Even in old age, though he suffered from gout and other ailments, he was fully possessed of his mental powers, and still found pleasure in driving out in his coach, in the cultivation of his garden, and in the pursuit of his various studies.

He died at a house in Ropemakers' Alley, Moorfields, on April 26, 1731, and was buried in Bunhill Fields. Defoe, the great Londoner, had found peace at last in the heart of the city in which he was born and that he loved so well. Henceforth his work and fame belonged to history. It is altogether fitting that his name should have been given to a glorious age in English literature.

(Summary of a lecture at Conway Hall)

Belief v. Religion

BY

PERCY G. ROY

WHAT A "BELIEF" is may be clear to everybody; but what is "religion"?

The definitions given in our various reference books are general and vague; their authors strive to cover both existed primitive beliefs and modern creeds so as to show that never have there existed men without "religion".

It is a crude hat trick, since not every body of belief is already a religion. The primitive belief in spirits is fundamentally different from the sophisticated worship of gods and although magical symbolism still lies at the bottom of religion, its form and importance has undergone a distinct change.

Let us first clear the ground of some statements which are repeated again and again and yet have no real foundation.

Religion—states the Catholic Encyclopedia—is a “personal relation” between the human being and his “creator”; yet every idol-worshipper has his individual fetish. By admitting that religion has grown up naturally, the author also admits by implication a line of evolution and decay; however, he makes the proviso that religion can be misdirected unless guided by divine revelation. Totemism, too, assumes initial revelation by the ancestor. A basically anthropomorphic image of the superhuman also existed in pre-religion and its reproduction in carving or painting, etc., is common to worship of spirits and gods alike; so is self-mutilation: in sacrificing to something which cannot be perceived, man—unlike any other animal—deliberately maims himself and destroys food or personal belongings.

In religion, however, the magical act becomes spiritualised to prayer, incantation and ritual. With primitive people prayers have no currency; if you expect any service, you have to pay in kind. When in 1881 the king of the Ashanti ordered the repair of buildings damaged through an earthquake, he had fifty virgins slaughtered and their blood mixed with the mortar. Workmen who in 1885 repaired the church of Holsworthy in Devon found an immured human skeleton of an obviously asphyxiated “building sacrifice” to the *genius loci*. The charge that the Eucharist was a human sacrifice had been levelled against the Church over and over again; faced with the task to find an explanation, the Synod of Ephesus (A.D. 431) declared that the “‘Incarnate Logos’ offered himself to God the Father for us for an *odor of sweetness*”—a dogma explicitly confirmed by the Council of Trent.

“Totemism differs from mature religion in that no prayers are used, only commands. The worshippers impose their will on the totem by the compelling force of magic. . . . The more advanced forms of worship, characteristic of what we call religion, presupposes surplus production, which makes it possible for a few to live on the labour of many. The headman ceases to be elective and becomes a hereditary chieftain. The totem is attended with prayer and propitiation, assumes human shape, and becomes a god. The god is to the community at large what the chief is to his subjects. He is endowed with all the qualities attributed to the ideal chief and worshipped with ceremonies modelled on the service of the real chief” (George Thomson, *Studies in Ancient Greek Society*).

Religion proper then is the spiritual expression of a society divided into classes of producers and appropriators, already literate, with a laid-down code of creed that has to be observed strictly and literally. There is an exercise of authoritative teaching in regard to the intellectual basis of religion: the things to be believed and to be accepted on authority. A code is set out to impose obligations and—in part mystical—restrictions (taboos), not for the purpose to attain results, but to “save the soul”.

For a long time it had been thought that fear created gods; this, however, only goes for the spirits of the magico-animistic stage, when for lack of insight into our environment much remained inexplicable. Fear created magic in order to influence nature-spirits, whilst gods cannot properly be influenced; their whims and caprices, however, remain “mysterious” and have to be appeased. Far from having been created from fear, gods *are* objects of fear. And an omnipotent, omnipresent god instils far greater fear than a specialised, local demon.

The priests like to prattle about "love", but the essence of religion is the "Fear of God"; the spirits turned gods when it became necessary to instil fear. Fear to behave socially? Not at all; unless man prior to all sophistry and all laws had not behaved as a good companion to his fellow-men—then very rare animals indeed—mankind would not have survived. Fear was a necessary corollary of class society where private property must be protected against the aspirations of the have-nots; the conception of an omnipotent, omniscient and all-seeing god, therefore, is so to speak the erecting of a scarecrow in the privately-owned field. It is the important social task of the god-conception to safeguard material reward in this world to one set and to console the other with spiritual reward hereafter. (This comfort may be vital for certain individuals to endure their suffering—it is not so for society as a whole.)

This fear, moreover, warrants the observation of class laws and of distinctive marks of the worshippers of a particular deity. This goes to show that before the rise of private property and class prerogatives there was no need for the "etherisation" of robust spirits into gods.

Beliefs are genuine opinions, accepted in confidence as true or presumed to be so; whereas religion is a creed enforced within a community, without proof, yet which has to be accepted without questioning. Both are opposed to knowledge, which "connotes logical certainty, not merely psychological conviction. It is plain that a man may believe what is false; but he cannot know what is false" (definition in Chamber's Encyclopedia). Beliefs may be accepted, rejected, altered or adjusted; religion has a rigid theology and any doubt is declared sinful.

The derivation of the term "religion" is still obscure. One school of thought derives it from latin *religare*, to bind fast—"a state of life bound by monastic vows; a religious duty or obligation" (*A New English Dictionary on Historical Principles*, Oxford 1914); Eric Partridge (*A Short Etymological Dictionary of Modern English*) traces the stem *LIG* back to "ob-LIG-are" and *lex*. *The Modern Library Dictionary of the English Language* (New York) and the Rev. Walter W. Skeat (*An Etymological Dictionary of the English Language*) state *religio* = piety, allied to *religens* = fear of gods, awe for the sacred, and "therefore not derived from *religere*, to bind, as often suggested, contrary to grammatical order". Also H. C. Wyld (*The Universal Dictionary of the English Language*, 1952) rejects *religare*, to bind, as "popular etymology" and gives latin *relegere* as origin whose meaning is: to gather, collect, hence read (cf. German *lesen*, i.e., collect the (small pieces of) beech-wood on which runic letters were scratched) literally, to re-read or go through over and over again in reading or thought), hence: ponder, meditate, to pay heed to (like Greek *alégein*). Ernest Weekley (*A Concise Etymological Dictionary of Modern English*, 1952) gives *religens* as "careful" in opposition to *negligens*. "From a verse quoted by Nigidius Figulus from an ancient writer, and preserved by Gellius (iv., 9), we learn that *religens* was actually used, as opposed to *religiosus*. He said: *Religentem esse oportet, religiosus nefas* 'it is right to be reverent, but do not be religious', that is, 'superstitious'" (F. Max Muller: *Natural Religion*).

Our progress in material production tends to colour our beliefs and ideas which change accordingly. Between the essence of early Christianity, Medieval Church and modern Christendom there is a development which can only be explained in terms of social history.

Religion is necessary for the man who has not yet gained full confidence in his own ability to "master his destinies" and therefore wants to "escape from the responsibility of making decisions by sheltering under the umbrella of Divine Authority" (Sir Julian Huxley).

The husbandman whose labours may be nullified in a moment through

some unforeseen catastrophe is the most tenacious believer, as God—defined by Haeckel as “a gaseous vertebrate”—is required in his process of producing. The less this ideological support is required, the more it fades away.* The eighteenth- and nineteenth-centuries were periods of stormy advances in science, industry and technology, hence the materialistic outlook in the philosophy of that period. Self-confidence has now been superseded by despair; like the “Sorcerer’s Apprentice” we are scared of utter destruction by the agencies we have unleashed. Hence the general flight into cloud-land with all sorts of escapism and idealistic philosophies.

When the English Royalists noticed that their materialistic outlook was adopted by the French Revolution in the Declaration of Human Rights, of Liberty and Equality, a wave of terror seized them and they fled back into the sheltering fold of the Church. However, the Fear of God could only be re-erected by false pretence and hypocrisy to serve as a model for the “lower stations”.

Similarly after the Russian October Revolution the U.S.A. bourgeoisie established sham religiosity—with hot-gospellers and “In-God-we-Trust” declarations—as a protective screen against the danger of infection. In its political connotation, religion is a “godsend” for the diehard (such as McCarthy, Dollfuss or Franco) thanks to its sanctified totalitarianism: it aims to perpetuate the past, suppress evolution and its claim to give unailing guidance which has to be accepted unquestionably.

“Patriotism,” said Dr. Johnson, “is the last refuge of the scoundrel.”
Not without religion, we may add.

Conway Discussions

AUTHORITY VERSUS FREEDOM IN MORAL BEHAVIOUR

10th October, 1961

THE CASE FOR Authority was presented by Major George Adcock, who began by stating that he believed in the mass conditioning of human minds and that all human progress since man first began to evolve was based upon this ability, the like of which no other species possessed. This mass conditioning occurred in three stages. The first stage lasted for about ten million years and was based upon the increasing size of the human brain. The bigger the human brain the better its chances of mass conditioning the minds of individuals up to the level of the family group of millions of years ago. The second stage began between 250,000 and 50,000 years ago when religious institutions began their task as the educational organs responsible for mass conditioning the minds of individuals up to sovereign group level.

With the advent of the A-bomb in 1945, we entered the third and final stage of human group evolution, the stage in which it is necessary to condition the human mind up to world level.

Morals were patterns of behaviour within the human group. They differed from all other group patterns in that they were evolved, not by sex, but by social transmissions based on the ability to transmit learned experience from one generation to another. Morals could not be understood unless one understood what an evolutionary ceiling was. All survival factors had their ceiling, and in the jungle the biological ability to learn by experience had a very low ceiling indeed. It was quite impossible for a species to evolve learning by experience into an evolutionary transmission system except in

*Increasing mechanisation in production, even in agriculture, together with the rising standard of life in Europe and U.S.A. has resulted in people becoming indifferent to religion.

the security of the trees, and even there a special factor had to occur to start the system off, but this could not be dealt with in so short a talk. Our ape forebears succeeded in evolving learning above its critical level or ceiling, and they were thus able to transmit a heritage of acquired experience from one generation to another. The first morals must have been morals of parental care learned by experience, and they began to evolve in the trees at least ten million years ago. Speech was quite unnecessary as a factor for evolving morals in the trees. Once such a group heritage of learning by experience had begun to evolve in the security of the trees, it would select the species for qualities, including a big brain, which would force the species out of the trees and at the same time, would fit the species for ground life and survival in an environment of greater danger. The two evolving levels (the group plus the biological individual) would enable the species to defend itself on the ground by means of weapons, group discipline, and morals or group defence and group cohesion. Once the species had been forced out of the trees on to the ground, the increased selective pressure would greatly accelerate both biological and social evolution, but the evolving social group would not be free to evolve independently until biological man had been perfected.

It is important to realise that the social group and the biological individual evolved concurrently, but each by means of different selective processes. The social group was selected for survival by the Darwinian process of selection based on competition, and which we will now have to distinguish by name of simple selection, whilst the biological individual was selected for survival values based on co-operation, and this unique selective process we will have to call super-selection. These two types of selection, the simple selection of the group for competition and the super-selection of the biological individual for co-operation, proceeded jointly because each had its own separate transmission system.

With the arrival of *homo-sapiens*, biological man reached his ceiling under the super-selective system and this set the human group free to evolve. It was now the turn of biological man to be held down and to have his further evolution inhibited. The explosive period of human group evolution began to take place and to accelerate. At this stage of group evolution, speed and religious force became two of the greatest factors in group survival, only the economic factor being of more importance.

Whilst armed force could subdue a group and bring it under the sovereign control of a centralised brain, it was unsuitable as a means of keeping a group in perpetual subjection. Killing within the group was too weakening a process and religion had to take over the task of keeping the individuals subjugated during times of peace. Religion dominated the ignorant peasants by mass conditioning their minds and was merely a very primitive educational system which used myth as an educational tool because it was not capable of explaining the facts of the world by scientific means. Sound morals can be evolved on very unsound reasoning. It is the morals that are important, and groups which failed to evolve sound morals tended to be eliminated when they came into competition with other groups.

Authority

Religions conditioned the minds of individuals to the fact that it was highly immoral to kill within the group itself, but at the same time they preached that it was every man's duty to defend his group and to kill its external enemies. Even today it is very difficult to explain the scientific reasons behind these two opposing morals, and in less enlightened days the task was quite impossible. Reliance on myth was thus more efficient than trying to give reasons supported by verifiable facts, and myth enabled

religion to dominate the minds of the ignorant peasants and to condition them with survival values that were essential to the group.

With the dropping of the A-bomb in 1945, both armed forces and supernatural religion reached their evolutionary ceiling. Together they had evolved morals of human group security up to nation state level, and it was now necessary to evolve morals up to world level, but this new task was quite beyond them. Armed force and supernatural religion were scientific selective mechanisms only as long as the elimination of unfit human groups by means of warfare was possible. Today we cannot afford to eliminate error by means of this type of competition.

Religion has been merely a primitive educational system and now it was the duty of modern educational systems to take over the task of evolving morals up to world level. If they are to do this successfully, a science of morals is necessary; our own educational system is quite unfitted to replace our armed forces as the new moral authority, but it should not be discouraged by this fact, for both the biological brain and weapons of defence had to begin to evolve morals when they were utterly unfitted to do so.

Individual teachers are all specialists. As specialists in their own particular subjects they are excellent, but the teaching profession has not produced a single "General" who could see whole and teach world morals. History went back for only 3,000 years which was a tiny part of the story of evolving life. The meaning of history was only to be found by studying human biological evolution. It was the principle of super-selection. The process of super-selection for co-operation now had to be applied to nation states and their morals, just as in the past it had been applied to biological man. World government or raising armed force up to world or U.N. level was the wrong moral solution, for that would lead to an excess of moral authority. Pacifism was also the wrong moral solution for it would lead only to an excess of instability and moral freedom.

What we needed were efficient educational systems the whole world over, each with its own science of morals. We had a world of about 100 nation states and if each state educational system produced its own world morals based upon a science of morals, they would all evolve in parallel. They would vary in detail from nation to nation, just as biological man had evolved in parallel the whole world over by externalising himself with a new environment based on education, so too, could a world of 100 nation states follow the same principle of super-selection and become specialised for co-operation.

This system of evolutionary selection would combine a sufficient degree of both Authority and Freedom, and the minds of individuals the world over would be mass-conditioned up to world level, and right mass-conditioning, said Major Adcock, was what we needed.

Freedom

Introducing the case for freedom, Mr. Amphlett Micklewright said that the proposition could not be proved or disproved by abstract or mathematical argument. He could only examine what had happened in history and suggest certain probabilities. Morals were merely social evaluation and moralities had differed from society to society and age to age. There is no such thing as a collection of propositions which could be labelled morals and are of universal application. All man could do in seeking human happiness and well-being was to apply to detailed questions of conduct, scientific methods of comparison and experiment. He pointed out that there was no sign of any universal ethic within human history. Even within variant Christian civilisations, applied moral decisions in such matters as sexual behaviour had differed notoriously. For these empirical reasons,

he denied the possibility of a science of ethics or the claim that there was any sign of absolute moral authority. Morality in any society could never be more than a matter of relative judgments. Conscience is not an entity but an emotion psychologically conditioned and shaped by heredity and environment.

Mr. Micklewright claimed that the facts of the case challenged entirely the outlook of Major Adcock. He stressed that biological evolution and social evolution were not identical in method or development, and urged that a great part of Major Adcock's claim was irrelevant to the basic matter under discussion.

Tuesday, 3rd October, 1961

IN OPENING HIS TALK entitled "Revolutionary Man in the Cosmic Age", Mr. Anthony Brooke, Rajah Muda of the former independent state of Sarawak, gave an interesting account of its history and development in response to requests from his audience.

Mr. Brooke referred to the revolution which now confronted mankind in this cosmo-nuclear age. The problem today was the spreading all over the world of international communism, the growth of power states, heading for an authoritarian world society.

Our new moral dilemma was the increasing realisation that values could not be preserved or defended by nuclear warfare. We were in the midst of perhaps the most crucial period of transition in human history. We could no longer live securely with our narrow nationalist points of view in a world of conflicting ideologies and fully armed sovereign states. We had failed to solve the problem of peaceful living and if humanity could not learn to live in a radically different way, it may cost us the total price. A new moral and spiritual regeneration and a complete psychological transformation was needed. We had to re-think in a different and non-violent way. Violence was manifested in terms of politics by the statesmen of the world, and whereas in the past it was thought that war had value, now we had come to the point where the use of power in this way was self-destroying and could not be continued. We needed to re-think completely the whole question of the exercise of power.

This was not only a question for governments to tackle: it was a matter for individual men and women. Either we leave the future of man to the militarily powerful nations, or as individual human beings, assert our inherent significance, and separately and together find the courage to assume the burden of responsibility for changing human history. The time demanded a world-wide revolution of the common man.

When the great powers were following a course which may lead to the wholesale massacre of mankind we needed urgently to stop what is happening and to work in a totally opposite direction from the Gadarene swine if civilisation was not to go the way of Greece and Egypt and the others. World Government and the protests were not enough. We needed to release our own creative energies. Only through a human revolution—a spiritual and moral revolution—could we attain an enduring social revolution.

Individual man seemed to be caught up in a struggle between two different systems of ideas, each seeking to establish its ascendancy over the other, each convinced the other is out to enslave and dominate the remainder of mankind. Yet the choice was not simply between two sets of ideas, between two civilisations, the Communist and the Western civilisations. We did not have to line up with either East or West. We needed to see ourselves beyond these barriers and work for a radical transformation of

life so that eventually there may emerge one true civilisation of man. It was only when we found a non-violent way of living life that we could make the contribution that is necessary today. Ghandi discovered a way which is being imitated in different parts of the world. Only a total non-violent revolution embracing all mankind could bring the full cleansing wave of transformation to the society of man, of which we were all so desperately in need. The hope for mankind lay in the spirit of unity and complete acceptance of the notion of universality.

Book Reviews

HUMANIST ANTHOLOGY, compiled by Margaret Knight, published for the Rationalist Press Association by Barric & Rockliff. 21s.

THE ANTHOLOGY, as a literary form, enables the compiler to make a critical choice of passages, in verse or prose, with a view of bringing to the reader's attention what is best in a particular literature. The Humanist tradition, in spite of the fact that those who represented it in literature and art were in the past usually frowned upon, and sometimes persecuted by the ecclesiastical and civil authorities, has made a noble contribution to human enlightenment and social progress. There was, then, a real need for a Humanist anthology to make available to readers in our day extracts from the great Humanists and Free-thinkers of the past and present.

Mrs. Margaret Knight, who is well known for her work as a lecturer in psychology at Aberdeen University, for her able exposition of scientific Humanism on the radio in 1955, and her missionary visits in the cause of free-thought to universities and societies in all parts of Britain, has essayed the task of compiling just such a Humanist anthology.

The book contains an excellent introductory chapter which makes plain Mrs. Knight's reasons for preparing the work, why the choice of writers to be represented in its pages was made, and the meaning she attaches to the word "Humanism". She tells us that in her experience many of the university students she met and talked with knew little or nothing about Humanism or, indeed, about Christianity, but nevertheless really wished to know more. So she came to the conclusion that it would be a good thing if selected passages from the Humanist classics could be made more accessible to the general reader. The outcome was the compilation of this informative and stimulating book.

In the opening paragraph of the first chapter of the anthology Mrs. Knight quotes a sentence written by Wittgenstein: "The meaning of a word is the way in which it is used." If the word "Humanist" is thus defined we are at once conscious that its meaning has changed appreciably since the turn of the century. She adds: "Today, to describe someone as a Humanist does not usually imply that he has been educated in *Litterae Humaniories*. Rather, it implies that he sees no reason for believing in a supernatural God, or in a life after death; that he holds that man must face his problems with his own intellectual and moral resources, without invoking supernatural aid; and that authority, supernatural or otherwise, should not be allowed to obstruct inquiry in any field of thought." This, it seems to me, is a most useful contribution to clearing up certain ambiguities that cling to the use of the word "Humanism" in these days.

"With these basic beliefs," Mrs. Knight explains, "there go commonly two corollaries. First, that virtue is a matter of promoting human well-being, not of obeying the commands of a superhuman lawgiver; and, second, that the mainsprings of moral action are what Darwin called the social instincts in those altruistic, co-operative tendencies that are as much

part of our innate biological equipment as are our tendencies towards aggression and cruelty." I have drawn attention in these two paragraphs to the useful lead Mrs. Knight gives to us all on the importance of making clear the meaning of the words we use in our discussions of Humanism.

The anthology itself tells the story of great ideas that have made history and traces the slow growth of a Humanist tradition across the centuries. The remarkable series of extracts taken from the writings of eminent Humanists and Freethinkers, and re-printed in chronological order, belongs in time from the Age of Confucius to the present day. Thus the reader is shown that the great classical civilisations of China, Greece and Rome were rooted in Humanist values, derived from a far older tradition than Christianity. Unhappily, these values were obscured during the long night of the Dark Ages—for more than a thousand years, that is to say—but they show forth again during the Renaissance, became influential during the American and French Revolutions in the eighteenth century, and today have gained fresh impetus and strength in alliance with the powers of Science.

The reader must savour for himself the many passages of great power and beauty in this book. Each one of us will find in its pages ideas, reflections and fresh insight to enrich our own knowledge of Humanist philosophy, ethics and action.

We commend *Humanist Anthology* to our readers.

GEORGE GISSING AND H. G. WELLS: A Record of their Friendship and Correspondence, by Royal A. Gettman. Rupert Hart-Davis, London, 1961. 25s.

THIS BOOK will be read with delight by confirmed admirers of Gissing and Wells. It will also be of use and value to new readers as an introductory study to the work of these two notable English men of letters. For, let us make no mistake about this, their writings will continue to be, so long as men cherish the ideas of free inquiry, self-government and social progress, potent factors in the spiritual and ethical life of present-day society.

A few words descriptive of the contents of the volume are necessary. In its pages there are brought together some hundred letters written by one or the other during the years of their friendship. There are also some essays and reviews by Wells on Gissing's work as a novelist. The whole of this material has been admirably edited by Mr. Royal A. Gettman, who has presented the reader of this comely volume with factual, informative and stimulative reading. The charm of the book lies in the contrasting personalities of the two men, who in their writings and relationships reveal a heart-warming friendship, which is marked by mutual respect, sympathy and responsiveness.

They first met at the dinner of the Omar Khayyam Club at Frascati's in November 1896, when Gissing was thirty-nine years of age and Wells about thirty, and their association lasted to the time of Gissing's death at the end of 1903. Both men belonged to the first generation to have matured in the climate of opinion created by Darwin's *Origin of Species*. Then, too, as Mr. Gettman in his Introduction proceeds to remind us: "They were separated from their elders by a break in religious belief and by the suspicion that literacy, self-interest, inventions, and commerce were not enough, and that the confidence expressed in the Great Exhibition was not fulfilled by the Diamond Jubilee." In other words, Gissing and Wells, as their early novels and other writings show, turned to science for the answers to the common needs of the day.

Both were also faced by the personal and social problems of young men with eager minds and soaring ambitions but possessing only thin purses and

scarcely any family or social influence. The lives of the two men were also caught up in the tangle of social problems which arose in the closing decades of the Victorian era—the threat to peace from the development of imperialism and jingoism, the difficulties of individual adjustment in a time of new ideas and changing values, and the creation of a satisfactory relationship between a man and a woman in which sexual passion found reconciliation with an enduring affection, compatibility and the responsibilities of family life.

RICHARD CLEMENTS

Correspondence

To the Editor, *The Monthly Record*.

Humanist Group Action

Dear Sir,

Allow me the liberty to comment on your report of the R.P.A. Conference on Africa.

A heated debate was conducted at the conference on the theme that mere discussion and increased understanding were not sufficient to fulfil R.P.A.'s social rôle. A broadly based resolution stressing chiefly the need for increasing secular education and giving support for the Prime Minister for liberal attitudes, in colonial territories, was proposed. Some of the R.P.A. apparently sought to evade the issue.

This resolution was, however, subsequently signed by conference participants* as individuals and sent off, under the auspices of Humanist Group Action, receiving acknowledgments from the R.P.A. Board of Directors, the national Press, and from the Prime Minister.

Accordingly, it might well be considered worthy of mention in the *Monthly Record*.

Yours faithfully,
G. ENGLAND.

*Not necessarily R.P.A. members.—*Ed.*

South Place News

Sunday Social

On October 15 Miss Gladys Farnell once again delighted her audience when she introduced the programme "Egypt's Glory". After giving a short but comprehensive history of one of the world's oldest civilisations from ancient times to the present, she particularised this by showing a fascinating collection of colour slides.

Her presentation was made in the graphic manner that we have come to expect from this esteemed member. Indeed, we might almost say that it exceeded our expectations, if that were possible.

Egypt's glory is very well known yet Miss Farnell brought it vividly to life.

Society's Other Activities

Conway Discussions. Tuesdays in the Library at 7.30 p.m.

- December 5—H. J. Blackham, B.A. (Secretary, The Ethical Union): "Epicurus, born 341 B.C.—his Philosophy in A.D. 1961."
.. 12—Frederic Jackson, F.R.A.M. (Chorus-master, London Philharmonic Choir): "The Development of Christmas Music" (with illustrations).

December 19—Hector Hawton (Editor, *The Humanist*): "The Uses and Abuses of Religion."

January 2—Gladys Farnell, M.Sc.: "Egypt's Glory"—Colour slides and Narrative.

Sunday Social

December 17, in the Library at 3 p.m. Joyce Langley and G. C. Dowman will present a musical programme: "An Hour with the Poets"—a selection of songs set to poems of many of our best known poets.

The Poets

Milton
Tennyson
Byron
R. L. Stevenson
Rossetti
Masefield
W. S. Gilbert
W. A. Davies

The Singers

Valerie Kitchen
Irene Clements
Ted Inglis
William Bowen
Norman Hodgkinson
G. C. Dowman

Accompanist: Joyce Langley

Tea will be served at 3.45 p.m. Members and friends are welcome.

Thursday Evening Social

December 14, in the Library, at 7 p.m.: Whist Drive. Members and friends are cordially invited.

Country Dancing

Saturday, December 16, in the Library, 3-6 p.m., in conjunction with the Progressive League. Instructress, Eda Collins. A charge of 2s. is made. Everyone welcome.

Conway Hall, Library

The Librarian will be in attendance on Sunday mornings and Tuesday evenings.

Young Humanists. Meet in the Library on Mondays at 7.30 p.m.

December 4—"The Bow Group and the Future of Toryism", introduced by John MacGregor.

„ 11—Informal meeting.

„ 18—"Films are Good for You", introduced by Christopher Brunel.

Missing!

John Leslie would welcome the return of the book "In Search of Purpose" that he lent to one of the audience at a meeting of *Conway Discussions*. Please leave it in the office at Conway Hall!

Rambles

Boxing Day ramble in Epping Forest, December 26. Meet 11.15 a.m. at Loughton Station, Central Line.

A seven-mile walk in the forest; bring lunch; tea will be provided at Loughton in time to catch the 5.30 train to town. Leader: Mr. B. O. Warwick meets the party at Loughton.

Sunday, December 3. Visit to Commonwealth Institute to see films on the North Pole; ski-ing; and the Isle of Man. Meet at 2.30 p.m., main hall of Commonwealth Institute, turning off Exhibition Road, Kensington, S.W.7. Leader: Miss W. L. George.

SOUTH PLACE

THE South Place Ethical Society is a progressive movement dating from 1793 which today advocates an ethical humanism, the study and dissemination of ethical principles and the cultivation of a rational religious sentiment, and believes that the moral life may stand independently in its own right.

We invite to membership all those who have abandoned 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 Library is available and all members receive the Society's journal, *The Monthly Record*, free. The Sunday Evening Chamber Music Concerts founded in 1887 have achieved international renown.

The minimum subscriptions are: Members, 12s. 6d. p.a.; Associate Members (ineligible to vote or hold office), 7s. 6d. p.a.; Life Members, £13 2s. 6d.

Services available to Members and Associates include: The Naming Ceremony of Welcome to Children, the Solemnisation of Marriage, Memorial and Funeral Services.

The Story of South Place, by S. K. Ratcliffe (5s. from Conway Hall), is a history of the Society and its interesting development within liberal thought.

OFFICERS:

Secretary: J. Hutton Hynd

Hon. Registrar: Mrs. T. C. Lindsay

Hon. Treasurer: A. Fenton

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Executive Secretary: Miss E. Palmer

Editor, "The Monthly Record": G. C. Dowman

Address: Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London, W.C.1. (Tel.: CHAncery 8032)

MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION FORM

To THE HON. REGISTRAR,

CONWAY HALL, RED LION SQUARE, LONDON, W.C.1.

I desire to become a *Member/Associate Member of South Place Ethical Society and enclose entitling me (according to the Rules of the Society) to membership for one year from the date of enrolment.

NAME

(BLOCK LETTERS PLEASE)

ADDRESS

DATE

SIGNATURE

*Cross out where inapplicable.