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**Dr. Cyril Bibby in interview with Dr. Max Blythe  
Hull, 24th August 1981, Interview I**

**Cyril Bibby was perhaps the greatest health educator of the 1940s and 1950s, and so much else. I recently re-read his biography of T.H. Huxley and then went in search of other writings by this remarkable author and educationalist. There are works on the art of the limerick, education, history, the classic health education works of the 1940s and 1950s and a remarkable collection of sonnets dedicated to his wife on the occasion of their Golden Wedding. While in Yorkshire in 1981 I had an opportunity to spend some time with Cyril Bibby and ask him about those early years in health education in London during the war. MB**

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MB You didn't go directly to the Central Council, but you eventually became part of it. Can you tell me about that?

CB Yes. What happened was there an organisation known as the British Social Hygiene Council which was concerned particularly with education in connection with venereal disease and sex education and it was to the BSHC, as we called it, that I went as Education Officer early in 1941. Not very long after I went there, I just don't remember exactly when, there was a reorganisation and we moved and joined into the Central Council for Health Education.

MB How were you recruited to the British Social Hygiene Council?

CB Well, this was a rather interesting situation. I was without a job. In fact, I had been sacked from my job in a grammar school because of my political and anti-war activities and I was perusing papers for any job that would bring in something to keep the wolves from the door, there wasn't a social security system in those days. I saw an advertisement requiring an Education Officer with a range of attributes; knowledge of biology, there were thousands of better biologists than me able to lecture fairly well but I knew I could; able to write simply, I think I could; and persona grata with trade unions and labour organisations which I was, and I just thought my God, that's me. I didn't think I had the slightest chance, but I wrote and applied.

MB How were you finally recruited? What was the process?

CB Well, there was a very remarkable woman, a Mrs. Sybil Neville-Rolfe, and if she

was still alive, she wouldn't mind me describing her as a bit of an old tartar because I told her so to her face, but a wonderful, wonderful woman. I had an invitation to meet her for lunch, I have an idea it was in Nottingham but I am not sure. I went off and she gave me a very good lunch. She was rather abrupt, almost rude, to me in her usual manner, told me how deplorable she thought my opinions were and said "But when I read your application, I thought I would at least have a look at you." Whereupon she dismissed me and I went home. Then a week or so later I got a letter asking me to go up to London for a formal interview when I was appointed.

MB So, you go from Chesterfield to London. What did you find when you got there? What kind of organisation had you stepped into?

CB Well, a small one of course, compared to what the Central Council for Health Education became very, very quickly indeed after that. There was Mrs. Sybil Neville-Rolfe who had more or less founded the thing. She had, I gather, in the First World War, when she was a young society debutante, been disgusted by the fact that nobody in the medical profession or the government would do anything about venereal disease. It was an improper subject. So, this delicately nurtured young lady decided that something should be done, did it, and formed the Social Hygiene Council. It was a small organisation and she was the driving force. There was Sir Drummond Shields, a medical adviser, there was another rather marvellous woman who there might be an opportunity to say something about later, a Miss Violet Swaisland, who looked after the education work, and there was the marvellous man of all jobs, a Mr. Litchfield, who drove the vans, repaired the cine apparatus, drove you to anywhere that was needed even when there was an air-raid on, and there were one or two others. There was not, I am glad to say, what you would find in virtually any organisation today, about two administrators for everybody actually doing the job. The size of the staff was by present day standards just absurdly small and thank God it was, so that we could get on with things without doing a lot of non-sensical bureaucracy.

MB Now, we've talked about you going to the British Social Hygiene Council, when did that become amalgamated with the Central Council for Health Education?

CB I wish I could tell you but I don't remember the date. The only thing I can say is that it seemed to happen fairly soon, at a guess I would say 1942, but I may be wrong.

MB I think this was late 1941, so you are close. What do you remember were the changes then?

CB Well, the strange thing is that I've learned more recently there had already been a Central Council for Health Education, of which I knew virtually nothing, and we were apparently to judge from the name taken over by it, at least the name was Central Council for Health Education. In fact, I think it must have been the equivalent of what commercially, as I think I said to you, was a sort of reverse takeover bid because it just seemed to me that the Social Hygiene Council staff just got rather more room, rather more typewriters, rather more staff and just carried on.

MB Did you have new premises?

CB No, no. We didn't move the premises. The Social Hygiene Council did I know have some store somewhere in the country, I can't remember what it was, but we worked in Tavistock House from when I was appointed early in 1941, in BMA House with the Secretary of the British Medical Association, Dr. Charles Hill, later Lord Hill of course, on the corridor above and in the most intimate connection with them, and it just seemed as if we had changed our name and now had a lot more money.

MB What were the duties at that time for you as an Education Officer?

CB There was no business then of everybody having to be given a job description and getting redundancy pay if they had to ask you anything beyond it. My job was as a biologist with personal experience in education to do all I could to promote health education. Initially, with the Social Hygiene Council, education in connection with sex and venereal disease, and from the day of the change all aspects of health education, and it involved almost everything. I'll be quite honest and say one of the earliest things I did was to manoeuvre the need to get the various existing pamphlets re-written because I didn't think that they were terribly good. Then, there was giving talks in schools and in factories.

MB Can I just ask you about the pamphlets. Was there a wide range or were they largely again about sex education?

CB Well, of course, initially they were exclusively about sex education. I don't recall the titles exactly, but they were titles such as "Facts on Sex for Girls", "Facts on Sex for Boys", "The Truth about Venereal Disease", they weren't the actual titles because I can't recall them but they were the sort of things, eight to sixteen pages about demi-octavo size, and the intentions were absolutely good. I just thought they were rather stilted and upper-class in their approach, which wasn't surprising in view of the people who had done them, you see. So, that was one of the first things that I did. Soon, one was involved in a fantastic range of things. To begin with, now that we were going to be a big national organisation, we had to set up area offices all over the country and I seemed to be forever training here, there and everywhere, meeting the medical officers for health, directors of education, leaders of youth organisations and then being involved, although it wasn't my decision, in the appointment of regional officers. There were more than a dozen but I don't remember exactly how many there were all over the country, and it became very rapidly a quite major organisation and we just worked all the hours God sent.

MB When you are talking about a major organisation, at the centre there must have been power. Where do you think this power came from? Was this from the Ministry of Health or was this from the medical officers of health as a league?

CB Well, I think I would have to say, to be quite honest, that the driving power in the early times was from the three or four members of staff, particularly Mrs. Neville-Rolfe.

MB She was a law unto herself?

CB She was a law unto herself, very much so; this Miss Swaisland I referred to, and myself. Then a medical officer or adviser, I forget the title, was appointed, a Dr. Isaac Frost, who left after some time and was replaced by Dr. Robert Sutherland, but we were of course subject to the policy decisions of the Council itself, which had the great good fortune to have Dr. Temple as its president, I think it was.

MB Can you reminisce a little about Dr. Temple?

CB Oh, Archbishop Temple, he was a wonderful man. He looked exactly like an overgrown Billie Bunter with a wide beaming face and wide spectacles, really very like Billie Bunter. He was always quietly spoken, very intelligent and learned of course, good humoured but incisive, and as tough as you make them inside, with a great wit which helped greatly. I recall one particular thing. There was a certain Yorkshire alderman, a very powerful man and very much credit to him, but he was very much one of the people who boasted of saying what he thought, and I can remember one Council meeting with Archbishop Temple in the chair when this alderman spoke up and said "Mr. Chairman, I am a Yorkshireman and I say what I think." And quietly, just enough to be heard, Dr. Temple said "Oh, I haven't the slightest objection to the Alderman saying what he thinks. I do very much object that he thinks what he says." And that's the sort of way that he used to deal with things so quietly and may I say that I personally found him a good friend. This is being rather autobiographical but I was a young man and I was lucky to be appointed to this job when I was only twenty-seven. It was rather extraordinary and it could probably only happen in wartime, and to have a man in that position who was so willing and helpful. If I may give an example, when I wanted to be quite sure what were the views of certain Roman and Greek authors he, the Archbishop of Canterbury, was willing for me to go along to Lambeth Palace and to explain to me exactly what Virgil had meant by something. He was a wonderful man in that way.

MB So, you felt the Council was under a good president?

CB Yes.

MB Was it Sir Alan Daly in the chair?

CB Certainly for part of the time. I'm not sure whether he was throughout the six years I was there.

MB Did he not give way to Charles Hill?

CB Of course he did. You see how my memory is failing. Sir Alan Daly was Medical Officer for the LCC and he had as a matter of fact been Medical Officer in Hull where I came many, many years later. He had a rather beaming face and if I remember metal rim specs and a bald pate, but he also like so many of the big men I've known had mastered the art, which I sought to master, that if you wanted to be really rude to anybody, you always did it in the politest possible manner and he was very effective in chalking people off in such a way, so quietly and so politely, that

they didn't know what had hit them and couldn't find anything whatsoever to complain about. Now Lord Hill, as he now is, was a very different chap. He was very exuberant, also with a jolly face like the other two, and if you wished to be unkind you would say that he liked to throw his weight about. Actually, I think he perhaps did, but he did it to very good effect. He would come into the room with a booming voice. Anybody who remembers the 'Radio Doctor' would know that lovely, juicy voice, the only voice I've known quite as juicy was J.B. Priestley. Now, he was an immensely valuable chairman and in fact a much more important influence really than the Archbishop of Canterbury because our offices were in BMA House, he was there as secretary, and it was just a matter of going up or down the stairs for me to go and see him and although he was so busy I could always ring up and say "Can you spare a moment?" And he nearly always could. I've always found it's busy people who can spare time.

MB Just looking at these central people in the development of this Council, did you get the feeling that a lot was up to you? Did you take ideas to the Council table and they rubber-stamped them or did ideas really come from Hill and you then had to ferret your way through to application?

CB There was never any rubber-stamping. This was a powerful Council, again I can't after these years remember its constitution, but there were representatives from the Ministry of Health, the Ministry of Education and from the various councils of medical authorities and education authorities, it was a powerful body of people and they never rubber-stamped anything. On the other hand, only on one or two occasions did I ever have the feeling that anybody was being obstructive. It must have just been I think, even though this sounds immodest, that on the whole the proposals the staff put to the Council seemed to them to make good sense. Now, as to where the ideas came from. Hill of course had ideas, but primarily his job was the British Medical Association and I think his contributions to programmes and plans were very rarely from anything he submitted, it was through his influence when various members of staff might be talking to him three or four times a week. No, the main plans after Mrs. Neville-Rolfe went were worked out by three people; by the medical adviser, first Isaac Frost and then Robert Sutherland, the Miss Swaisland I referred to, I forget her exact title but it was something like Womens Education Officer, and myself. To most people working in big organisations today, you just can't conceive the freedom in the war years. You see, nobody wanted to waste manpower then and the degree of freedom that one had to draw up plans was remarkable and exhilarating. They were examined by the Central Council but there was never any rubber-stamping and very rarely, as a matter of fact, was anything rejected.

MB From your point of view, as an educationalist, and from my point of view, from an education bias, I wonder whether you were impressed by the heavy weight of medical representation on that Council that was to do with health education? It seems to me that education had a very raw deal?

CB Some of the men impressed me as impressive. Certainly, I was impressed by it. May I say, I don't think I was ever awed by it. Now, in terms of representation, it is quite true that the medicals could have run everything themselves. I happened to

think, it sounds arrogant as I was only a young man in my twenties at the time, that nine doctors out of ten hadn't the faintest idea what to do about health education. Fortunately some of those at the top, Alan Daly and Charles Hill, shared my view and I think temperamentally I'm not easily awed although looking back it is rather extraordinary. My main impression was that the more important medical men, although themselves maybe not having thought about this or that educational approach, were very quick to recognise it when it was put to them and to agree. It wasn't often that they didn't agree with things.

MB Coming to characters and personalities in those early days, were there any other people that come to mind that we should discuss at this time? I'm thinking about the flavour of the Council at that time?

CB I mentioned him in passing and I'm going to mention him again, this man Litchfield, who did everything. So often when people are thinking of the history of things, they get the directors and those whose names appear on agendas and so on, but after Mrs. Neville-Rolfe and the medical adviser and myself, the organisation depended more on Litchfield than on anybody else. He kept all our equipment up to date, he transported from place to place and he arranged that wherever any meetings were taking place, lighting conditions were right. He would drop what he was doing and run you to the other side of London if you wanted it, or even on odd occasions when an air raid had disrupted a railway, I'd say "Look, I've got to get up to Leeds, can you run me up tonight?" And he'd drop everything. So, I'm going to mention Litchfield as one of the key figures although he won't appear probably anywhere in any of the Council's documents except on their pay list. Did you mean centrally or regionally?

MB Any others that you remember.

CB It was of course a great help that Sir Martin Rosevere was at the Board of Education, I think he was Senior Chief Inspector although I'm not sure of his exact position, but anyway he pulled a lot of strings and since we were engaged in getting underway in about twelve months the sort of expansion which in peace time might take five or six years, it was always important to know who were the people who could ease the path. Sir Martin Rosevere was important.

MB Can you explain a little bit more fully about 'easing the path' at the Board of Education? Where were the difficulties?

CB Well, the difficulties were not especially with the Board of Education, they were everywhere. I'm speaking now in particular during the early years when our concentration was on sex education. The Government centrally through the Board of Education wouldn't back up any teacher who did anything about sex education in schools. The National Union of Teachers and the National Association of Teachers were opposed to it. I mean, it wasn't especially difficulties with the Board of Education, wherever I turned I found blank walls of opposition and one would have to find a crack here and a crack there and then find somebody who shared your opinion who would pick up a hammer from inside and give a crack from the inside. Martin

Rosevere was simply a broad-minded man. I was very ignorant at this age as to the workings of the Government. I had just come from being a teacher and then being out of work and the Civil Service is a complex thing and as I very rapidly learnt, in the upper echelons at least, manned by extremely intelligent and extremely capable people and when you were wanting something changed you had to manoeuvre everywhere you could. Martin Rosevere was such a broad-minded man and he would tell me which under-secretary dealt with this and which principal dealt with that. It was simply that it enabled me to do in a week what otherwise might have taken me three months.

MB But, as far as sex education was concerned, what kind of doors did he open? Do you think he just helped you to meet people who were sympathetic?

CB No. No doors in particular. His great thing was, I suppose to use the famous Snow phrase, that he was the first person who showed me a bit around the corridors of power. I mean, that was really all it was. He gave me a map of the corridors of power.

MB When you eventually got underway, who were the educationalists in the country who really gave the whole situation credence?

CB Well, I'm going to use the word education as you've done, that is to say, irrespective of whether they were involved in teaching or in administration. First, of course, one that's already been mentioned, Sir Alan Daly of the LCC. He was very powerful amongst medical officers. There was one other medical officer I recall whose own county he did a great deal in and by his example got others to, and that was Fraser Brockington who was Medical Officer of Health for Warwickshire. Incidentally, he later went to Manchester University and started the first nursing degree course in this country. Now, when one knew that there were one or two medical officers who were keen for things to be done in sex education and in health education generally and who would persuade the committees to put money in the budget for meetings and the purchase of literature and the hiring of films and so on, he would report what was doing at meetings of his medical officers and the word got round and then another medical officer would invite you. He and Alan Daly stand out rather among the medical officers in my memory, I may be doing an injustice to others because this is many years ago, but they are the two who stand out in my mind. As directors of education of course there was also Sir Graham Savage who was Director of Education for the LCC which was a vastly powerful thing, but out in the country there were four that come to my mind, one of them later became known through the Newsom Report. John Newsom was at that time Director of Education for Hertfordshire; there was a man called Blake who was Director of Education for Burton-on-Trent; there was H.G. Stead, Director of Education of the then tiny little authority of Chesterfield and there was Maurice Harrison of Oldham. Now, in the main, these are not names very well known. I am just saying these were people who welcomed us with open arms. Apart from the LCC, they were all small authorities, but they welcomed us with open arms and they were willing to say what other directors of education it might be worth approaching next, they helped the snowball on its way and the snowball grew at a fantastic rate.

MB Can you just give me some idea of just what you were trying to do for sex education initially to get it off the ground?

CB Yes, I've got a very clear idea about this. Perhaps it was arrogant of me, but I'd never given any special thought to sex education. I must explain, to me at first this was a bread ticket, I was out of work and needed a job, but once in it I thought I should do the job properly and I started reading everything that I could find that had been done about sex education, and I didn't think anything of it. Generally, it was one of two types, either the sacramental approach, sex is so beautiful in effect that one mustn't tell you anything much about it, so to speak, or there were others who thought that if you taught people the anatomy and physiology of sex, that was sex education. I can recall very clearly when I was addressing a meeting of biology teachers under some authority, I don't know which it was, and one said "Well, at our school we deal with this matter perfectly satisfactorily. We tell our children all about the sexual organs of the rabbit and the breeding and so forth and we then tell them that the organs in the human are the same." And I can recall replying "Well, that's absolutely fine if your aim is to persuade children to grow up so that they behave sexually as rabbits do with the same promiscuity and the same breeding habits." And at that the meeting rather quivered for a moment. You see, as I say, it was either too beautiful and too sacramental for words or it was a matter of the mechanics of intercourse and it seemed to me since I happened to hold a very high view of sex, that it was important without being portentous, to build into the very fabric of sex education at every stage and understanding that homo sapiens is a rather different creature from a rabbit, capable of much else, and that therefore attitudes and sentiments, not sentimentality, and a feeling of responsibility and, these days it's an unpopular word but I stand by it, self-discipline were necessary too. I'm now thinking more of youth groups and younger groups of factory girls and so on, that although you have all these sexual urges now in your later teens and it's very natural and we hope that one day you will be very happy, you don't say "I want it and I want it now." You say "What is it that in the long run would be best." I believed, and I still believe, although some people regarded me as a libertarian in sex education, my name was mud in many circles, that it only reaches its best if there is restraint and discipline and that was what I was trying to build in.

MB So, that was your basic theme and your basic drive when you came into sex education. You had five years with the Central Council for Health Education. What do you think you achieved in that period? Did you go far along the way towards your aims?

CB You mean specifically in sex education or generally?

MB Specifically in sex education.

CB Yes we did, we went quite a long way. When I say I, you've asked about me, but there were other people involved too. We worked out in very considerable detail, gradually building on our experience of literally talking with thousands of schoolchildren, thousands of youth clubs, thousands of factory workers and people in



the Forces and so on. Of course as the questions being asked came in, one found a great deal from them as to what were the major concerns, so we were continually altering, and I do think that even after all these years by the beginning of 1943 we really had got a very good scheme of sex education going, dealing with the psychology, the sociology, the ethics and so on and so forth, and we did for some years achieve a great deal. I am very sad to say that I believe that a very large part of the ground that was gained was lost between about 1960 and 1975 because I found myself as the person who all my life was regarded as the rather shocking sort of revolutionary, being myself not shocked, I don't think anything shocks me, but rather disgusted with the way in which the liberty that we'd fought for seemed to me to be becoming license and libertinism. Now, that may write me off as an old reactionary but, for example, whereas we had hoped to persuade people of the possibilities of immense joy and of, I use the word spiritual although I've no special religion but there's no other word, spiritual enrichment and family responsibility and so on, I have a feeling that a large part of that ground has been lost and that it's just a question of what's the pleasure now. Converting sex from what we'd hoped would be a lifelong joy into a rather enjoyable game of tennis for the afternoon, trivialising it. I may be just old-fashioned.

MB You talked of the youth clubs and groups and the mill girls, what about the schools themselves, did they take it on lock, stock and barrel in your time?

CB No, not lock, stock and barrel, but to an astonishing degree. Mind you, we did work very hard. We were able to get a fair degree of access to radio. All over the country one took the opportunity to address teachers' conferences, county teachers' conferences, county youth leaders' conferences and so on, and it became very clear that large numbers of teachers, youth leaders and social workers were feeling already that something serious should be done about sex education but were frightened off by two things. Firstly, as long as the ministry and the teachers' organisations and so on were opposed to it, they were afraid they wouldn't get any backing if they ran into professional trouble and secondly, they didn't know how to set about it. Both of those things had to be done. Quite quickly, the ministry and then the teachers' organisations became slightly favourable and quite quickly, with these hundreds of thousands of people we spoke to, a very great deal was done and there were literally hundreds of schools all over the country that were doing a great deal in sex education. We got a lot.

MB Just to quantify that because you were obviously doing an enormous amount, how many times a week would you actually speak to groups on this kind of a theme?

CB Well, how you average it out, I don't know. You see, sometimes I would spend a week in the office in London planning a campaign in Northumberland or something of that sort, but there certainly were days when I would perhaps get a night train up or even a sleeper train up and go and see a director of education at half past nine. He would have arranged a meeting of twenty of his heads for eleven o'clock, I'd perhaps have fixed in the planning a meeting in the lunch-hour with the Women's Co-operative Guild or a seroptimist or a trade union group, then perhaps an afternoon talk that some manufacturer had agreed for me to give during the tea-break of his people and then

maybe a youth club in the evening. I mean, there were many occasions when I'd speak to six or seven groups in a day. Now, don't misunderstand me, I'm not suggesting that I was doing this all the time, but that was the sort of tempo that we worked at.

MB How did the time divide between London and the provinces? Did you find yourself going out of town a lot, about fifty/fifty?

CB I can't quantify.

MB Just roughly.

CB Round about fifty/fifty I suppose but I can't quantify it, and it was very tiring, very hard and I hated being away from home. However, you see, the thing that one has to bear in mind is I was aware how lucky I was to be being allowed to do this work that I was enjoying when nearly all my friends were either being submarined or were being shot down in aeroplanes or in the trenches. Nearly all my friends naturally of my age group were in the war and one was aware of how terribly lucky one was. I mean, the fact that you might be travelling somewhere on the railway line which had been bombed two miles ahead or the time I arrived at my hotel to find that it had been bombed, in the war time conditions one felt one was lucky, so one didn't mind.

MB Given your immense interest in writing, as a writer, how far did your writing support you in that campaign to establish sex education in schools?

CB Now, of course, I'm not the person to judge, it would sound immodest if I tried to.

MB Try. I would like to have your view on it.

CB I'll say what I think and if it sounds boastful, that's it, but it's the best objective judgement I can do. I poured out articles to every educational journal I could, to *The Lancet*, to the Eugenic Society, to any number of little local papers like *The South Wales Echo*, I just poured out articles. I must in those years have written literally two or three hundred articles and from the amount of correspondence and enquiries that came in, I am sure that the writing that was done had an enormous effect. Now, this sounds you see as if I'm talking just about me, but don't forget there was Sutherland and before him Frost, that there was Miss Swaisland, that there were the office people, that we had our regional officers eventually and that we had hundreds of lecturers on our lecture list. However, I'm sure that it is true that the fact that I have a fairly facile pen in that if I wrote an article, I would sit down and write it and maybe read it through and correct one punctuation and then shove it off to be typed and that's how they would just churn them out, helped. Now, of course, a lot of people think that you can't write well if you write quickly. I don't believe it. But, whether for good or ill, I just churned things out in every little journal and every little local paper you could think of.

MB What of broadcasting?

CB Yes. I loved broadcasting.

MB And you were good at it?

CB Well, I hope so. At any rate, they kept on inviting me back again. I enjoyed it and I think it went over well, everybody always said so. I ought to mention here by the way, another person who played a part in this, a man called Richard Palmer, who had been a biology teacher and who later became an Inspector with the LCC. I with him, because he was the prime mover, year after year with some minor modifications, we did a course on human biology for schools in which human reproduction was just worked in along with everything else and a very small thing, which actually was my idea and not his, was that whenever you got books in those days dealing with the organs, they always did the reproduction ones at the end, the grand climax. We quite deliberately in this, and in my popular children's' books, put it somewhere in the middle and then came on to something else which psychologically seemed to be an important thing because otherwise it was ah, now we're coming up to the grand climax, so to speak. But, we did quite a lot on radio. There wasn't of course television operating then.

MB You mentioned earlier, if I can turn aside from what I was going to do, the Eugenic Society and that you forwarded publications for their journal. What kind of an influence did the Eugenic Society have on health education?

CB As a society, really very little. The great days of the Eugenic Society had preceded this, the days of Galton and so on, when they had hoped that by improving the selection of suitable mates it would improve the inherent quality, but the Eugenic Society was very helpful in many ways. To begin with, the people involved. One of them was Dr. Blacker who was the Secretary and who was very much a supporter. The thing that helped me greatly was that I was a Fellow of the Eugenic Society and they had a major annual address to which people came from all the country and quite early on, I don't remember the year but there'll be a record of it somewhere if you want to find out, they invited me to address this major national conference on sex education. I can recall the title now and the sub-titles I think will indicate the way I was trying to work things out, because I hadn't the luxury of sitting back for two years and thinking, you know, but it was 'Sex Education: Aims, Possibilities and Plans' and this had quite a major affect actually in many other countries, because being printed in the journals, it was picked up and re-printed in America, Australia and all sorts of places. However, the Eugenic Society as such corporately did nothing. May I say that there is something very closely connected with sex education, in fact at the very nub of it, and that is family life education and relations. You see, there was an extremely important figure, Lord Horder, and he was also helpful in the Central Council for Health Education, but in the Eugenic Society he was the Royal Physician at that time and the most marvellous diagnostician by medical repute that there has ever been. He just sort of looked at you and saw what was wrong was what they said. Now, Lord Horder and Blacker at the Eugenic Society helped in all sorts of ways. The Eugenic Society, I don't know whether it still is, was in those days one of the small voluntary societies that was quite wealthy. They had excellent large-scale offices in Eccleston

Square and one day Lord Horder and I were talking about the importance of family life as an integrated permeating part of sex education, and there was a whole mass of separate organisations such as the Family Welfare Society, the Marriage Guidance Council, the Central Council for Health and Education, about a dozen or so of them doing all sorts of things. Which of us said it first I don't know, but we suddenly said and almost said it together "There ought to be some way of getting them altogether." Now, this again was the advantage of working with that sort of powerful person and in wartime conditions when all people wanted was results, they didn't mind how you got them. Horder and Blacker and I just decided we would form the Family Relations Group with Horder's name on the notepaper, of course. I was Secretary, nobody elected me or appointed me, it wasn't a paid thing but a voluntary thing. Horder, Blacker and I agreed that I should be Secretary, so we got notepaper printed, The Family Relations Group, Chairman: Lord Horder, I forget what Dr. Blacker was, Secretary: Cyril Bibby. It was quite impressive notepaper, I designed it rather carefully, and the Family Relations Group was in existence being us three. Of course, we then wrote to all the various organisations, to David Mace of the Marriage Guidance Council, and the Family Welfare Group and others, and said "Why not let us meet once a month to share common views?" And within two or three months, it depended how often it met because all these different organisations had their own executive committees, the Family Relations Group didn't consist of us three, it consisted of representatives of every organisation in the country that had anything to do with the family. We had no money, and so the Eugenic Society gave us free offices for as long as it existed and free secretarial help. I wouldn't have thought of mentioning the Eugenic Society if you hadn't mentioned it.

MB How long did this society exist?

CB Well, I'm not sure but I know sadly that it folded up rather soon after I ceased to be its secretary.

MB Which was 1947 or 1948?

CB Yes. We also incidentally produced and on the scale it was on the speed was rather extraordinary, a quarterly magazine *Family Forum*. We got Crystal Herbert to act as editor, the daughter of A.B. Herbert, she did that voluntarily, and this *Family Forum* appeared over several years.

MB It was a very exciting development.

CB But, that marvellous grouping that was so obviously needed existed from about 1944 to about 1948 and then petered out, and as far as I now there's nothing like it even now.

MB But, certainly an important period of time?

CB Yes.

MB From which other things went on, I'm sure. If I can just turn back to the sex

education central theme that we were following, in the early years, how did your links with religious groups go?

CB Of course, it was of great benefit to have the Archbishop of Canterbury with one. However, in the Anglican Church, to call it a republic would be quite misleading, but since in most places the vicars have freehold, the extent to which the Archbishop can force anyone to do anything is almost negligible. It did mean that one got entry into Church House in Westminster, it meant that any vicar or bishop wanting to join knew that there would be the implicit blessing put on it, so I'm sure it helped. The main thing was finding individuals and everything else and may I say that although I have no particular religion myself, the number of clergymen, although they may not have had any expert technical, medical or education knowledge, who were desperately anxious for something to be done was very, very impressive. There were some people in the free churches too and of course this was a thing where one might have expected that, bearing in mind that this was forty years ago, it would be impossible to get co-operation from the Roman Catholic church. This is not true. The then Cardinal I understand had appointed, I don't know the procedure because I don't go to the church, one Roman Catholic who was able to say to me what was acceptable to the catholic church and what wasn't. This was Father Lester King who was Professor of, I think, Modern Theology. At any rate, he was a Professor at Haythrop, the Jesuit College and one reason why it was in some ways so easy to work with the Roman Catholics is precisely because they knew exactly where they stood with us, so to speak. Some things were out if it was going to be a Catholic audience or if you wanted the support of Catholics on an Education Committee to get a scheme adopted for all the schools in the neighbourhood, you had to judge in an individual case whether it was better to get exactly what you wanted to a limited audience or to get less than that but get it accepted city-wide. Father Lester King was so valuable because it was quite clear after just a few talks there was really only one thing on which doctrinally there was any difficulty and that was artificial methods of birth control. So, repeatedly, if I was producing a pamphlet or a scheme for lectures and if it was something that I wanted to be acceptable to Catholics too, it might be acceptable to the individual ones but where there would be no official Roman Catholic ban, Lester King would read it and would say "Well, I really think that would be a bit difficult to get through, you'd better alter it." And it was easier to work with the Catholic Church than the others, contrary to what you might expect, because we knew exactly where the stop was. With the Church of England and with the Methodists and so on, there were many clergymen who like many other people thought we were rather disgusting but there were more who would co-operate. However, each one had to be dealt with individually.

MB Because of this clear view, do you suspect or do you know that sex education had been going on in a minor way in Roman Catholic schools anyway?

CB Well, yes. What I fear has been a very obvious note of hesitation in my voice is to adapt old Jode's phrase "it depends what you mean by sex education". In my view, it was quite excessively concerned with what you don't do rather with what you do do, although may I say that even giving pupils some advice as to what they don't do is better than giving them no advice at all.

MB This was the point I was making because some of the non-Roman Catholic schools obviously had very great difficulties in knowing where they stood and I think perhaps the Roman Catholic schools had a start?

CB Yes. But, you see, it depended so much as it did in the other schools, on the individual priest, the individual head or the individual class teacher and as far as birth control was concerned the Catholics were out, but otherwise there was some easy Catholics, some easy Agnostics, some easy Anglicans, some easy Jews and some who weren't. I couldn't make any generalisation on this matter at all.

MB But, you did get a chance to speak to lots of religious groups and teachers especially?

CB Yes.

MB Turning to an earlier comment, you were saying when we were speaking exclusively about sex education. What of the other areas of health education you became involved in although this was obviously a central theme?

CB Well, quite quickly after the change to the Central Council for Health Education where our remit was the whole of health education .....

MB By the way, were you happy about the fact that you had a wider remit?

CB Yes. I mean, I was happy. I don't think though that I would have been unhappy if it hadn't happened. I had a needed job to do and I was enjoying doing it, it was interesting. Now, I think that when we got on to dealing with wider things like nutrition, communicable disease and so on, the medical side of things became more important. I knew a certain amount of biological knowledge and as a human being anyway a good deal about sex, the important things being their relation to society in individual behaviour and so on, but some of the pamphlets that I spoke of earlier were loaded up with all sorts of anatomical detail. You would not have thought it was a service manual for a car but the repairing garage's manual, it was all totally irrelevant. But, of course, once we began widening out, the medical side of the Council's work became much more important in that although I had a reasonably good knowledge of a layman's knowledge, it required doctors, primarily initially Dr. Frost and then Dr. Sutherland and the medical sub-committees and so on, to say what were the main nutrition problems which of course in the war was a very important thing and what were the main communicable diseases. I wasn't competent to judge that. The procedure generally was that some medical committee with the medical officer or adviser, I think when Dr. Sullivan came in it was called adviser but I'm not sure, producing the drafts of what they wanted to get over and then the medical side would say what the best was that they wanted to get over and they would then pass it over to me. When I say me, after a year or two it was me and other people in education, and they would say would you produce a draft of a popular pamphlet on it or would you do the draft of a film strip on it or something of that sort and I would put it into what I thought was simple language. It then got back to them to make sure that in the

process of getting rid of all the medical gobbledegook of terminology that I hadn't got things wrong and so there would be two or three passing's to and fro. We sought to get a thing which was medically acceptable and educationally effective and, as I say, in the fields outside sex education the medical side was much more important than in sex education where it was really an educational problem. Of course, when we were talking about health education in relation to nutrition, I think I ought to mention that although we at the Central Council did a lot in that we produced pamphlets and had lectures and films and so on, the very important ruling was carried out in that connection by Lord Woolton, Freddie Marquis as we used to call him in Liverpool when I was a boy when he was in charge of the big store, Lewis'. You see, at the Ministry of Food, he did such a superb job and although there was liaison with them of an informal nature, a major part of the nutrition education, I think I ought to say nutrition propaganda because it was very straightforward with masses of posters all over the place, was done by him and the fact that this little island country, apart from a few things, virtually fed itself during the war, nearly fifty million people, it was quite an extraordinary thing and Lord Woolton must take a very great share of the credit for that.

MB What was he like in Council? Was he impressive?

CB I believe he did on occasions attend the Council, but I never had much to do with Lord Woolton.

MB I think he came towards the end of your time, but you were probably denied that?

CB No, no. I mean, he was impressive. A man of the most amazing ability, quiet and incisive. My guess, and it's a pure guess, is that he could probably be absolutely ruthless with anybody who didn't do his job properly, I'm rather in favour of that as a matter of fact, but my contacts with him were not very many. Occasionally, he would be speaking at a meeting where I was speaking and we'd have a gossip and a cup of coffee together, but I didn't really know Woolton and I only mentioned him because the massive work done by the Ministry of Food came into my mind.

MB I'm getting a strong impression that nutrition and sex education were at the centre? What about infectious diseases?

CB There was quite a lot about infectious diseases, but less than we had originally thought. Now, when you say infectious diseases, one includes venereal disease as a communicable disease, but leaving that aside, there was a widespread fear that in the case of heavy bombing there would be sewers broken and water-mains broken with the two mingling and vast epidemics of typhoid, typhus, cholera and so on. Fortunately and quite extraordinarily, in view of the amount of bombing, it never happened and so, although we began thinking about what one could do in the way of education in that way, you know, very elementary things like if we had to produce suddenly millions of leaflets about boiling water, we never really had to do anything much about that and therefore, so far as I can recall, publicity on communicable diseases was mainly the personal habits of home hygiene and school hygiene and so

on. In this, as in everything else connected with communicable diseases, we didn't, I fear, manage to make the distinction that I always make between what is unhygienic and what is inaeesthetic and I was commonly in a minority of one when there was any discussion of this matter. I've never, for example, seen any really conclusive evidence that having a thorough bath once every day is any healthier than having one once a fortnight, but I never got away with that because the general view was that cleanliness and health were inseparable, and I went along with it fairly happily because in any case I regard cleanliness as desirable from an aesthetic point of view and if that can be smuggled in under health, who was I to object?

MB I think there was a very strong Health and Cleanliness Council working in some kind of collaboration? Is that right?

CB Yes. I personally don't know very much about that. The Medical Adviser mainly collaborated with that. I don't know much about it.

MB Was there no Wartime Committee looking at special wartime opportunities and initiatives or was it all part of the general every day duty?

CB Wartime Committee of what?

MB Of the Central Council. There were various committees, so was there a special Wartime Committee?

CB No, we were just operating in the wartime. I don't know about other people, I can't speak for them, but the thought had never occurred to me.

MB Well, there was a Medical Committee and I just wondered if there was a special committee for the wartime?

CB If there was, I don't remember it, which means that it must have been so unimportant that it was insignificant. My view, I don't know about other people's, was that we've got to get through this war. We were operating for the war. If we carried on after the war, so much the better, but our whole business was a wartime committee.

MB We've talked of achievements, what of missed opportunities? Are there points in the work that you think might have been interesting crossroads that were missed?

CB I'm sure that there must have been. I don't think we ever did nearly enough in getting across to a large part of the population the idea of sex as something immensely fruitful. I don't mean in a biological sense, but of being able to affect people's whole attitude to life and so on. I will say that we did what we could. I don't think that we did in connection with venereal disease where the problem was the simple practical one of how to avoid it and how to go for treatment if you had it, we never really managed to get this across to people. This was partly due to the armed forces and so on. I think that in connection with school biology teaching, I'm pretty sure that my biggest failure was that it was only a rather small percentage of teachers who really



appreciated, to the extent of it becoming a part of themselves which is the only way you can teach, that the biological facts not merely of sex but of health and so on are in no way an engine, that they are only a tool, and that the engine would only be provided by finding ways of motivating people to have what this sort of behaviour will produce and to have what this sort of hygiene will produce and so on. Yes, there were lots of failures. I don't say it as an excuse as it were, but I mean we were working all the hours that God sent and we just had to get on with something.

MB When you look back at the personalities you worked with, we haven't talked about personalities, what of people like Robert Sutherland?

CB I think if you are doing anything for an archive, you've got to be very, very honest indeed. Robert Sutherland and I did not always get on very well together. I certainly greatly respected his devotion and he obviously, as far as I could judge, was a very good doctor. To my way of thinking though, he was too formal in his manner and I thought too meticulous in his procedure. Now, I've been quite honest in saying what I think but I'm going to try to be equally fair in saying one or two other things about it too. I am aware, because all my life people have told me so and somehow I've never cured myself, that I tend to be too much inclined to say "Let's get on with it." Although I hope and indeed believe that I'm a polite person, I've never been very much of a respecter of positions and so on. Now, if you judge in terms of salary, which is often quite a good judgement, I seem to remember that Sutherland was paid rather more than I was and so I suppose you could say that he was my superior and, of course, later when there was some reorganisation and he became quite definitely in charge of it, I can understand, having said what I had said, that I may very well have been a rather awkward second-in-command.

MB A difficult man to live with?

CB I hope not difficult to live with.

MB Well, in the sense that you were also pretty good at directing things, from all I know of you?

CB Yes, and I mean he had the most tremendous devotion to the work. He, like the rest of us, worked away and he was extremely good at, I don't think we have an English word for it, but the French word is, to 'précis'. He could get the gist of things and he knew how to speak without medical gobbledegook, so although I would be dishonest if I pretended that our relations were almost harmonious, I knew he disapproved of various things about me and I disapproved about various things about him, I do think we were a damn good team.

MB What about John Lee?

CB I've no very clear memory. There was something and this is the only point in this interview when I am holding back anything whatsoever. I am not prepared to put what I might have said in, but there were various difficulties with Lee. I forget the exact circumstances of his leaving, but I am not going to say any of the details

because they are so entirely subjective, but I will say that in my opinion whether whoever watches this will know what I am talking about I don't know, but he was not entirely fairly treated. Now, I don't know what you know and I don't know whether that means anything to you, but I am not going to say any more about it.

MB What of any other characters that I may have overlooked in my own reading through those years? Are there any others that you might like to bring to my attention?

CB Well, one that I've already mentioned because she was so different from what I'd expected, and that's Violet Swaisland whom I mentioned earlier. Now, she was already there at the old Social Hygiene Council before the great expansion began and she had drafted some of the pamphlets, simple things, 'Facts of Sex for Girls' and things like this. Now, when I first saw her, the dear soul and I mean dear soul literally is dead and she can't be hurt, I was horrified. If you wanted a caricature of the withered spinster, that was Miss Violet Swaisland, and her speech too was very upper-class, there was never 'a girl', there were 'gels', and I thought oh my God, is this the woman who is going to do our sex education, this was before we had a vastly bigger staff, to factory girls and so on. Within a couple of months I had discovered how totally wrong I was and ever since those early days I have never believed people who say you must have experienced, married people and so on. This was as she appeared to me as a young man, she probably wasn't, and probably I appear withered to other people now, but she appeared to me to be the epitome of a withered spinster. Normally, boys and girls were dealt with separately but often in youth clubs and so on they weren't, and quite early on I made a point to go and listen to her, because I had to find out what was happening so that I knew how I might want to change it, and it was a revelation to me the first time I heard Violet Swaisland speak. This apparently withered spinster with such warm humanity coming out, this smile which given the thinness of her face you'd have thought might come out on a photograph as a rather wintry smile but it wasn't, it was a ray of sunshine smile, and crowds of factory girls, with this obviously upper-class, obviously virgin and obviously you'd say everything wrong, held them like this. She could come out with such plain spokenness too and to use a certain term like anatomy, I remember the first time I saw this refined woman speak, she said "That's probably what you'd call a so-and-so." And these girls' faces of course were quite marvellous. She was able to put things over so clearly. There's one thing which, in fact, I mentioned to you earlier that does it. I think that there's been a great mistake made in the advance in contraceptive knowledge. I was one of those who fought for it, but the idea seems to be now just go ahead, get on the pill and everything will be alright and so on. Well, of course, there wasn't any pill then, but we were trying to persuade responsible behaviour as well and I can remember one occasion when somebody asked in some youth club or factory, I don't remember where it was, "Miss, what's the best way of making sure you don't get caught?" And she said "I will tell you the perfect method of contraception. Always have just one inch of fresh air between you and your boyfriend." And it went down like a bomb. Now, she was just one old character. Let me think. There was one who perhaps wasn't a major part, but one who I haven't mentioned from the early days before lots of government money came in. There was a man called Weatherall, who was the Biology Master at Eton and although he was never an employee, he was on many of our committees and for years edited our journal, *Biology on Human Affairs*. And I

must mention one other. You know, and it has become clear during this interview, with this very rapid expansion with eventually regional officers all over the country, these regional officers were of course key people. At first, when almost everything could be done from London, everything depended on the quality of our handful of staff there, but by the time we had more than a dozen regional officers all over the country, everything depended on them and they were the ones approaching the local directors of education and planning things and so on. I'm not wishing to be invidious, but one happens to stand out in my mind particularly well. I know she is still alive and living in Leeds, Agnes Patrick. Nobody should ever imagine that the massive work that was done during this years was done by us little handful whose names appeared on the agendas of members present at committees and so on, these regional officers all over the country, there was also a Miss Bennett I remember but it's no good going on just reeling out names, when we got big, they were key people. We were terribly lucky.

MB What was the role of a regional officer?

CB Well, the regional officer had the regional office as such. Sometimes it was provided free by a local health authority. In another place, you'd find a favourable director of education who'd provide for you, you got everything free that you could, you see, but sometimes you had to pay for it. According to the size and the work, one or two typists and clerks and so on. To help the rapid expansion that we wanted in the very early days, a tiny handful of us were lecturing, lecturing, lecturing, talking, talking, talking, our aim was to build up in every area a panel of people who would lecture for us, just at one guinea a lecture or whatever it was. Their job, we couldn't possibly do it centrally and we had to take their word for it, was to vet local teachers, a few local doctors, I'm bound to say very few local doctors are any good at speaking in my experience, local youth people and so on who would be willing to speak for us. Now, we didn't send all these officers, one would be sent for one and another one might be three months later, but as soon as she got a group of people together, a team of us from the head office would go down and we'd run either a weekend solid course, Friday night to late Sunday night, or six successive weeks on a Monday evening or something, training these people as far as we could. Then their job was to go round the medical officers and the education officers in their region whipping up support and also whipping up money because although we had quite substantial government funds, the local authorities paid us for what they got, I think this is inherent in our general way of doing things in this country, and no local authority was going to have people coming into their area, and I am very much in favour of that. We sold what people thought was good enough to buy and the fact that there was this rapid expansion maybe produced the right staff, but it was very good. This was the officer organising things, recruiting speakers and of course the general organising including little things like booking halls, booking hotels and so on and so forth. Once we had expanded as we did very quickly, these regional officers were terribly important and we eventually had some hundreds of people on our lists. Then another thing of course were the summer schools. They were difficult to organise during the war, but we did run some summer schools and the regional officers would come to them. They were responsible for one region of the country each.

MB Did your regional officers have appropriate support staff?

CB Not what anybody would think appropriate nowadays. It depended on the size of the place. Largely, it depended on how successful the regional officer was. As the regional officer as it were sold more work, it became clear at the Centre that they wanted another typist or in another area that they wanted a film projectionist instead of somebody coming out from London, it varied enormously.

MB There was a natural evolution?

CB Yes.

MB I was going to ask at this particular point when you went there at the age of 27, what did you take along that you thought was special because you obviously had a great deal of confidence and you obviously took something there that was quite special? What was this born of?

CB Well, you've been very kind in saying confident, but to be quite honest, I must have been brash. To be honest, I had the feeling that I could do anything. Now, this is an appalling confession to make, but it's the truth. Looking back, it didn't occur to me to be abashed at very soon calling on Lambeth Palace to see the Archbishop. Confident, yes, you're very kind, but I must have been brash. I don't think that I was in manner. I don't think so because I think that if I had of been brash, people like Mrs. Neville-Rolfe and Sir Alan Daly and Sir Martin Rosevere would soon have told me. So, I don't think I was brash in manner, but I had an absurd degree of confidence, looking back, and as it turned out of course it was fortunate in those circumstances at those times. I think in many circumstances, it would have just got me the sack, actually it did once. What did I take? I don't know, how can you judge yourself? It isn't boastful to say that I was reasonably intelligent. Now, the one thing I am quite sure of is that I've always been a good speaker, I just don't find any difficulty at various levels. I mean, I have always been an after dinner guest and so on and I never took anything into the dinner with me, I sort of listened to what the proposer was saying and then answered. I think one capacity that I had, yes I think I can say this because I found it fairly early when I started doing some, I'm not talking of scholarly books, elementary books for children of eight and nine, and I think that I was able to take quite complex scientific concepts and put them in a language that children could understand. But, may I say, I wasn't aware of any of this when I went there. I went there because I needed a job.

MB What about your background in Liverpool? How much do you think that was significant? It kind of played a small part?

CB Yes, it must have done. You see you can't, as it were, psycho-analyse yourself. I mean, I was one of a family of ten living in South Liverpool, eight children and the parents. We weren't poor, Dad was never out of work, but we never had any money to spare. Mother was the most incredible organiser, quite incredible. I mean, not only do I see this in retrospect, one realised it at the time. Here was the ten of us in this terrace of houses and most of the people became sailors or coal heavers and girls

would be very pleased if they got a job in a good shop and some actually got into a bank and of course that was marvellous. Now, how she did it I just don't know, but there were the ten of us, dad never earned much, but we were never poor, at least not by those standards, people today would think we were. But, Ma had us organised, we were on rotas for housework and we all knew what our jobs were, and this is really surprising over sixty years ago, never at any point was there any distinction between boys and girls, there were four boys and four girls, cooking, washing and ironing. It's difficult when you are reminiscing to be sure of your memories, but one thing happened which enabled me to put this exactly. The grammar school in Liverpool that I went to in those days had school on Saturday mornings and so I know that the oldest child home on a Saturday morning was eleven or younger, so this does enable me to be sure of this. Mother used to go down to the Cunard on Saturday mornings and earn a few bob extra, I don't know how much, but those were the days of large numbers of immigrants to America and they all needed their heads examined to see that they hadn't any nits in them. Now, that makes us sound poverty-stricken, but we weren't, we were never short of food and we always had decent clothes and so on, but on the Saturday mornings, whichever was the eldest at home got the midday dinner ready, so that means that we all in turn by the age of eleven were preparing a meal for ten and took turns in scrubbing the step and so on and so forth. She was a superb organiser, she must have been because a family of ten can drag people down, you see, and we saw round about us families that did, but Mother was a pillar of the local Conservative Club, horrified I am afraid when later I became a Socialist. She was however broadminded enough to be able to discuss this reasonably every week at the Conservative Unionists Association; every week at the whist-drive, the local tennis club, if there were any street parties, she was in on it, and on Poppy Day she organised the local collection and she did all this on top of everything else. She was tired, but of course looking back, I can see that the only reason she could do it was in fact because we did most of the housework and she was the foreman, but of course it was an excellent thing. Mother was sparkingly intelligent, I mean, by the time I was fifteen or sixteen, I'd realised that. Dad was, but he was a much quieter person. My main memories of Dad apart from his kindness and his occasional stubbornness, Mum could be too and people have said I was, was his kindness. Well, Mother was kind too, but Dad was one of the kindest of men you could imagine. He was one of the people who organised what in Liverpool was called the 'League of Welldoers' and they dealt with down-and-outs, and you would have thought that with ten of us in this terrace house there was enough, but more than once Dad would arrive home with some kid that he'd found and say "We'll look after him until we find him a home." So, there'd be an extra one in the bed, as it were. But, Mother was a superb organiser. Then, of course, one was very lucky in the schools. They were still referred to as Board Schools, but legally they had not been Board Schools for quite a long time, they were elementary schools. There was this little tyrant of a woman of not more than 5 feet, a Miss Davis, but she was marvellous and she made you work. I believe in making people work. Then, one was lucky enough to get a scholarship to the Collegiate and that meant you got fees and you got a grant of so much per term, quite a substantial amount of money when you multiply it by about twenty as you have to, with free school blazers, so we were able to go and keep up with everybody else. Seven out of eight of us went to grammar schools. The funny thing is the one who didn't went into business and ended up able to buy the whole lot of us out. Most of

us, I think about five, went to university or college, which of course from a family of eight in those days was rather unusual, but it is a reasonable supposition that, from very early days, having to fit in to doing the front door step, peeling potatoes, going to Scouts and doing your homework, it probably helped to enable one to have several irons in the fire at a time.

MB What about the work you've done on Thomas Huxley? Does this relate to your earlier thinking? Do you feel you came to Huxley later or was he already in your mind?

CB No. I was aware once I went to college, and perhaps slightly before, that there had been such a person and that he'd something to do with Darwin, nothing more than that. It was round about 1950 or 1951, something like that I became interested in Huxley. By that time, I'd been a biology teacher and a biology lecturer and so on. I knew he was a great biologist, but as happens with any biologist or any scientist, a hundred years later, their stuff is over and done with and science has gone on. So, he was just an historical figure and a great scientist. I was also interested in education, in education history and in social history, I've tended rather to dissipate my energies over a dozen different fields, and I began to notice that wherever I turned I seemed to come across Huxley. For example, I started examining the First London School Board in 1970 and found to my astonishment in the days when the great struggle was whether the Anglicans or the Free Churches would have control, that this avowed Agnostic was elected to the First London School Board, so I started looking at old newspapers and found how active he was in education and I began to find all sorts of other things. Then, I had a most incredible piece of luck. Some of his correspondence was in what is now Imperial College. Now, Imperial College has grown out of a little government school that Huxley got a part-time job in at £100 a year as his first job after he left the Navy and quite a lot of his things, particularly his scientific things, notebooks and so on were there. From the amount that there was of his stuff, it looked as if he kept things, and I found out that the basement room somewhere in the oldest building of Imperial College had actually been his lab and there were various things of his in the old cupboards, and it had been used as a storeroom for I don't know how many decades. He was an astonishing man in education and in anthropology. I think what first got me interested in feeling that there must be something special about him was this school board business. How did a man who was a reviled Agnostic get elected to the First London School Board which is mainly a fight between the Anglicans and the Non-conformists? At the first meeting of the London School Board when Lord Lawrence who was its chairman proposed to start with a prayer, it didn't seem the best start for him immediately to get up and make the first policy objection that education should be something quite distinct and they agreed as a compromise that there would be prayers before the School Board Meeting started for everybody who wanted to attend and that's the origin of the whole of secular religion here. But, at the second meeting he was elected chairman of the Scheme of Education Committee which was to draw up the whole plan for the first comprehensive education system and I thought my God, how could this have happened with this man? So, I started going into the correspondence because they were great letter-writers and there are thousands of letters. My generation is the last in which anybody was able to find out the sort of things I was able to find out about Huxley, everybody

does things by telephone nowadays, and I came across so many references to his hardness but his kindness and his concerns for the child, and to me it was a great tribute, not to Huxley, but to the boarding religious sects of the time that they sufficiently recognised that this Agnostic was the man to be the chairman. A lot of his diaries exist, I've been able to trace out in quite a lot of detail the lobbying he did, who he was seeing at 12 o'clock and who at 2 o'clock and so on. He really set the whole shape of elementary education through the 1944 Act, quite extraordinary. Then I went into other things. I began looking at his origins. I went by the Standard II Volume Biography trying to check up on things, trying to check when he got his MB degree at London University that he states he had. I couldn't find any lists anywhere and then found all sorts of interesting things and thought my God, this is the man to study and I then for about five years dosed myself in him. I'd no intention of writing a book originally, I started writing articles and then I realised there was a book in it. In fact, I never set out to write a book ever, they've all sort of accumulated. There was one case of some simple experiments in biology that I did for a specific wartime purpose. Then I did more and there was another book in it and so on and eventually there was a doctorate in it that came on the side too.

MB How much do you think that Huxley, like yourself, was a visionary in terms of health and educational progress because he and you were not restricted by a religious straitjacket?

CB It would be pleasant to say that were so as an Agnostic but I don't believe that this was the factor at all. I feel that if he had retained his religion, it might have here or there limited him, but I don't think it would have limited him any more than Charles Bradlaw in his view was limited by his secularism. I mean, Charles Bradlaw and Annie Bezzant appealed to Huxley for help on one occasion, you see, and he gave it but then he wrote to somebody else, I'm paraphrasing "People like that don't do any good to our cause." And he said "The citadels of Christianity(?) will never be tumbled by scurrilous attacks and savage language. What we need is a regiment of Ironsides." He was basically a Puritan. I'm a great admirer of Puritans. He wanted self-control and self-discipline. I think the only difference that there would have been if he had retained his religious belief was that he would never have invented the word 'agnostic'. Incidentally on that point, this is an interesting thing and one of the things that astonished me and everybody else who has read anything I have published on it, on the London School Board when they were drawing up this first comprehensive scheme for a metropolis-wide system of education, Huxley proposed that there should be daily bible reading and the Minutes of the Education Committee show this. Everybody was so astonished. He explained why in a passage, I can't remember it verbatim but it was so resonant with his marvellous prose. A.T.L. Menkin regarded him as the greatest Nineteenth Century master of the English Language. His works were a joy to read unlike poor old Darwin who couldn't write for nuts. He said something like "Where else would you find one single book which would give our street Arabs a conspectus of great civilisations, a moral guidance which if not absolute is better than anything they've been used to down their alleys", and so on. No, I don't honestly think that his visionary approach had anything to do with him being an Agnostic.

MB Do you think he was one of the great pioneer health educators?

CB This would be an overstatement except of course that he was perhaps the first I should think of the world-famous scientists who didn't think he was demeaning himself by writing elementary text, and in fact there is a letter where he says "I dare say my reputation will suffer with me doing this little book for the London schoolchildren." He wanted a London schoolbook, science was included, but he had a great battle getting music included which most of them thought was ridiculous. He said he couldn't imagine any more civilising influence. He then thought of the way he thought teachers should teach science and an East End clergyman, I forget his name, said "Our teachers say it can't be done with these children in this school." Whereupon Huxley said "Right." And he arranged a series of dates for him to go round and teach these East End kids down in the school to show them how it could be done. So, he was certainly a pioneer in trying to get human biology taught, but he never made any special feature of health education, except in the sense that any forward looking person realised the importance of hygiene. It is implicit in everything he did in education, but it's not explicit.

MB Dr. Bibby, it's been an enormous pleasure to share these memories with you and it has been an afternoon I will long remember. Thank you very much.

CB Well, I've enjoyed it. Thank you very much.

END OF INTERVIEW.