

# FREETHINKER

Registered at the  
G.P.O. as a Newspaper

FOUNDED 1881 by G. W. FOOTE

Friday,  
February 3, 1967

## RESPECT FOR THE SANCTITY OF LIFE

"IT IS ONE of the most reckless Bills that has ever come before the House of Commons. It strikes a blow at one of the fundamental principles on which society is based—the respect for the sanctity of life." Thus speaks Mr St John-Stevas, Member of Parliament, member of the Church of Rome, and member of the Commons standing committee on the Medical Termination of Pregnancy Bill.

We can rest assured that if this reckless Bill is wrecked, more women will become wrecks following their reckless copulation. Certainly there is nothing like respecting the sanctity of life. It is respected in Spain when the aficionadas roar with delight as the tormented bull sinks dying to the bloodstained ground. And it is respected in Vietnam when the guilt-ridden crusade waged with supercharged ferocity is duly purged by the priestly prayers of Cardinal Spellman.

What is this Bill about? It is about alleviating suffering. Some of the Bill's opponents point out, and quite rightly so, that there is a risk to the woman's health and that the foetus itself suffers pain. But there are surely very few operations which cause no pain and involve no risk. Even the removal of a tooth is painful, but we will have it removed if, everything considered, its removal is generally beneficial to our health.

The commotion starts simply because a potential human being is involved. I wish to consider briefly the common "sanctity of life" objection against abortion, as lodged by a devout Roman Catholic. And I wish to consider the merits of the objection by the criterion of consistency. If one *is* going to consider the "sanctity" of life, how else can one consider it but from a religious standpoint. For the non-religious rationalist, life has no inherent sanctity, just as it has no inherent purpose.

"We must respect the sanctity of life", urges Mr St John-Stevas. "This is one of the fundamental moral principles on which life is based." First of all, I think it is a highly disputable point that respect for the sanctity of life *is* one of the fundamental moral principles on which society is based. Mr St John-Stevas could hold that it *should* be. But to assert that it *is* seems to me a contradiction of the

present state of affairs. If life is sacred and should not be destroyed intentionally why does the Holy Father not order all Catholics, on pain of excommunication, to cease participating in acts of violence, extending from throwing broken bottles at a Rangers-Celtic football match to active service in the Vietnam war? I am afraid, Mr St John-Stevas, that the traditional apologetics about just wars make a mockery of the holy cries about the sanctity of life.

If the sanctity of life is to be respected at all costs then your next move should be clear enough. Leave the House of Commons for the time being to grapple with its affairs unaided by you. I am sure the Abortion Law Reform Association will not worry unduly if you are absent from the remaining standing committee meetings on the Medical Termination of Pregnancy Bill. Book a seat on an early flight to Rome. Crave, or whatever one does an audience with the Pope. You shouldn't have too much difficulty here. After all if the Pope will give Harold Wilson and Brother Brown forty-five minutes of his valuable time, even if there is a handsome silver vessel, an illustrated volume on Westminster Abbey and more political power in it for him, I should think he will receive you. Tell him that you are deeply concerned about the suffering caused to children. Tell him that you have an awesome respect for the sanctity of life. Tell him that you are not satisfied simply with having this respect yourself but that you feel duty bound to impose it and its St John-Stevas implications on every other mortal being. Tell him that, although an infallible being, he is a mortal one and that your respect for the sanctity of life is thus binding on him as well. You know how to use clear unequivocal terms, Mr St John-Stevas, and as a fellow communicator I admire you for this. Tell the Pope in clear unequivocal terms to use his undoubted political influence and particularly his Power of the Keys to order all Catholics true to the Faith and to him, the Supreme Pontiff, that they must desist forthwith from the taking of life, whatever and wherever the operating theatre may be. Tell him that perennial pious platitudes are poor mitigators of misery. Tell him to be clear and unequivocal like you. Tell him to order, on pain of excommunication, all Catholic troops in Vietnam, whether American or Vietnamese, in the North or in the South, to disengage from the war, to stop all killing, and to respect with true Christian piety the sanctity of life. Tell him that if he does not show tangible respect for the sanctity of life in this practical way you will have no respect for him and will cease to be a member of the Church of Rome. Tell him all this, Mr St John-Stevas, and when you have told him clearly and unequivocally, come back to England and tell us as much as you like about your respect for the sanctity of life and we, whatever our respect for sanctity, will then listen to you with respect.

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## ABORTION LAW REFORM

THE MEDICAL TERMINATION of Pregnancy Bill is still at the committee stage and the pressure to amend it is still very much on as well. As this is such an important and intricate subject we are reprinting the whole of the bill itself, the views of the British Medical Association and the Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists and comment on these views by the Abortion Law Reform Association.

### MEDICAL TERMINATION OF PREGNANCY A BILL TO

Amend and clarify the law relating to termination of pregnancy by registered medical practitioners.

BE IT ENACTED by the Queen's most Excellent Majesty, by and with the advice and consent of the Lords Spiritual and Temporal and Commons, in this present Parliament assembled, and by the authority of the same, as follows:—

1. (1) Subject to the provisions of this section, a person shall not be guilty of an offence under the law relating to abortion when a pregnancy is terminated by a registered medical practitioner if that practitioner and another registered medical practitioner are of the opinion, formed in good faith—

- (a) that the continuance of the pregnancy would involve serious risk to the life or of grave injury to the health, whether physical or mental, of the pregnant woman whether before, at or after the birth of the child; or
- (b) that there is a substantial risk that if the child were born it would suffer from such physical or mental abnormalities as to be seriously handicapped; or
- (c) that the pregnant woman's capacity as a mother will be severely overstrained by the care of a child or of another child as the case may be; or
- (d) that the pregnant woman is a defective or became pregnant while under the age of sixteen or became pregnant as a result of rape.

(2) Except as provided by subsection (3) of this section, any treatment for the termination of pregnancy must be carried out in a hospital vested in the Minister of Health or the Secretary of State for Scotland under the National Health Service Acts, or in a registered nursing home, or in a place for the time being approved for the purposes of this section by the Minister or the Secretary of State.

(3) Subsection (2) of this section, and so much of subsection (1) as relates to the opinion of another registered medical practitioner, shall not apply to the termination of a pregnancy by a registered medical practitioner in a case where he is of the opinion, formed in good faith, that the termination is immediately necessary in order to save the life of the pregnant woman.

(4) A termination of pregnancy performed on the ground of rape shall require the certificate of a registered medical practitioner consulted by the patient freshly after the alleged assault that there was then medical evidence of sexual assault upon her.

(5) A termination of pregnancy performed upon a girl under the age of sixteen shall require her express consent in addition to any necessary consent of her parent or guardian.

2. (1) The Minister of Health in respect of England and Wales, and the Secretary of State in respect of Scotland, may by statutory instrument make regulations to provide—

- (a) for requiring any such opinion as is referred to in section 1 of this Act to be certified by the practitioners or practitioner concerned in such form and at such time as may be prescribed by the regulations, and for requiring the preservation and disposal of certificates made for the purposes of the regulations;
  - (b) for requiring any registered medical practitioner who terminates a pregnancy other than in a hospital to give notice of the termination and such other information relating to the termination as may be prescribed;
  - (c) for prohibiting the disclosure, except to such persons or for such purposes as may be so prescribed, of notices given or information furnished pursuant to the regulations.
- (2) The information furnished in pursuance of regulations under subsection (1) of this section shall be collected solely by the Ministry of Health or the Scottish Office.

(3) Any person who wilfully contravenes or wilfully fails to comply with the requirements of regulations under subsection (1) of this section shall be liable on summary conviction to a fine not exceeding one hundred pounds.

(4) Any statutory instrument made by virtue of this section shall

be subject to annulment in pursuance of a resolution of either House of Parliament.

3. (1) Nothing in this Act shall affect the provisions of the Infant Life (Preservation) Act 1939 (protecting the life of the viable foetus).

(2) For the purposes of the law relating to abortion, anything done with intent to procure the miscarriage of a woman is unlawfully done unless authorised by section 1 of this Act.

4. In this Act, the following expressions have meanings hereby assigned to them—

"defective" means, in relation to England and Wales, a person suffering from severe subnormality as defined by subsection (2) of section 4 of the Mental Health Act 1959 and, in relation to Scotland, a person suffering from mental deficiency of the degree described in subsection (7) of section 96 of the Mental Health (Scotland) Act 1960;

"registered nursing home" means a nursing home registered under the Public Health Act 1936, the Public Health (London) Act 1936, or the Nursing Homes Registration (Scotland) Act 1938, and a private hospital registered under the Mental Health (Scotland) Act 1960, or legislation amending or replacing them;

"the law relating to abortion" means sections 58 and 59 of the Offences against the Person Act 1861; and any rule of law relating to the procurement of abortion;

"the National Health Service Acts" means the National Health Service Acts 1946 to 1966 or the National Health Service (Scotland) Acts 1947 to 1966.

5. (1) This Act may be cited as the Medical Termination of Pregnancy Act 1966.

(2) This Act does not extend to Northern Ireland.

Presented by Mr David Steel.

### Views of BMA and RCOG

Views of the British Medical Association and the Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists.

The following document was approved by the Council of the BMA at its meeting on December 21st.

### Safeguards

Clause 1 (1) permits any registered medical practitioner to terminate a pregnancy. This is not sufficient and we recommend that it be made obligatory for the termination to be carried out by, or under the supervision of, a consultant in the National Health Service, or such other doctor of equivalent status and experience as the Minister shall approve for the purpose of the Act.

Both the BMA and the RCOG agree that the consultant should be a consultant in gynaecology and the RCOG would like this written into the Act. The BMA, however, feel it would be preferable not to exclude other consultants, eg, a consultant surgeon, as this would preclude the operation being carried out in certain parts of the country where a consultant gynaecologist is not readily available.

On many occasions it will be necessary for more than two doctors to agree before termination is carried out. We would like the requirement to be that the opinions of "at least" two medical practitioners are obtained.

Clause 1 (2) permits termination to be carried out in any registered nursing home. The reference to a registered nursing home should be deleted so that the operation has to be carried out in a National Health hospital or other place approved for the purpose by the Minister.

### Indications

Provided the above safeguards are incorporated it is both unnecessary and undesirable to frame the indications for termination too narrowly. The requirements that the risk has to be *serious* and the injury to health *grave* in clause 1 (1) (a) are capable of causing considerable difficulties in practice and may mean that terminations carried out on certain medical indications which are accepted under current medical practice would become questionable in future.

The indications should be framed "in the interests of the health of the mother or because of the (substantial) risk of serious abnormality of the foetus". Although the BMA and the RCOG are in agreement that the risk of serious abnormality to the foetus must be "substantial", the BMA have reservations about this qualification being included in the Act, bearing in mind the difficulties which have occurred in previous statutes when "substantial" has been used as qualifying medical opinion—for example, substantial mental impairment in the Homicide Act. (See

also Lord Dilhorne's comments in the debate on Lord Silkin's Bill, *Hansard*, 28 February, 1966, col. 528).

Clauses 1 (c) and (d) are objectionable in specifying indications which are not medical. They will, in our opinion, give rise to serious difficulties in practice. They might well lead to an excessive demand for termination on social grounds and this would be unacceptable to the medical profession. Each case has to be assessed on its own merits and express reference to the factors mentioned in (c) and (d), though only permissive, would inevitably lead the public to believe that termination would automatically be carried out in the instances mentioned. Sub-clauses (4) and (5) of Clause 1 are unnecessary if clauses (c) and (d) are removed.

On the other hand, we would like to see included in the Bill a subclause to the effect that in deciding whether or not to terminate the pregnancy in the interests of the health of the mother "account may be taken of the patient's total environment actual or reasonably foreseeable". The words in quotation marks are taken from the draft Bill recommended by the Report of the Church Assembly Board for Social Responsibility (page 67, Clause 1 (2)).

#### Emergency

Clause 1 (3) permits emergency termination only where the life of the pregnant woman is in immediate danger. This does not cover the situation where, in the course of an operation for some other condition—for example, cancer of the ovary—it is discovered that the woman is pregnant and it is necessary to remove the pregnant uterus in order to improve the prognosis. It is important to secure an amendment to the Bill to cover this contingency.

#### Notification

Clause 2 (1) permits the Ministers to make regulations setting out the way in which notifications should be made. We would like to see this made mandatory.

Clause 2 (1) (a) should be amended in such a way as to permit the signatories to the certificate of the doctors recommending termination of pregnancy to include the medical practitioner who terminates the pregnancy.

Clause 2 (1) (b) requires only those pregnancies terminated outside hospital to be notified in the statutory form. We would like all pregnancies terminated under the Act to be notified.

Clause 2 (1) (c) should be worded in such a way as to permit disclosure for purposes of *bona-fide* research, but in no circumstances should any disclosure be made to the police other than upon an order by a Court of Law.

Clause 2 (2) requires notification to the Ministry of Health. This should be amended to provide that notification should be made by the doctor terminating the pregnancy to the Chief Medical Officer of the Ministry of Health (or his opposite number in Scotland) on a doctor-to-doctor basis.

#### Recent ALRA comment

THE ABORTION LAW REFORM ASSOCIATION comments on the views expressed by the British Medical Association and the Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists (document approved by the Council of the BMA and published in the *British Medical Journal*, 31 December, 1966).

The following statement was approved by the Executive Committee of the Abortion Law Reform Association (ALRA) on 12 January, 1967. Copies have been sent to the Home Secretary, the Minister of Health, the standing Committee for the Bill, the BMA and the RCOG.

#### Safeguards

The BMA recommends that "it be made obligatory for the termination to be carried out by, or under the supervision of a consultant in the National Health Service, or such other doctor of equivalent status and experience as the Minister shall approve for the purpose of the Act". The RCOG would like the operation to be restricted to consultant gynaecologists (of whom there are only about 460 in England and Wales).

ALRA points out that it would be unprecedented in legislation to insist that a particular operation must be carried out by a consultant; that such a recommendation comes from the BMA, it finds quite incomprehensible.

If this recommendation were to be accepted, it would limit the permission to terminate given by the present case law which allows all lawful operations to be carried out by any medical practitioner and *without* requiring a second opinion. In practice, it is of course usual to seek a second opinion but it should be noted that Mr Aleck Bourne did not consider a second opinion was necessary in the case which made him famous and which made our present law. Every day terminations are being performed efficiently by doctors other than gynaecologists. If the BMA/RCOG view were

to prevail, these qualified doctors would find themselves bracketed with unqualified abortionists.

In view of the pressure upon gynaecologists' time and of the known attitude of many consultants, such a restriction would have the effect of decreasing the number of abortions at present carried out *lawfully*. Furthermore, the requirement would fail to look forward to the time, not far distant, when termination will be procurable without special skill, eg, by the woman taking a pill.

ALRA cannot believe that the insistence upon the use of a consultant is motivated by a desire to protect the patient from unskilled operators—rather is it the result of a particular moral or religious bias which we should not seek to enforce by law.

The insistence that the operation "has to be carried out in a National Health hospital or other place approved for the purpose by the Minister", and the consequent deletion of a registered nursing home from the Bill is another piece of restrictionism.

It is unprecedented for an Act of Parliament to require a medical operation to be performed in a particular place. There is no requirement in the present law that the operation be performed in a hospital or nursing home and this requirement is also absent from the Infant Life (Preservation) Act of 1929.

There is already severe pressure on beds in hospitals and maternity units. If places are excluded where terminations are now being performed and no alternative accommodation is provided, the result will be the opposite of the intention of the Bill, namely to liberalise the law and practice and so bring about a decrease in the number of unqualified operators.

Here again, the requirement fails to look forward to the time when the technique will be much simpler.

#### Indications

ALRA does not object to the removal of the words "serious" and "grave" in clause 1 (1) (a) relating to the health of the pregnant woman.

For the BMA and RCOG to say, however, that clauses 1 (c) and (d) "are objectionable in specifying indications which are not medical" indicates a serious confusion of thought. The fact that the operation is being carried out by a medical practitioner need not carry the automatic implication that it is carried out on medical grounds.

The definition given to health by the World Health Organisation is "a state of complete, physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity". A good family doctor looks at the patient's whole situation in making a diagnosis and prescribing a remedy.

To say that "an excessive demand for termination on social grounds . . . would be unacceptable to the medical profession" is tautologous. Of course an excessive demand would be unacceptable. If, however, it is intended to mean that every demand for the termination on social grounds is unacceptable to the medical profession, then that is simply not true. There is no evidence that a majority of members of the medical profession subscribe to this restrictive view.

Those who object to clauses (1) (c) and (d) on the ground that they will permit abortion on general "social" indications and allow abortion on demand read too much into the wording of the clauses. Clause (c) applies only when the woman's capacity as a mother will be severely overstrained by an addition to her family or where her capacity is so poor that it would be overstrained by having to care for a single child (eg, a mentally abnormal or subnormal woman whose condition is not so severe as to bring her within the Mental Health Acts of England and Wales and of Scotland).

The suggestion to add that "account may be taken of the patient's total environment, actual or reasonably foreseeable" while unobjectionable does not really add to current practice. It does not allow, as clause (c) would, for the conditions of the existing family to be taken into account. The same reasons as make the doctor concerned for the welfare of the woman should make him concerned for the welfare of the existing children.

The BMA/RCOG statement that "each case has to be assessed on its own merits" has no substance when related to clause (d) which is concerned with sexual offences. The rationale of this clause is that the woman gave no consent to the sexual intercourse or else that she gave some kind of consent but which she is not regarded in law as competent to give.

Since the law aims to protect women from sexual offences it should also define the principle on which doctors may terminate pregnancies resulting from such offences.

#### Notification

The requirement that all terminations should be notified instead of only those performed outside hospitals ignores the fact that all operations performed in hospital are recorded in the hospital register. For the BMA to single out for additional hospital procedure terminations of pregnancy suggests only one purpose: it wishes to discourage abortions.

## NEWS AND NOTES

DOES THE FOETUS suffer pain when aborted? The Society for the Protection of Unborn Children says Yes. The Abortion Law Reform Association replies that this dogmatic assertion is unsupported by evidence. If there is evidence that the foetus suffers pain it is right and fair that the SPUC should say so. Women in particular should be well informed about abortion, its pros and its cons.

Having said this it seems to me that the SPUC is more interested in whipping up near hysterical resentment of the Bill by highly emotive and, I suspect, not entirely accurate assertions than it is in promoting factual knowledge of the disadvantages of abortion. At a recent SPUC Press conference the Medical Termination of Pregnancy Bill was condemned because if it became law it could lead to "unnecessary slaughter of healthy babies".

"Unnecessary" begs the question. If many abortions are unnecessary why is it that every year thousands of women risk their health and even their life by having illegal, ill-performed abortions. "Healthy" begs the question. No one can be sure if a particular foetus is healthy or unhealthy and you cannot tell if a baby is healthy until it is born. So to talk of the "unnecessary slaughter of healthy babies" is sheer and utter nonsense, as well as being highly irresponsible. Then this very emotive word "slaughter". It may well make those who are acquainted with the Holy Bible think of the slaughter of the innocents by that cruel, callous brute, Herod. And perhaps that is precisely why the word has been used.

I was particularly irritated by Professor Ian Donald's description of abortion procedures. He said that the baby could be removed kicking. "You have got to kill it, by drowning or freezing it. You have to hide it from the nurses. It is very upsetting to see a healthy baby destroyed in this wanton way. Or a baby could be removed by suction. The head, arms and legs usually come off. It is not an elegant operation."

I am not so sure that there is anything particularly elegant about the SPUC. Does Professor Donald know so little of the pain caused by self-induced abortion, for example? The pain caused to the woman and the pain caused, as he would have it, to the foetus. Or is he unconcerned with *this* cause of pain? Does he regard this as the just vengeance of righteousness on the wanton wicked women who have wilfully tampered with the purity of Nature? Come, come, Professor Donald. Perhaps you would care to describe to us the horrible sight of a disintegrated foetus being removed from the womb of a woman who, in desperation, has tried to terminate her pregnancy herself or with the aid of an unqualified person. If such a sight or the thought of it does not upset you it does upset those who wish to see the Medical Termination of Pregnancy Bill become law. If you and your SPUC colleagues are so much against abortion I say this to you. Conception has taken place. You can do nothing to prevent this. The Bill is now in an advanced stage of pregnancy. You cannot turn the clock back. Either the Bill will be born healthy and fit to play its long awaited rôle in alleviating human misery or it will be born into the legal world misshapen, deformed and crippled. The latter will only occur if those who are attempting to perform the abortion are murderously successful. So put away your scalpels of emotive phraseology, put them away in your lugubrious black bag. Desist with your intemperate mutilations and let the Bill be born.

### It's never too late to mend

NOT A MOMENT too soon Fordham University, the most influential Roman Catholic university in the United States, is to launch a campaign to instruct the faithful throughout the land in the Jewish origins of Christianity, the evolution of the Church from the synagogue and the dreadful history of the persecution of the Jews.

In 1908 the following words of James J. Walsh rolled off the Fordham University presses: "In a word, I failed to find any trace of Papal opposition to true science in any form". This was part of Walsh's preface to his important bleaching book, *The Popes and Science*, subsequently published in this country by the Catholic Truth Society. Had enlightenment for the deluded faithful about their Church's unjustified persecution of the Jews and its indebtedness to the Jewish people and the Jewish religion rolled off the Fordham University presses in 1908 instead of Walsh's book, the climate in Europe thirty years later might not have been so conducive to Hitler's successful campaign for the mass extermination of Jews. Christianity, as preached and practised for centuries, helped to lay the seeds of anti-semitism and procreate the monster of hatred. However, the past cannot be undone. I welcome Fordham University's current campaign of enlightenment. It is yet another sign of a heartening change of appraisal within the Roman Catholic Church.

### The other side of the fence

NOT SO HEARTENING was the drunken shout I heard in a tube train late the other night. "If there's a Catholic in here, then get out", bawled an uncouth youth. Since nobody seemed anxious to meet his demand by getting off the train which was speeding along, he yelled out a defiant piece of information, "I'm down here if you want me". No doubt he and his besotted friends would have been glad if a Catholic martyr had turned up and said, "Well, I'm a Catholic, but I'm not getting out before High Street Kensington unless the Pope tells me to". We should then have seen some unofficial Christian unity in action. I should dearly like to know about the upbringing of the bawling bibulous barbarian. My speculation is that before he learned to imbibe alcohol he was taught to imbibe hatred of Catholics and Catholicism at an Evangelistic Church School. The "Scarlet Whore" mentality is still at large in some of our "educational" institutions and where the State does not have complete control and maybe only very little influence, we must resign ourselves to the fact that children will continue to be indoctrinated in religious sectarianism.

### Religion in schools

THE NATIONAL SECULAR SOCIETY has organised a public forum on Religion in Schools. The meeting will take place at the Caxton Hall on Friday, February 10th, beginning at 7.30 p.m. The list of speakers suggests that it will be a meeting well worth attending.

### ADVERTISEMENTS

MAN, 46, seeks new employment. Ministry of Labour rehabilitated from 26 years HG driving to clerical worker in local government. Any interesting appointment considered. Honest and reliable person. Home Counties preferred. Replies to Box 33, The FREETHINKER.

BOOKS WANTED: *They Were Singing* by Christopher Puling (published by Gollancz, 1963); *Lunacy of Ink*, author's name unknown. Contact P. Kay, 8 Greenhill, Wembley Park, Middlesex. Telephone: Arnold 6531.

## SUNDAY SIXTY YEARS AGO

H. P. Lamont

TO ME, as a child, Sunday was hell. We were a large family and every Sunday morning my father shouted from downstairs to the brood scattered in the upper regions, "Get ready for chapel, you tinkers". Only serious illness could prevent our attendance at the place of torment. I often marvel that mother was able to cope with the stockings that needed mending, the Eton collars with broken stud-holes, the torn garments and shirts that required patching. Of course we had special suits for Sunday. They smelt of moth balls and made us look like orphans of the storm. We even had to carry gloves. Although desperately poor, our parents were eminently respectable and had very definite ideas as to the proper garb for the holy day.

The clamant church bells began to ring at about 10.30 a.m. Mother never attended the morning service. She had to cook a special dinner, when funds permitted. Father inspected us, like an NCO in front of his platoon. Sometimes we had to dash indoors to polish our boots, wash our face or tie up our sagging stockings. With muttered imprecations father at length allowed us to accompany him down the village street. As we advanced we met other members of the chapel, all in dark clothes and all solemn. Religion in Sketty<sup>(1)</sup> was a serious matter 60 odd years ago.

Father was a bit deaf, so we occupied a pew very near the pulpit. The preacher was usually a hedge-trimmer, market gardener or carpenter who made up in zeal for what he lacked in scholarship. The prayers were long and incoherent. The Big Boss upstairs was jealous, ready to inflict dire punishment if we made graven images, fornicated, bore false witness and coveted our neighbour's ass. While the preacher ranted I fidgeted or made faces at my pals who responded with gusto and occasionally earned a clip on the lug. To the tune of the hymn father muttered fierce threats about what he would do when we returned home; they were not idle threats, either.

### Satan's scribe

Bliss, harps and crowns for the saved, flames and eternal woe for the damned. They all laboured the same theme. Of course Satan finds work for idle hands. I wrote doggerel in hymn books, scratched my pal's nicknames with a sharp nail on the back of the pew, and ruined my shoddy boots by putting them on the hot water pipes.

The service usually ended at about 12.30 p.m. but could continue longer when a zealot, intoxicated by his verbosity, moaned, ranted and raved with such fervour that one of the elders had to remind the wind-bag that it was really time to stop. One roaring preacher used to shout: "You want to hurry home to your dinners, but Christ offers you celestial manna. He who tastes it needs no other food". Then he sang, in a cracked tenor:

"Hungry, Lord, for Thy word of truth,  
Sitting at my Saviour's feet;  
Rising, gleaning, just like Ruth,  
Feed me on the finest of the wheat.  
Bread of life it is now to me,  
Honey, wine and meat;  
In Thy love I will ever be  
Fed upon the finest of the wheat."

There were other verses, but I have forgotten them.

At the end of the service my father always invited the preacher home for dinner. Usually the tub-thumper came from a distance and accepted. Occasionally my mother blew her top after the guest had departed, because she had not been warned of his arrival.

Sunday School lasted a couple of hours in the afternoon.

One ancient spinster gave us up as a bad job because we tormented her abominably, asking her the meaning of many rude words and reading aloud the passage in Isaiah where men sit on a wall and do unpleasant things with their faeces and urine.

One man knew how to interest us. He had served in the Boer War and told us marvellous tales of the countless Boers he had shot, stabbed, strangled and kicked to death. I suspect he was a terrible liar, but we found his tales so thrilling you could have heard a pin drop.

The evening service was particularly lugubrious in winter. Branches of trees swept to and fro against the windows as the preacher depicted the terrors of hell that awaited us if we did not repent pronto and seek salvation.

Occasionally my brother Tom (two years older than I) persuaded me to play truant from chapel or Sunday School. We either walked along the sands to Mumbles or explored Singleton, where the university college now stands. Returning home I was thrashed with a steel rule while Tom dashed upstairs, opened the window, clutched the bars and threatened to yell blue murder if touched. So he escaped scot free.

On Sunday evenings, after chapel, my father made us sit round the table in the living room while he read long boring passages from the holy book. How I hated the Amalakites, the Ishmalites and all the other shites! The blather in Revelations seemed to me the diatribes of a drunken lunatic.

### Melancholy Music

Although I was brought up in South Wales, my parents were Scottish, imbued with the fanatical zeal of those who signed the solemn League and Covenant. All frivolity was banned on Sunday. A secular tune on the piano called for instant stern rebuke. At the age of ten I played: —

"For ever with the Lord,  
Amen! so let it be!  
Life from the dead is in that word,  
'Tis immortality.  
Here in the body pent,  
Absent from Him I roam  
Yet nightly pitch my moving tent  
A day's march nearer home."

Sometimes I had to entertain visitors who must have thought me barmy when I banged the keys and warbled: —

"So when my latest breath,  
Shall rend the veil in twain,  
By death I shall escape from death,  
And life eternal gain.  
Knowing as I am known,  
How shall I love that word!  
And oft repeat before the throne,  
For ever with the Lord!"

Many years later, when a psychiatrist examined me, he asked if my juvenile choice of hymns denoted melancholia.

"Not at all," I replied.

"Then why did you choose them?" he asked.

"Because the tunes were easy to play," I explained.

My mother solemnly assured me the man in the moon had been placed there by God for chopping sticks on a Sunday, and I believed that nonsense for many years.

No words of mine can convey the boredom, the frustration and the exasperation that I endured every Sunday from the age of about five until I joined the Army in 1914. Oh religion, what horrors are perpetrated in thy name! Our parents meant well. They believed it was their obvious duty to save us from the snares of hell, even if they had

to be thoroughly Draconian. My father really believed he would be called to account on Judgment Day and severely punished by a wrathful Deity if any of us strayed from the straight and narrow path. So he flogged without mercy to rescue us from the clutches of Satan.

### Christian Charity

In *Death of a Hero* Richard Aldington said that religion is such an easy excuse for being nasty, and I must confess that Christian charity seemed conspicuous by its absence among the zealots of my youth. A girl who *went wrong* was usually chucked out of the home by her pious parents. A local tradesman renowned for his religious fervour, diddled the poor widow out of a penny or two whenever he saw the opportunity. I don't say that all the chapel gang were hypocrites, but many paid lip service to religion while behaving like heathens. They never suspected that the Sermon on the Mount applied to them.

The chapel stalwarts hated the Roman Catholics, the Anglicans and the Jews. In the words of Swift they had just enough religion to make them hate, but not enough to make them love one another.

My mother was a great stickler for the proprieties. I recall a village wench (daughter of a wealthy parvenu) who married a terrific snob. She had a white wedding, half a dozen bridesmaids and guests rolled up in carriages from all over South Wales. The local paper gave the affair great prominence. Then about six weeks after the ceremony, Daisy produced a brat. My mother fulminated with such venom that her anger amazed me. She kept repeating: "God will punish them!" I asked a pal to explain the mystery. "'E 'ad 'er before they was spliced," he declared, to my astonishment. The pious were grateful when the brat died in infancy. "God is not mocked," affirmed my mother.

## JOHN BROWN'S SOUL (Part 1)

"No Sir," said General Sherman,  
"I did NOT enjoy the sermon.  
Nor I didn't git any  
Kick outa the Litany."

*Clerihews Complete.*

THE American Civil War has an interest for Rationalists. It is possible that the religious views of the military leaders on both sides affected their strategy.

If this is true, the effects are stupendous. There is no doubt that the Civil War changed history. If the South had won, America (the United States) would have split up into several nations and could not have had the effect on the world she has had.

The situation in 1861-65 was as follows: the South wanted to break away from the Union. The Northern states wanted to stop her. The North had far more men and money; but the South had good soldiers, and she had also a great general—Robert E. Lee. In several battles—Fredericksburg, Chancellerville and others—he defeated the Union generals sent against him.

For years the world thought Lee one of the greatest generals in history. But this view was challenged in the 1930s. Major-General J. F. C. Fuller wrote several books saying that Lee was a failure. What right had General Fuller to challenge the opinion of almost every historian, and to defy such an impressive array of fact? The answer is that Fuller (though a conservative in politics and religion) was, in military matters, one of the Great Rebels. That is to say he often disagreed with Established Military

Lucretius asserted that *tantum religio potuit suadere malorum*,<sup>(2)</sup> and I have known religious people who were far more mean, vindictive and unforgiving than any heathen. The most pious humbug I knew was the nastiest rogue I ever encountered in my long and chequered academic career.

### Spindleshanks and Slug

I shall never forget the consternation caused by a pal of mine called Bill Slug who, at the age of fourteen refused to work, declaring that he did not ask to come into the world, and as his parents procreated for their pleasure they would have to keep him. We were ordered to say special prayers for him. The last time I saw him he had become a tout for a Soho clip joint.

At intervals a zealot named Theodosius Spindleshanks gave special talks in chapel and Sunday School on the perils of self-abuse. If we defiled our bodies we would become mad, blind and paralysed, a grim prospect indeed.

Let it not be thought that I am against true piety. I have known saints whom I admired enormously. But I have no time for a fanatical creed that torments children whose parents are afflicted with what seems to me a perverted religious mania. A vindictive Jehovah has always repelled me and I want to have nothing to do with Him.

Three of my favourite texts, so incompatible with the Sunday sermonizing of sixty years ago, are: —

1. Let the one without sin cast the first stone.
2. In as much as ye did it unto one of the least of these, my brethren, ye did it unto Me.
3. Ye shall know the truth and the truth shall make you free.

(1) Village near Swansea.

(2) Such are the heights of wickedness to which men are driven by religion.

I. S. Low

Opinion, and was often proved right. For instance, after the First World War he thought tanks would be the decisive weapon of the next war. He was proved most unpleasantly right in 1940.

It should be added that Fuller considers himself a good Christian, and he certainly cannot be called an atheist or rationalist.

### Battles that could have been better won

What exactly does he say about Lee? His thesis is that though Lee won battles, he did not win them well enough; and he could have won them well enough. More precisely, had Lee handled things differently, the final defeat of the Confederacy could have been avoided. For instance, in the Seven Days' Battle in June 1862 Lee saved the rebel capital Richmond from being captured, but failed to destroy the Union army. And Fuller is quite definite about one of the reasons for this—the General put too much trust in God.

In his book *Grant and Lee* General Fuller says

"More often than not, this reliance on Providence deprived him of all possible chance of gaining a decisive victory." . . . "At Fredericksburg he let the decisive moment slip away . . . he . . . as Chesney says, 'missed an opportunity of further advantage such as even a great victory has rarely offered'."

What had happened was that the Union General Burnside had tried to attack the Confederates who were holding a position behind the Rappahannock river. Lee inflicted a crushing defeat; the Federals lost many men;

they fell back disorganised and disheartened. Had Lee attacked, he might have destroyed the Union Army. (It should be mentioned that the Federals made so many mistakes in this campaign that Lee could hardly help winning). J. B. Mitchell, in *Decisive Battles of the Civil War* says:

"Many historians believe that General Lee lost at Fredericksburg his best chance to destroy the Union army, that he should have counter-attacked on the evening of the battle while the Northern forces were disorganised from their defeat. . . . By the next morning it was too late; the Union troops were by that time prepared to resist a counter-attack".

Why didn't Lee take this chance? Fuller says:

"The reason may have been, as Henderson supposes, that it was out of consideration for the inhabitants of Fredericksburg, that Lee did not attack; but personally I think that once battle was joined he handed over his command to God". Finally, Fuller quotes the Southern General Taylor: "Indeed it may be confidently asserted that from Cold Harbour to Malvern Hill inclusive there was nothing but a series of errors, one after

another and all huge. . . . We had much praying at various headquarters and large reliance on Special Providence; but none were vouchsafed by pillar of cloud or of fire".

General Fuller also has much to say about Stonewall Jackson. Many people have heard about Jackson without knowing much about him. He and Lee were a famous combination, like Gilbert and Sullivan. When Lee planned a campaign, he usually gave Jackson the most important part to play. Now Jackson's fanatical religious fervour was notorious:

"Appealing from his native sod,  
In *forma pauperis* to God,  
'Lay bare thine arm—stretch forth thy rod,  
Amen'—that's Stonewall's way."

There is no doubt that this religious confidence enabled Jackson to face great dangers without fearing or flinching. But according to Fuller it had unfortunate strategic effects.

### Too much time in church

In the Seven Days' Battle the Union army had landed to the east of Richmond (having come by sea) and was about to attack that city. It heavily outnumbered the rebels. Lee ordered Jackson to move threateningly towards Washington, which had no troops in front of it. At once large numbers of Union troops were ordered back to defend Washington. This left the Union force near Richmond much depleted. Lee's plan was that Jackson and his men should rush back to Richmond, so that with them and the troops already there the Confederates would outnumber the Federals. It was a good plan. And it saved Richmond. The Union army was driven back. But it was not destroyed. Why?

Because, Fuller says, Jackson and his army wasted too much time in church when they should have been marching to the battlefield.

"Jackson", says the Major General in his *Decisive Battles of the United States*, "having received Lee's letter of the 15th, moved his 18,500 men down the Virginia Central Railroad and arrived at Frederick's Hall ahead of them on Sunday 22nd. There he remained attending religious meetings until the Sabbath was over. . . . This waste of precious military time, as we shall see, was the initial cause which wrecked Lee's campaign".

When Jackson arrived, Lee planned to attack the Federals. Part of his army was to attack them in front while Jackson attacked the flank. Says Fuller, "If (Lee) had struck Porter before he could be reinforced, then, as General Alexander writes 'the game was Lee's for a great success—the greatest ever so fairly offered to any Confederate general'." Most unfortunately for Lee and the entire South, this was not to be. Not only did Jackson's men, as we have seen, spend Sunday in praying instead of marching, but they made so poor an advance on Monday that ". . . they failed to arrive in time and the enemy escaped".

The following Sunday—the 29th—Jackson repeated his performance. So did the Federals.

Curiously enough, there is another example of slow marching—on the Union side this time. At the Battle of Shiloh the Confederates took the Union army by surprise; the Northerners were pushed back with heavy losses. A certain General was ordered to the help of the struggling Union forces. According to Liddell Hart,

he "arrived belatedly, having taken all day to cover a distance which, directly, was only five miles". Also he attacked at the wrong place. Says Liddell Hart: "He appreciated too much the risk of fighting isolated, and too little the enemy's feelings when a fresh division appeared on their rear flank, and thus forwent the opportunity of an early afternoon intervention which might well have been decisive".

The General's name? Lew Wallace, later famous as the author of that pro-Christian best-seller *Ben Hur!*

[To be concluded next week.]

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## ANNOUNCEMENTS

Items for insertion in this column must reach THE FREETHINKER  
office at least ten days before the date of publication.

National Secular Society. Details of membership and inquiries  
regarding bequests and secular funeral services may be obtained  
from the General Secretary, 103 Borough High Street, London,  
S.E.1. Telephone: HOP 2717. Cheques, etc., should be made  
payable to the NSS.

Humanist Holidays. Hastings: Thursday, March 23rd to April 1st.  
Burton-in-the-Wirral, Cheshire: Painting Holiday, July 29th to  
August 12th. Details from Mrs M. Mephram, 29 Fairview Road,  
Sutton, Surrey. Telephone, Vigilant 8796.

Humanist Letter Network (International): send s.a.e to Kit  
Mouat, Mercers, Cuckfield, Sussex.

### OUTDOOR

Edinburgh Branch NSS (The Mound)—Sunday afternoon and  
evening: Messrs. CRONAN, McRAE and MURRAY.

Manchester Branch NSS, Platts Fields, Car Park, Victoria Street,  
Sunday evenings, 8 p.m.: Messrs COLLINS, DUIGNAN, MILLS and  
WOOD.

Merseyside Branch NSS (Pierhead)—Meetings: Wednesdays,  
1 p.m.: Sundays, 3 p.m. and 7.30 p.m.

Nottingham Branch NSS (Old Market Square), every Friday,  
1 p.m.: T. M. MOSLEY.

### INDOOR

Brighton and Hove Humanist Group (Regency House, Oriental  
Place, Brighton), Sunday, February 5th, 5.30 p.m.: KATHLEEN  
NOTT, "Culture and Morality".

Leicester Secular Society (Secular Hall, 75 Humberstone Gate),  
Sunday, February 5th, 6.30 p.m.: F. A. RIDLEY, "The Evolution  
of Secularism".

South Place Ethical Society (Conway Hall Humanist Centre, Red  
Lion Square, London, WC1), Sunday, February 5th, 11 a.m.:  
Professor A. PHILLIPS GRIFFITHS, "Reason in Ethics in  
Science"; Tuesday, February 7th, 6.30 p.m.: RICHARD HAUSER,  
"Social Education".

South Place Sunday Concerts (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square,  
London, WC1), Sunday, February 5th, 6.30 p.m.: Oromonte  
Piano Trio. Haydn, Beethoven, Schubert. Admission 3/-.

West Ham and District Branch NSS (Wanstead and Woodford  
Community Centre, Wanstead Green, London, E11), Meetings  
at 8 p.m. on the fourth Thursday of every month.

# THEATRE

David Tribe

The Experiment (David Halliwell and David Calderisi), Arts  
Theatre Club.

The Soldier's Fortune (Thomas Otway), Royal Court.

WHAT is the intrinsic life of a dramatic character? How does it  
relate to that of the player? Pirandello philosophised, Method  
actors fret about it. *The Experiment* borrows some cinematic de-  
vices from René Clair and his school, adds inventions of the  
QUIPU Company and turns every theatrical convention on its  
head. Various incidents in the life and assassination of President  
Garfield are taken and burlesqued, with the actors changing rôles  
in subsequent scenes. A programme note by David Calderisi  
describes the production as a technical "improvisation", with  
variations on a mental orchestration in the jazz idiom. Super-  
ficially, however, the evening suggests a satire on Joan Littlewood,  
Tyrone Guthrie and the "director's theatre", the theatre of cruelty  
and the theatre of fact. There is a wonderful "infra theatre"  
creation of the twenty-seventh ballot at the Republican Party  
convention in 1881, mercilessly lampooning Andy Warhol and  
the New York underground cinema, that aims at the complete  
boredom and detitillation of the audience.

A lively jazz interlude on the piano by Lawrence Beck accom-  
panies some virtuoso performances, notably by Tom Kempinski  
in the Kenneth Williams manner. The sympathetic "direction" is  
by the authors.

AFTER almost two decades of Puritan piety and no theatre, Eng-  
lish audiences soaked up Restoration comedies. What is so  
impressive is the decorum and grace of their lewdness and vul-  
garity. Only today are we beginning to escape from the senti-  
mentality and prudery of the Victorian stage, and there is still  
often a self-conscious bravado in which modern dramatists put in  
their thumb, pull out a raspberry and say "What a bad boy am I".

Thomas Otway (1652-85), who died in abject poverty after  
writing *The Atheist*, is best remembered for his hilarious *Soldier's  
Fortune*, the story of two captains, one of whom cuckolds Sir  
Davy Dunce while the other courts his niece. The whisking away  
of moral considerations is aided by the odiousness of Sir Davy  
and the nature of seventeenth century holy wedlock wherein, at  
the behest of her parents, Lady Dunce, "said a few words to him  
once after a priest".

Bravura period acting comes from Arthur Lowe as Sir Davy;  
Wallas Eaton as Sir Jolly Jumble, the whoremonger who scorns  
being a matchmaker; Bernard Gallagher as Bloodybones, the  
supposed assassin; and Sheila Hancock as Lady Dunce, especially  
splendid in her parody of Shakespearean tragedy when detected  
by her husband with her lover in the bedroom. Music by John  
Dankworth, flying sets by John Gunter and fast direction by Peter  
Gill add to a splendid evening.

## LETTERS

### Men frustrated

I DO appreciate the article "Men Frustrated" following my article  
"Women Alone". I would like to say that there is no loneliness so  
agonising as loneliness inside of marriage. I know, because I suf-  
fered it for years. I agree that some women find complete gratifi-  
cation in the bearing and rearing of children, or at any rate an  
outlet for much of their emotions and energy. The writer of  
"Men Frustrated" says that in the second half of life when the  
problem of child bearing does not worry a woman she might then  
find the companionship and sexual fulfilment she is seeking for.  
The joke about this is that by the time a woman reaches the age  
where she no longer fears pregnancy men usually find her too  
old and unattractive to take notice of her!

No, I can only say that we humans are a sorry lot. Owing to a  
variety of reasons—the complexity of our civilisation, universal  
guilt feelings, our own complicated natures and a thousand cut-  
side circumstances, we spend our entire lives in the pursuit of  
peace and happiness that always seem to elude us. In our old age  
we look back wearily on a life of desperate competition and  
struggle and say how futile it all was; what did I get out of it?  
What was it all about? What did I achieve?

We have discarded the hollow consolations of religion and not  
one of the ancient or new philosophers, the wise men, the writers  
and thinkers, have been able to give us any answers yet.

WOMAN ALONE