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POLICE HARRY HOMOSEXUALS AND THE 'UNDERGROUND'

IN THE FREETHINKER of May 10 this year, under the heading 'IT and Homosexuality', attention was focused on a police raid on the offices of *International Times*. This article was quoted from the BBC radio programme 'The Weekly World' on May 10. The police raid was alleged to have been initiated by "complaints from MPs of both parties about IT's making its columns available to lonely homosexuals". Amongst other things "the police took away sixty letters addressed to box numbers. This is not only an untenable intrusion into the lives of those who wrote the letters, but brings to light the fact that there is nothing to protect people, who have advertised with box numbers, or written to box numbers, from being put on police records and made to undergo an investigation . . . , even if they were not guilty of any crime".

This was written with a view to what was *possible* rather than to what was actually *likely* to happen. However, astounding as it may seem when the amount of public protest that the incident engendered is considered, the police have in fact been to see four men who advertised for homosexual partners. They asked the men to complete a questionnaire, which demanded answers to questions about their private lives. These men complained to the National Council for Civil Liberties. One of them went to the police accompanied by a solicitor, supplied by the NCCL, who told the policemen concerned that their questions were 'quite improper'. The other three men were too frightened to refuse to answer, as they are legally entitled to do.

The British police are continually referred to as the best police force in the world. If they intrude in this way into a man's private life for no other reason than that he has placed an advertisement for a homosexual partner, one begins to wonder whether it is all right to be a heterosexual in other parts of the world.

The Commissioner of Police has assured the Home Secretary's Private Secretary that any letters seized by the police and not forming the subject matter of inquiries, will be returned. This gives little comfort since it is the criteria which the police use to determine what should be 'the subject matter of inquiries' which is obviously in need of adjustment. Nor did the Commissioner say what his police force is likely to do with letters which do give grounds for inquiry.

Peace News of September 5 made an interesting comment on the recent police action against the four men. "The suspicion that the police are acting illegally has been given near-confirmation after a ruling by Mr Justice Talbot on Thursday, August 28, in a case concerning the seizure of passports. It was ruled that the police have no right to hold documents belonging to people who have not been charged or shown by evidence to be unconnected with the matter under investigation."

The fact that this strange and, it seems likely illegal, police action is so closely linked with the underground newspaper, *International Times*, cannot but cause one to consider to what degree the establishment resents, or indeed fears, the existence of the disorganised collection of people and institutions, which is collectively referred to as the 'underground'. *IT* and the other leading 'underground'

paper *Oz* have had repeated trouble from police, printers, customs officials and so on. In FREETHINKER of May 10, the point was made that as a result of the confiscation of letters to box numbers: "*IT's* revenue from classified revenue will very likely suffer, and it is well-known that the paper depends heavily on the revenue it receive from this source". Since then *IT* has ceased to carry advertisements for homosexuals. It is not unreasonable to suggest that this is only a by-product of a subtle 'war of nerves'.

Readers of the FREETHINKER will do well to consider that in terms of radicalism there is no small comparison between this paper when it was founded, and *IT* at present.

INSIDE:

A MAN OF GOOD TASTE

—An appraisal by Tony Halliday of

Edward Gibbon

MORE AMOROUS PRIESTS

THE QUESTION of the celibacy of Roman Catholic priests, which together with birth control forms the backbone of the current bitter disagreement within the hierarchy of the Roman Catholic church, has up till now been one of those issues which is discussed in principle rather than practice. For, hitherto no reliable figures have been available to show the extent of the problem. Some figures have now been published which though not reliable have the official stamp of Papal approval. These have been published in this country in the September issue of *Herder Correspondence*, the Catholic review. Two separate tables cover the years 1963 to 1968, one for what are called 'secular' priests and one for 'regular' priests. The former are 'ordinary' priests as distinct from the latter, who belong to orders, such as Dominican, Franciscan and Jesuit.

The increase in numbers over the six years is phenomenal. In North America the figure for 'secular' priests has gone from 8 in 1963, to 230 in 1968. Germany, Switzerland, Austria and Holland, lumped together, show an increase from 3 to 130. Latin America has the highest num-

(Continued on next page)

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ber of 'secular' priests asking for dispensation during the six years with 661. The rate of increase is itself increasing rapidly. In 1968 the total number of 'secular' applicants in the world was 1,026. From January 1 to March 20, less than three months, the figure is over half that, at 675. The total figure for 'secular' priests over the six year period is 3,330. This is 1.28 per cent of the 260,051 'secular' priests in the world. 82 per cent of these applicants were granted dispensation. 'Regular' priests show a rather higher predilection for the so-called 'evils of the flesh'. 3,807 of the world's 164,832 'regular' priests applied. This is 2.31 per cent, but only 71 per cent of these were granted dispensation.

Of course these figures bear little relation to the real numbers of Catholic priests leaving the priesthood to marry. For, first it is probable that many of those whose dispensations are not granted leave the church regardless. While secondly, and more important, we know that many priests having experienced the essentially humanist feeling of love for a woman, undergo a complete change in outlook, and leave the priesthood without bothering to apply for his Holiness' permission. Many of these resent having wasted years of their lives in an unnatural state.

The figures do however, explain the panic which has emanated from the Vatican recently. And it must be remembered that priests leave the church for many reasons other than a desire to marry. It does not seem unlikely therefore that not far in the future Pope Paul will be compelled by the seriousness of the situation to soften the hard line of his 1967 encyclical: "it is only when no other solution can be found for a priest in this unhappy condition that he should be relieved of his office". (Somehow the use of the word 'unhappy' there, symbolises the intrinsic evil, or in modern parlance 'sickness' of the Roman Catholic church—

COMING EVENTS

National Secular Society. Details of membership and inquiries regarding bequests and secular funeral services may be obtained from the General Secretary, 103 Borough High Street, London, SE1. Telephone 01-407 2717. Cheques, etc., should be made payable to the NSS.

Humanist Letter Network (International) and Humanist Postal Book Service (secondhand books bought and sold). For information or catalogue send 6d stamp to Kit Mouat, Mercers, Cuckfield, Sussex.

OUTDOOR

Edinburgh Branch NSS (The Mound)—Sunday afternoon and evening: Messrs. Cronan and McRae.

Manchester Branch NSS, Platt Fields, Sunday afternoon, 3 p.m.: Car Park, Victoria Street, Sunday evenings, 8 p.m.

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

South Place Ethical Society: Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London, WC1: Sunday, September 28, 3 p.m.: 71st Annual Reunion—The Guest of Honour, Mr H. J. Blackham, BA, will speak on 'Being British'. Tea at 5 p.m. and Songs by Unity Singers.

its warped ambitions, and catastrophic actions, not only over the centuries past but in 1969.)

Much pressure is upon the Pope to change the 'holy' law. Not only are the now noted progressive Cardinals, Bishops and theologians clamouring for it to be altered, but now *Herder Correspondence* in its comments on the figures is, to say the least, bitter. Pinpointing the humbug, which characterises the Catholic leadership the paper says: "The simplest way through the bureaucratic jungle is to get married first and then have things straightened out by the Roman authorities. The other major disturbing factor is the attempt to keep the priest's marriage secret at all costs . . . the attitude seems to be that if you can't stop it happening, you might as well pretend it didn't happen".

A DAY IN SUSSEX

SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 21st, 1969

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SECULARISM TODAY

RICHARD CLEMENTS

THIS ARTICLE is about the Annual Report of the National Secular Society for the year 1968-69. The report is a workman-like document which should be studied by Free-thinkers, Humanists and Progressives. I commend it warmly to readers of the FREETHINKER, and to other inquiring minds of whatever school of thought they may belong. For this publication indicates with courage and clarity the path of advance for men and women who believe in rational thought and action. That is one of its major purposes.

"The Unfinished Business"

It is also the record of the thinking, planning and work-a-day activities of the Society's members, affiliated bodies, its committees and its officers. This brings out the striking fact that a few determined men and women, with meagre financial resources, have been able to mobilize and give public expression to opinions and views that would otherwise have been ignored. Thus, in the new and exciting world around us, the National Secular Society has again shown how necessary it is to create, strengthen and keep informed a robust Secularism in the life of this country.

That, under the splendid leadership of our pioneers, was its service to the British people in the past; but "man's unfinished business goes on", freedom of thought, human rights, peace at home and abroad, tolerance, and steady progress towards global social security—and many other desirable things not yet within our ken, remain to be won by man's struggle.

War and Peace

The report is entitled *Vision and Realism*; and throughout its pages there are sharp notes of challenge: it opens with a rapid glance at some of the tragic and distracting events of our times. First, the long drawn out Vietnamese war, which the United States has so far failed to win; and also the futility of the efforts of the diplomats in Paris to find a way out of the tangle. Meanwhile, the loss of life and treasure—on both sides—continues; "the war is more strenuously pursued than the peace talks in Paris". Thus a whole region in Asia finds itself as far as ever from peace and security. The lessons to be drawn from this experience underline the truth of ex-President Truman's dictum: *that war is no longer a rational solution for the settlement of disputes between nations.*

Reference is also made to the conflicts and confusion now prevailing in the Middle East, Eastern Europe, along the Sino-Soviet border, and over large tracts of Africa and Latin America. The authors of the report add:

"Despite interest in multi-national economic blocs, a significant, and disturbing, feature of global politics is the growth of divisions—or the consciousness of divisions—among people, represented by nationalism, separatist movements, tribalism and racialism. No continent and few countries are free of these influences, which not only degrade human relations in times of relative peace but pose a real threat of wars of unparalleled extent."

Events in recent days which have flared up in several of the areas of the world already cited, serve to underline the truth and realism of the dangers created by the disruptive influence of irrationalism in the affairs of the world.

Social Welfare

Further, attention is also drawn to the population explosion, "the failure of what is in the bread basket to catch up with what is in the oven": a neat way of reminding all who read it that it is now estimated that the world's population will be doubled by the end of the century, while food production, in spite of "the introduction of high-yielding grains in some areas", remains sluggish.

A whole range of new social problems—some being the by-products of a growing population and an expanding industry—bring in their train river and seashore pollution, noise by day and night, industrial accidents, traffic congestion and road accidents; and then, again, there are questions of erosion, the chemicalisation of the countryside, and, as Lord Ritchie-Calder has so strikingly reminded us all by prophesying a Freedom from Thirst Campaign, a time when our natural resources are used up by industry and the great cities. A truly frightful prospect. The fact is rightly stressed that the social problems of present-day society still impair physical and mental health. "Faced with these challenges secular humanists have sought to direct attention away from dogma and hysteria or apathy towards a concerned and reasoned approach based on the best available knowledge."

Surveying the year's work—one of the most active in the Society's history—its officers have supported and campaigned for action in Parliament on such matters as John Parker's Sunday Entertainment Bill, Bills against cruel sports, Lord Raglan's Voluntary Euthanasia Bill, Marriage and Divorce Law reform, and other measures for the updating of the British outlook and way of life. A whole series of public meetings, some of which attracted large audiences, were addressed by well known public figures. The details of this work are concisely presented in the report: they make interesting reading for all active Free-thinkers and Humanists.

Crises in the Churches

Two other important matters are discussed in this comprehensive report, of which the first is the author's comments on "the moral bankruptcy of Christianity", and "its irrelevance or disservice to the lives of ordinary people". The indictment is plainly and honestly drawn. They quote in support of their findings the bitter disappointment caused by Pope Paul's encyclical *Humanae Vitae* on family planning, which, "in a world spawning with the underfed and ill-housed", did nothing but confirm the obscurantist teachings of the Catholic Church on this subject. The press and radio commentators censured the Pope's views; enlightened social opinion was outraged; and, "never since the 'No Popery' agitation of a century ago", had such violent criticism and abuse been voiced by Catholics. Indeed, in the past year the massive revolts over this issue, as well as on the celibacy of priests and other questions of church discipline, led to large scale defections on the part of priests and laity.

Secondly, the year 1968 proved to be no better for the Anglican Church. Its restless questionings and weaknesses were exposed before the eyes of the country. The hopes founded upon the Anglican-Methodist scheme came to nothing; they were defeated by the timid conservatism of the Anglicans.

I conclude this review by quoting the caustic comment of the authors of the report: "If the scheme is ever ratified it now seems likely the result will be *three* churches instead of one". They add: "Meanwhile the Bishop has joined the Rector of Woolwich in outer darkness, and modernism and the New Radicalism are shown up as nothing but jaded word-games of minimal interest to either Christians or non-Christians".

Our readers must now turn to the Annual Report and read it for themselves.

A MAN OF GOOD TASTE

TONY HALLIDAY

THE CHARACTER of Gibbon given by his contemporaries rather suggests a fashionable man of leisure, than a philosopher and historian. In manner and dress he was reckoned inordinately vain at a time when foppishness was almost the rule, and he cultivated polite society in London with a diligence seemingly uncurbed by his duties as an MP. Even his own letters from Lausanne, where he retired to finish the *Decline and Fall*, present a life of refined ease. But however much the dilettante in outward conduct, Gibbon was far from being an amateur historian.

The *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* was 'the labour of six quartos and twenty years', and though it obviously differs in method and intention from the work of modern historians, its accuracy and sound judgement, even its sheer scope, are extraordinary. There were many facts Gibbon could not have had access to, and many others which, having at hand, he could not have known how to use. Of such things as the authorship and transmission, and thus of the reliability, of many of his sources, he knew even less than we do. But these were the limitations of his age and he could not have corrected them without himself transcending history. Against them we can set the great care and breadth of his reading and the penetration of his judgement. A more serious failing lies in his attitude towards the history of the later Empire, which occupies the second half of his work. It is in itself significant that as much space should be given to the history of the Western Empire between 180 and 476 as to the interval from then to the fall of Constantinople in 1453. It is not merely that his treatment of Byzantium is more compressed; it is also more superficial. He under-estimated its prosperity and importance and misunderstood the significance of its political and religious developments. He was content to see only a continuation of the decline he had recorded so meticulously in the West: a 'uniform tale of weakness and misery'. But however serious this failure may appear to us, it cannot overshadow the immense achievement of the first part of the work. Here his mastery of his subject was such that 100 years later, when revolutions in historical method had swept most of his contemporary historians into oblivion, the *Decline and Fall* could still be re-edited by Bury with only a minimum of corrections and additions to bring it up to date.

It is not only as a work of history, however, that the *Decline and Fall* should be judged, or understood. The writing of history in the eighteenth century was still largely the province of the moral philosopher. The events of the past, correctly interpreted, were expected to yield invaluable lessons for the conduct of the present, and, for all his advanced standards of scholarship, Gibbon wrote, perhaps principally, with this in view. The opinion of our times has been no more favourable to eighteenth century philosophers' concepts of history than it has been to their ideas as a whole. Too often the effect of their 'philosophical' approach is to present the past as merely a less satisfactory but necessary prelude to the enlightenment and stability of their own times. This is perhaps inevitable—Gibbon's contemporaries were writing after a century of political and material security: they could not have been expected to foresee the events of the next 50, let alone the next 150 years. But inevitable or not, it seems to us regrettable that they did not take from history the one lesson of which they stood most in need: an understanding of the capacity for self-destructive violence which we nowadays recognise as a

permanent inheritance of man, even at his most civilised. Such failure is for us all the more regrettable in that it seems to indicate a basic misjudgement of man's emotional needs and inclinations. In consequence, we have perhaps over-estimated such writers as Rousseau and de Sade, just because they provide exceptions to the rule.

Superficially, Gibbon's own attitudes may seem to betray this failure of awareness, especially when dealing with early Christianity. Such appearances, however, are indeed superficial; for if the *Decline and Fall* is directed at a specific failing in his contemporaries, it is precisely at the complacency and security with which they viewed the progress of civilisation. Like many writers of his age, Gibbon had a profound regard for the dignity of the human mind, but unlike most of them, he was fully conscious of the precariousness of its achievements. His subject was the destruction of classical civilisation and 'the triumph of barbarism and religion'. In spite of more recent upheavals, this period is still perhaps the most frightening of our history, and at the time when Gibbon wrote it must have seemed that Europe had scarcely yet recovered the prosperity and learning it had lost with the collapse of Rome. While he catalogues with minute detail the material weakening of the empire, it is for the death of its culture that Gibbon reserves his most eloquent and sombre prose. In such passages as his description of the sack of the library at Alexandria he presents the spectacle of a civilisation destroying its inheritance of more than 1,000 years in the name of a single (or rather, divided) religion. It was no puerile spite that led him to set down so meticulously the fanaticism and violence and the ludicrous internal squabbles of the early church, but the gloomy awareness that the fate of one civilisation, though now half forgotten, could befall another.

Gibbon had himself experienced both the religious 'enthusiasm' he was later to condemn and the intolerance it could generate even in a liberal age, when as a youth he had been converted to Roman Catholicism and had therefore been forced to abandon his career at Oxford and all prospect of a place in English public life. Such a conversion was spectacularly rare, and its consequences must have impressed on him forcibly the vulnerability of freedom of conscience in a society, however secular in outward behaviour, whose constitution recognised an established and exclusive church. Nor can he have found much temptation to complacency when living later as a Protestant on the continent.

One consequence of the travels that followed his conversion to Catholicism was the awakening of a lifelong enthusiasm for the Swiss nation, the history of whose struggle for liberty Gibbon intended to write before he eventually decided on the subject of the *Decline and Fall*. His regard for liberty, both personal and intellectual, was perhaps the strongest principle he held. Even when giving his famous account of the prosperity and security of the Empire under the Antonines at the beginning of his history, a period which he paints almost as a lost golden age, he adds that the Romans 'must often have recollected the instability of a happiness which depended on the character of a single man'. He applied the same rigorous standards of individual liberty to his own times, and even to the politics of his friends. When Sheffield, perhaps his closest friend, wrote a pamphlet in support of the slave trade, Gibbon wrote to him '... but do you not expect to work

at Beelzebub's sugar plantations in the infernal regions, under the tender government of a negro driver?"

The depth of Gibbon's personal emotions, as distinct from the fervour with which he embraced abstract ideals, has sometimes been called in question; largely because of a famous passage in his *Autobiography* in which he describes his 'early love' for Mlle Curchod. "Though my love was disappointed of success", he confides, "I am rather proud that I was once capable of feeling such a pure and exalted sentiment". In fact, his father, on whom he was financially dependent, had disapproved of the match and Gibbon prudently placed material security before passion: "After a painful struggle I yielded to my fate: I sighed as a lover, I obeyed as a son". Some consolation for the loss was provided by the lady's eventual marriage, proudly related by Gibbon on the next page, to M. Necker, 'the minister, and perhaps the legislator, of the French monarchy'. At least Gibbon's good taste had been vindicated. But amusing though this account now is, it should not be taken as giving

an index to his emotional responses, or lack of them. He wrote his own biography because 'the public are always curious to know the men who have left behind them any image of their minds'. It was as the author of the *Decline and Fall* that he was to be remembered and it would not have been fitting for a great historian to indulge in candid self-revelations in this most 'official' of autobiographies.

The confidence with which Gibbon expected his history to survive has proved well-founded. It would have been easy for a man of Gibbon's capabilities and background to become famous in politics or the law, or in almost any field of literature. His learning and his judgement were prodigious, and in an age of great prose writers, he developed a style both more beautiful and more efficient than that of any of his contemporaries. That he decided in the era of dilettantism, to devote such immense talents so single-mindedly to the composition of a single great work is something for which we should be grateful.

METAPHYSICS AND GHOSTS

G. L. SIMONS

THE METAPHYSICAL DRAGON, not wholly dead, is now in disrepute. Long gone are the days when metaphysicians held unbridled sway over the courts of university and church, with the poor rationalist the beggar at the gates. Today the metaphysicians are fleeing in their rags, usurped by science and logic and the bold attitudes possible in a technological age. Sometimes, unexpectedly, there is a plea—as in Russell—for metaphysics of a type. Empiricism alone is perhaps not enough but the new metaphysics is a pale shadow of the Dragon of old.

Start to define such things precisely and they soon evaporate. Anyway some people "believe in ghosts". Presumably this means that such people are able to describe their own (or—usually—someone else's) experience of "seeing a ghost". In this phrase, the "seeing" bit is probably more precise than the "ghost" bit. Let's concentrate for a moment on the "seeing" bit.

One principle of metaphysics is that, by dint of purely abstract reasoning, one could arrive at an accurate concept of the physical world (if indeed there was a physical world). This meant that it was quite unnecessary to observe the world with the five senses to find out what it was like. What was required was careful cerebral activity (though not called such—for do we know for sure the cerebrum exists?) in the absence of data acquired through eye and ear.

We know in great detail what happens when we see something: light enters the eye, affects the rods and cones, is processed and fed to the brain, whereupon, if the organism is functioning properly the brain puts the correct interpretation on the incoming signals and the organism behaves accordingly—it may move forward to kiss its sweetheart, move away to dodge a flying rock, or not move at all . . .

The idea was that we should sit down, close our eyes and think. Such activity was supposed to provide insights into ethics and human society, the nature of man and God, the purpose of life, the character of substance, the quality of hell-fire, the meaning of grace, etc., etc. We were not supposed to go out and look at humans functioning but to speculate, profoundly and at length, on their nature and destiny.

The important thing about this process is that it can be understood in purely *physical* terms. The light only allows vision to take place insofar as the light has *physical* properties. And these properties do not only affect the receiving mechanism (eye, photosensitive plate, etc.) but also determine *how* things are seen and *what* things are seen. Or in short, unless something is physical it cannot be seen.

Science knocked this idea on the head. Today if we want to find out about the world we are told to go and look at it. None of this armchair philosophising! Take a ruler and pair of scales and go out and see what the world is made of! Modern science has made a well-grounded empirical approach essential for any sober and sensible view of the world.

Things can only be seen if they emit or reflect light. All the objects we know about through direct visual perception must send us light in one or both of these ways. If an entity does not emit or reflect light we cannot see it. Now the physical circumstances of emission and reflection are relatively well understood. Emission can occur as a corollary to other energy changes in the environment, as for instance as an accompaniment to heat transfer. Reflection can occur according to the properties of the reflecting object. What we choose to call a 'black' object reflects less than other objects, and the character of the reflection depends upon the molecular structure of the reflector.

There are however a number of controversial topics where a bit of prior speculation, in the absence of the search for empirical data, can be a useful experience. Consider the case of ghosts, ghouls, and similar friendly creatures.

The point of all this is that for an object to be *seen* it has to be a *physical* object—and this applies to ghosts as much as to footballs, falling hair, and felons. If ghosts are in fact seen then they are part of the physical world and can be investigated as such. It is therefore quite sound for the psychical researcher to troop along to the haunted manor loaded down with cameras, tape-recorders and other artificial eyes and ears. If ghosts can be seen by light-

Many people still believe in ghosts. This is not to say that they are able to define exactly what it is they believe in. As with gods, ghosts are credible (to some people) to the extent that they are vague, ill-defined and ephemeral.

(Continued on page 295)

FREETHOUGHT ENTERTAINMENT FROM THE UNITED STATES

BOB CREW

A new film and play from the United States of America, both of which would, and probably will, go down extremely well in London, were shown to our Drama Correspondent, Bob Crew, in New York last month, and in this edition of the FREETHINKER we are pleased to carry his reviews for the current interest and, we hope, future reference of readers in Britain.

Geese

At the Players Theatre in New York's Greenwich Village a new play, entitled *Geese*, has been showing for several months and, judging from the many reviews which came to my notice, it has received a lukewarm reception from the critics, most of whom seem not to have understood it or simply to have found it disgusting, shocking, etc.

The play is concerned with the relationship between two young women one of whom is not necessarily lesbian—who have a love relationship which could be described as lesbian. The play examines, and attempts to articulate, the nature of that relationship, against the provincial family background of one of the girls involved who has left home (or has been driven from home by the attitudes of her parents and an ex-schoolmistress), and gone to New York to find accommodation and employment, where she meets and has an affair with another young girl who appears to be seriously in love with her.

For the very reasons that *Geese* seems to be unpopular with critics in New York, I would think that it could be popular in London and completely in tune with the intellectual mood of the moment. The beauty and theatrical essence of the play is simply—but powerfully—that the sophisticated minds and delicious bodies of two compassionate young women touch in such an innocent, ideal and playful manner that it is only on reflection that one is conscious that perversity has happened. Thus one dismisses perversity from one's vocabulary as meaningless and is alive, instead, to an entirely constructive and logical love plot with all the little ingredients of wit, charm, humour, beauty and philosophy without which there is no big experience.

For me, *Geese* was an experience between two people of the same sex, as enjoyable to have in the theatre as those between the sexes with which we are all familiar.

Alice's Restaurant

Alice's Restaurant is a new film based on the American satirical folk song of the same name recorded by Arlo Guthrie (son of Woody Guthrie) which concerns itself with a hippie interpretation of the small-mindedness of American provincial life and the reflection of this in the official attitudes of the nation at large. The song recurs throughout the film, with other folk songs, and the story depicts the life of a strolling hippie cum latter-twentieth-century minstrel—Arlo Guthrie in person—and his colleagues who spend most of their time trying to dodge the US Army draft, small-town prejudice and persecution, the injustice of the law, the boredom of conventional customs and, of course, work or anything resembling it too closely.

When the hippies are not urinating into bottles at the army recruitment centre, enrolling for somewhat pseudo



educational study-courses to dodge the draft, being beaten-up by small-town cowboys who regard them as weirdoes, and persecuted by the police, they are generally bumming around the States, snatching what enjoyment they can and philosophising to guitar tunes in which it seemed to me that they imbibed religious ardour. All these activities evolve round their eternal resting place and spiritual destiny, *Alice's Restaurant*, to which they never fail to return from their travels and adventures. Alice is a soft, pleasant, voluptuous, sympathetic and uninhibited high-priestess of their community, administering to all their wants, not least their sexual ones.

The film struck me as being an intelligent and thought-provocative picture of an aspect of society from which there is much to be learnt. It is exhaustive with funny scenes, sick scenes, exciting scenes and mad scenes, ranging from the sceptical to the hopeful, from beauty and happiness to sadness and ugliness. The funny scenes include a mock-wedding in a church (which the hippies have acquired and converted into a roadhouse) at which they dress in an odd assortment of carnival-type clothes and pun their way through the customary dialogue of a Christian church service; an absurd experience with small-town police who arrest and jail two hippies for dumping garbage over a mountainside when they are unable to use the town's tip which is closed to the public during a bank holiday—hoardes of police converge on the scene "of the crime", taking photographs of the rubbish for use in evidence, while a helicopter swoops overhead like an ominous bird of prey endeavouring to take more of the vitally important photographs! Guthrie arguing with the draft authority because he is unable to produce enough urine for examina-

tion and has difficulty in convincing a psychiatrist that he is mad—in the end, the psychiatrist goes mad!

The sad scenes include hippies being beaten-up by small-town cowboys, a drug addict committing suicide on his motor-cycle and Guthrie's father, Woody, receiving visitors in the hospital where he is bedridden and eventually dies from an incurable disease—a true story.

I thought that the film was purposeful and well-balanced between a broad span of emotional experiences interspersed with intellectual point-scoring. It also seemed to characterise the nature of hippie life and philosophy as clearly and apparently accurately as one can expect in a form of entertainment. As such, I would conclude that *Alice's Restaurant* is an important film, well worth seeing when it comes to London.

(Continued from page 293)

sensitive eyes then they can be seen by light-sensitive film as well: ghosts have physical properties or they are hallucination and nothing more.

This argument has important philosophical consequences which I am surprised have not circulated more widely. If ghosts, long since regarded as part of the supernatural world, must in logic be regarded as physical if they exist at all, can the same logic be applied to other supernatural 'entities'? Indeed it can, and again the consequences are profound. For the argument does not simply show that the supernatural cannot exist but that the concept of the supernatural cannot be meaningfully represented in language. Gods, ghosts, ghouls, etc., are of physical origin or the words are meaningless. For how else could the idea of the supernatural ever get off the ground?

First of all we have to reject the 'definition' of the supernatural which merely replaces one meaningless symbol by another. If definition is to be sound we must proceed from the clear and unambiguous to the unknown—only in such a way can a new concept be conveyed. So it is no use saying that the supernatural is 'spiritual' or 'transcendent' or 'other-worldly' or 'blondagragnig'. If we are to arrive at a concept of the supernatural then it must be from concepts that are public, clear and well-established. And the only concepts that meet these criteria are those of science and common sense, i.e. they are empirical in nature.

Consider 'transcendent' as a definition of God. To transcend is to be above or beyond or to be greater than. All these are spatial or temporal concepts. How could they possibly be other? So when 'transcendent' seems to conduct us to a heavenly realm it merely says something about our terrestrial (and empirically-grounded) concepts. The same is true of all the other words that purport to give us insight into a supernatural world.

I conclude therefore, *not* that supernatural entities do not exist (such a conclusion could not be made consistent with the above argument), but that it is literally hopeless to talk at all about a possible supernatural world since our concepts, our experience and our language is irrevocably rooted in the physical world. 'Ghosts', as a word, denotes physical phenomena not yet understood, denotes the experience of an upset mind, or is meaningless. It can do no more.

And so at the risk of sounding like C. E. M. Joad (for whom I positively have no axe to grind) I would advise the cautious rationalist, when asked "do you believe in ghosts?", to reply "what do you mean by 'ghosts'?" And our cautious rationalist, growing ever bolder, should have little difficulty in demonstrating that the only meaningful definition must be an empirical one.

Thus ghosts cannot be regarded even as a possible indication of a non-physical world. This much can rationally be said even before we go out with our ghost-nets to trap one.

BOOK REVIEW

DAVID REYNOLDS

FOR CRYING OUT SHROUD: Oswell Blakeston (Hutchinson 25s). OSWELL BLAKESTON'S latest book resounds incessantly from the hilarious to the haunting. It is a spy thriller, but bears little resemblance to other books which warrant this description. With a characteristic disregard for convention Blakeston reverses the usual ingredients, namely an implausible character in a plausible situation. Instead of the moral superman who is master of anything the only too earthly Russians—or whoever—may sling at him, we have a painfully ordinary man endeavouring to cope with a succession of situations which would baffle even the conventional superhuman genius. Instead of effortlessly ending up in bed alongside a variety of girls, who have severe sex appeal as a common denominator, Blakeston's hero is bisexual and even then hard up despite the wider range of his choice.

This combined with the author's uncanny talent for creating characters and situations, which can only be described inadequately with the word 'bizarre', is enough to take the book out of the realms of what are normally designated thrillers. However, the book's fascination lies primarily in the original way in which, and the unique wit with which, it is written. For the most part the author uses dialogue and a large amount of this is conducted between the hero and himself. There are few people who do not talk to themselves from time to time, and yet this is rarely made a subject for fiction—a pity, for in Blakeston's hands at least, this far from strange phenomenon is made at once delightful, amusing, and revealing:

"... This is a decent block of flats, with a lift."
 "When it works, when it works. Don't I know?"
 "Of course you do, you're me."
 "And I'm you."
 "And we're talking to ourself."
 "Pretty scatty."
 "I couldn't fail to agree with you less."

It is enough to say in conclusion that a book written by the owner of a mind, which can create, for instance, a black magician called Nick, who peddles pornography and maintains his connections with the nether world only with the assistance of a mouse called 'Death Posture', cannot but entertain and impose on the reader an increasing amazement as he turns each page.

LETTERS

Moral education

I AM SORRY to hear that Mr R. Robson (August 9) and others are still unaware that suggestions have been made for Moral Education in our schools. Of course our means of disseminating information are limited, but it is important that humanists should know what we are for, as well as what we are against.

They will find some information in the following, most of which should be in their Public Library:

James Hemming: *Individual Morality*.
 Margaret Knight: *Morals Without Religion*.
 (ed) A. J. Ayer: *The Humanist Outlook*.
 Ronald Fletcher: *10 Non-Commandments*.

Two BHA 1s pamphlets: *A Note on the Humanist Approach to Moral Education* and *Moral Education in Secondary Schools*,

and several pamphlets on this subject available from the NSS.

MAURICE HILL.

Dubbed racialists!

I AM so tired of reading a preponderance of political articles in the FREETHINKER, which should surely be a paper to embrace all shades of political opinion.

I was particularly incensed at Mr G. L. Simons' diatribe against Enoch Powell. So he doesn't care whether Birmingham is overrun with dark skins: does he live there? Has he seen his house fall lower and lower in value? Has he found his children are not receiving proper instruction in school because teachers are swamped with dark children who can't even speak English?

Heavens! It's our country!—or is it? Our country that we've fought for and slaved for. Yet if we object to being thrust aside for foreigners who have no right here at all, we're dubbed racialists by Mr Simons.

A. HIGGITT.

LETTERS

Free will

TO REPLY as briefly as possible to Mr Simons. The primary causal factor in a free and voluntary act is the will itself. The human will provides its own sufficient reason and is the self-determining cause of an infinite variety of acts that are physically possible but not physically necessary. These free acts may range from drinking a glass of ale to projecting men to the moon, a team effort requiring the voluntary co-operation of a very large number of individuals. Human acts cannot be scientifically determined until they have happened. Even the scientific prediction of a natural phenomenon such as an eclipse cannot be scientifically verified before it happens.

It is true, of course, that the free will cannot operate in a completely lonely isolation. It must have incentives from without itself. These incentives may be material, or they may be as we say "moral" in character. The external motivations to voluntary behaviour are not physically compelling. If individuals are subjected or subject themselves to "compulsion" they are no longer free agents. But in any rational kind of human government, the will of those who are governed is just as important as the will of those who govern.

The expression "unmotivated action" is usually reserved for some appalling crime that seems to be senseless or "meaningless". But the majority of human acts are directed to aims that are quite sober and sensible. They are not "unmotivated" but are perfectly free.

It may perhaps help to clarify the meaning of free will to point out that the thing must not be regarded as a physical entity existing quite outside the body as the "soul" is supposed to do. I certainly have no belief in any such "soul". But when the conditions are right the human body becomes a free will.

PETER CROMMELIN.

Humanism in Perspective

BETWEEN your editorial (August 9) and David Tribe's article (August 30) the FREETHINKER has done much to put the 'ambiguities of humanism' in perspective. It is a help towards perspective when 'effective journalism' and the clichés of journalists are not regarded as synonymous! Moreover, it is a help towards hope when 'contrary views' are expressed without ill-will. (We now have it as fact that 'leading figures' (even) have become so affected by their personal quarrels that they have 'left secularism for rationalism'.)

Perhaps it is easier to avoid quarrelling than quibbling about the relative extent to which ethical and factual grounds justify proposals for social change (whether through reform or repeal). Indeed we may lose more than we gain over such questions as 'whether or not humanism should be against things' or whether 'helpful suggestions to improve society' are in a sense 'negative' or 'positive'. It is not intended as quibbling to suggest that, in general, if enthusiasm is to be applied constructively it is necessary to be 'for' something and for a 'positive' reason.

A society in which there is mass enthusiasm for less unhappiness is not an 'impossible utopia'.

CHARLES BYASS.

Dirty dago degenerates

YOU WILL have received quite a few letters about that editorial on the front page of the FREETHINKER dated August 23, 1969. I sometimes wonder whether it is a pro-Romanist journal I am reading when I read some of your articles. If these articles are approved by the editorial board, then all I can say is that it is now composed of people who are not totally dedicated to freethought or secularism.

I am not one of those moronic fools who, directly an article is published which goes against their ingrained prejudices, immediately dash off a letter telling the editor to cancel their subscription. The FREETHINKER has certainly been more readable under your editorship, and we do not get so many of those highbrow articles which are above the heads of lowbrows like myself.

I read most of the political reviews and religious papers, mainly to try and fathom the trend of things and what some of them are up to. There is an article in the current September issue of the *The Churchman's Magazine*, the organ of the Protestant Truth Society. This article, by the Rev S. E. Pulford, is entitled "Why Protestant?" and is more of the type of thing we used to read in the FREETHINKER.

During recent months you have criticised the Rev Ian Paisley, for what reason I know not why. We know that his manner of talking and his physical make-up do not inspire liking, but he is fighting what we are supposed to be fighting. We know very well what kind of shrift we are likely to get if ever those Dirty Dago Degenerates in Rome ever gain complete control of the world.

That *Tic-tac Man at the Vat-i-can* is just itching to get this land under Romanist rule. When I went to Catholic services with my poor wife whose life was ruined by nuns and RC indoctrination so that she became a neurotic wreck, I found that England was referred to as Our Lady's Dowry.

I now note that *The Reformer*, the organ of The Protestant Alliance, has stopped criticising the Rev Ian Paisley, and that they are supporting him, or at least what he stands for.

You have also criticised Enoch Powell for his anti-racism, which is justified considering the state of this country as far as the population problem is concerned. Our Tory friends are fond of saying that other countries are laughing at us, but not for what they infer. The reason they laugh at us is because Britain is now known as the country where they are Breeding like Rabbits. Belgium, that impoverished priest-ridden little doghole, once had the reputation of being the most densely populated nation in Europe. I think it is Holland that now has this doubtful honour.

In Enoch Powell's last outburst, according to reports, he said that citizens of Eire should be treated as aliens. So they should be! What is an alien? According to *Chamber's Dictionary* an alien is a foreigner; a resident neither native-born nor naturalised. Citizens of Eire are just that, as the Republic of Ireland is now entirely dissociated from this country, with no allegiance to our throne. We know what kind of welcome our royalties get if they are rash enough to go there. Only last week our local newspaper reported that two young men from Cork were to be deported because they had been a nuisance ever since they came here. Do we "deport" Scots or Welshmen if they break the law or make a nuisance of themselves?

I may be wrong, but I sometimes wonder if Powell is not a crypto Welsh Nationalist. He bears the ancient and honoured name of Powell, and his wife's maiden name was also Welsh. Anyway, why the Welsh want Home Rule for Wales I do not know, because England is just as much their country as Wales. Professor Haldane once wrote that to assume that all the Ancient Britons were driven into Cornwall, Wales and Scotland is wrong, because he had accumulated evidence that they were not.

A. BONNETT.

To a Wolverhampton Freethinker

"All that Reynolds writes is fine"
On front page where he fails to sign
(Tho' back page shows some views aren't mine)
Does it not smack of party line?

More seriously how anybody can first quote Cohen on the illegitimacy of authority in matters of opinion, and then champion the editor of the FREETHINKER as the authoritative voice on what all freethinkers think, is beyond me.

BRIAN KHAN.

Dialectic

OUR GRANDSON is 3½ and has spent 12 months attending an excellent nursery school. Yesterday the following conversation wafted downstairs between bathtime splashings:

"Grandpa—my Daddy says it's rude to say 'shut your bloody cake-'ole'."

"Lie down now and get the soap off."

"My Mummy says it's rude to say 'shut your bloody cake-'ole'."

"You said you wanted to wash your socks yourself, have you done them?"

"Grandpa—do you think it's rude to say 'shut your bloody cake-'ole'?"

"If you mean it to be rude it is rude."

"All right, I won't say 'shut your bloody cake-'ole' any more, and I'll let you wash my socks."

ISOBEL GRAHAME.

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