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DEATH BY VIOLENCE: A VICTIM'S FAMILY TALKS TO THE FREETHINKER

The campaign for a return of capital punishment has been revived with a vengeance—in every sense of the word. Widows of murdered policemen have appeared in television programmes giving predictable and illogical answers to emotionally loaded questions. Their tragedies have been exploited by Right-wing organisations and narrow minded individuals who see violence and repression—irrespective of the social consequences—as the answer to every problem. *The Times* reported the opinions of two Scotland Yard officers who favoured more savage forms of punishment, and spoke nostalgically of the good old days when hanging, flogging, stone breaking and sewing mailbags were accepted forms of punishment. They poured scorn on those who maintain that punishment should not just be regarded as a form of retribution, and on organisations which defend the rights and liberties of the citizen. Opponents of capital punishment are often accused of being “do-gooders” who are concerned only with the criminal, and forget about the person who has been killed and his, or her, family. Last week the *Freethinker* interviewed the parents of a 19-year-old Londoner who met a violent death. Some time before he died he had also been kicked and badly beaten. His name was Derek Bentley, and he was hanged for a murder which occurred 15 minutes after he was taken into police custody.

A United Family

William and Lillian Bentley and their daughter Iris live in Colliers Wood, a nondescript, South West London suburb. A photograph of Derek occupies a dominant position in the living room of their home. As they discuss the events that shattered their lives 19 years ago, it is evident that the knowledge of his innocence, and their determination to clear his name, have sustained them through an experience that would have destroyed many others. Of course, emotion and bitterness occasionally break through.

Mrs Bentley: “It was a terrible thing to do, hanging him like that. He didn't kill anyone. We had always been a united family, and ever so happy, but all that changed. We still feel that Derek is here with us. I should like to talk to some of these people who want to bring back hanging. I'd tell them a thing or two. I'd tell them what it did to our family”.

The Bentleys' ordeal began late on 2 November, 1952. Mr. and Mrs Bentley had retired for the night, and it was Iris who heard the knocking and went to the door.

Iris Bentley: “The police just stormed into the house and one of them knocked me down shouting, ‘Your brother has killed a policeman’. They didn't show a warrant or anything like that. They ransacked the house”.

Earlier that evening, young men had been spotted on the roof of a warehouse in Tamworth Road, Croydon. They were tackled by the police and Derek Bentley was taken into custody. The chase continued and 15 minutes later Police Constable Niles closed in on Christopher Craig. A shot rang out and the policeman fell dead.

In the early hours of 3 November William Bentley went to Croydon Police Station and asked to see his son.

William Bentley: “They would not let me see him but told me he would be appearing later at the court in Croydon and we could see him there. So off we went to the court, and the hearing only lasted a few minutes but they



Lillian Bentley: her son was hanged.

(Continued overleaf)

(Continued from front page)

still wouldn't let us see Derek. This time they said we would have to see him later in Brixton Prison hospital. Well, the wife and myself and Iris went to Brixton, and Derek was sitting at the far end of a long table. There was a warder there, too. I could see there were marks on Derek's face, and I said to him, 'What's the matter with your face?' The warder chipped in and said I was not to ask any questions. But I asked questions, all right, and found out why his face was in such a state. At Croydon Police Station he was told to take the laces from his shoes, and when he bent down to undo his shoe laces a detective kicked him in the face. His nose was fractured and he was badly bruised all down one side of his face".

Illiterate Epileptic . . . the Death Sentence

Derek Bentley and Christopher Craig were sent for trial. Craig was convicted of the murder of Police Constable Niles. He was aged 16 and it was ordered that he should be detained "in strict custody until Her Majesty's pleasure became known". Derek Bentley was sentenced to death by Lord Chief Justice Goddard, whose influence on penal reform has been described as "unrelievedly malign". The Bentley family were at the Old Bailey, but none of them were called to give evidence.

Mrs Bentley: "It was all over before we knew what was happening. There were lots of things that should have come out at the trial. Like the epileptic fits. He had them since he was six. He was sitting on top of a lorry one day and fell on to the pavement. They took him to hospital but he was never right after that. Kept getting these fits. His dad had to sit on him sometimes and stick a pencil in his mouth to keep him from biting his tongue. And he was never able to read or write. So he could only get jobs like road sweeping and then he worked with a removal firm clearing houses.

"But nothing was said about this in court. There we were, expecting to be called in. Iris was all on edge and she went into the courtroom. After a while she rushed out and said the judge had put on a black cap. I said, 'Don't be silly, it can't be over yet'. But it was, and nothing was ever said about the fits".

The death sentence on Derek Bentley was passed on 11 December, and during the weeks that followed an intensive campaign to save him was conducted by his family and hundreds of others who were appalled by the injustice of the sentence. On 13 January, 1953, the Court of Criminal Appeal dismissed Derek Bentley's appeal. Two hundred MPs tried to prevent the execution being carried out. On the day before the execution Iris Bentley saw Clement Attlee at the House of Commons. He told her he was doing his best, "but I fear it is a losing battle".

The Last Visit

Later, the family visited Derek in Wandsworth Prison.

Mrs Bentley: "I saw Derek the night before he was hanged. He said that he was innocent and that one day the truth will come out. We said goodbye, and I never saw him again".

Mrs Bentley was unconscious when her son dropped through the trap-door at Wandsworth Prison next morning.

The Bentley family had to face many problems during the years that followed. Their health suffered considerably;

Iris had a nervous breakdown; Derek's brother was taunted at school. Their landlords refused to accept the rent, and when the Bentleys returned to their home one day they discovered that the landlord's workmen had forced an entry and their furniture was piled in the garden. They had to find another house.

Mr and Mrs Bentley wanted their son's body returned to them, and eventually the authorities agreed. The funeral took place at Mitcham Road Cemetery, Croydon, on 4 March, 1968. Derek Bentley's remains were buried near those of Police Constable Niles. The Bentleys had to pay the £125 funeral bill.

Judicial Murder

The Bentleys have recently been co-operating with David Yallop whose book *To Encourage the Others* will be published in November by W. H. Allen. Mr Yallop, who is now working on a television film based on the trial and execution of Derek Bentley, has spent two years researching and interviewing people who were involved. He believes that, beyond all doubt, Bentley was the victim of a judicial murder.

Just as the motives of many of those who are campaigning to "clean up" television programmes, censor books and ban plays are highly suspicious, so are the attitudes of those who are calling for hanging and other harsh forms of punishment. Their abhorrence of violence is often a shade too hysterical, and their sympathy for the relatives of murder victims too ostentatious.

Opponents of capital punishment are also concerned about increasing violence in our society, and are sensitive to the feelings of those who have been bereaved through acts of violence. But their compassion is extended to the families of the accused, and particularly to those who live with the knowledge that a member of the family went to the gallows for a crime he did not commit. Who really believes that Derek Bentley and Timothy Evans were the only such victims? Those in authority are seldom willing to admit they have made a mistake, particularly when it cannot possibly be rectified.

PUBLIC DEBATE :

THAT MAN NEEDS GOD

Proposed by

Sir DAVID RENTON, QC, MP

Opposed by

DAVID TRIBE

Former president of the National Secular Society;
author of *100 Years of Freethought*,
President Charles Bradlaugh, MP, etc.

Chairman

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TUESDAY, 14 SEPTEMBER, 7.30 p.m.

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NATIONAL SECULAR SOCIETY

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LADY BIRDBATH'S NIGHTMARE

TONY MASTERS

Since Bertrand Russell plumbed the dreams of the distinguished we have had more eminent persons, with (presumably) more nightmares. This week we publish a report on one of them.

Maybe it was just that extra cup of Ovaltine, but last night I had the most shocking nightmare.

I dreamt I was sitting in the third row of the stalls as usual, feeling very tired and depressed. I was saying to myself out loud: "Why don't you just give it up? Nobody cares, you know". And then suddenly a rich and cultured voice behind me said "Somebody cares", and I looked round and there was this handsome middle-aged man bending over me and smiling.

Well, it turned out his seat was next to mine, so we got into conversation, and it came out that he too was using all his authority and influence to clean up the country, and even had an opposite number in America who was doing the same thing. I was just about to ask his name, when I suddenly recognised him.

"Ssh, ssh", said Mr Heath (for he it was), "whatever happens, they mustn't know I'm here". I hadn't the faintest idea who "they" were, but before I could ask him the house lights went down and the show started. I couldn't tell you exactly what it was about, but I didn't like it. Also, it was all in Swedish. ("I must get Eccles to cut the grants to these foreign companies", said Mr Heath at one point, "how can we discharge our duty as guardians of public morals if we can't understand exactly what these foreigners are saying?") So I was not really surprised when he said at last: "I think we're wasting our time. Why don't you come back to Number Ten and see my collection of Chinese ceramics?" Quivering with excitement, I said yes, as I am very interested in antiques and have always wanted to see his organ.

When we arrived, there seemed to be a party in progress. I slipped into the Ladies to do myself up, as there was a good chance there might be the whole Cabinet there, and probably the Queen Herself! Imagine my shock and dismay, therefore, when on entering the drawing-room I was met with the sight for Kenneth Tynan, Paul Raymond, Richard Neville, and the entire cast of the new full-undress revival of *Boys in the Band*, all wearing dark suits and drinking glasses of sherry! Mr Raymond was discussing flower-arrangement with a young man called Andy Warhol, and Mr Tynan was talking to Yoko Ono about his plans for a new production of *The Geisha*.

I was almost prostrate at the thought of all the evil influences gathered in this one room, and reaching for my smelling-bottle was about to leave quickly when Mr Tynan took me by the arm in a familiar fashion and said: "My dear Lady Birdbath, you can't leave yet, we've been waiting for you all evening. Mr Raymond and I so want to tell you about all the productions we're going to put on".

"I don't want to hear about them", I said with dignity.

"I don't suppose you do, dear lady", he said, with what might almost have been a sneer, "that isn't what you're interested in, is it?"

"It's more what you're interested in, I think", I rejoined with some satisfaction.

"Oh, no, ducks", he said, flicking the ash off a monogrammed Passing Cloud, "it's the money we're interested in. Sex, strip, four-letter words—that's all had it at the box-office. Now it's *Love Story*, *Abelard and Heloise*, *Ryan's Daughter*, that sort of crap. Romance is the pornography of the 'seventies—just as crude, and comforting as well. Your sort doesn't seem to mind about that kind of corruption. The only kind you mind is kind you like."

I protested vigorously, but suddenly everyone in the room was shouting: "The kind you mind is the kind you like! The kind you mind is the kind you like!" at the top of their voices. I looked around for Mr Heath, but he was nowhere in sight; he had gone upstairs and was playing Widor's Toccata though rather slowly on the organ. In despair, I fled the house, not knowing where to go. At last, I thought I would go back to the theatre, in case any new clements had entered the performance.

To my horror, as soon as I entered I found that the theatre had somehow turned completely round, and I had walked straight on to the stage. To make matters worse, as soon as I appeared the band struck up a lively rhythm, and I looked down and found myself clad in very scanty attire, which I was obviously expected to reduce still further as my "act" proceeded. I was determined not to do this, and was just going to get up and denounce the whole thing, when I suddenly saw Lord Longford, Mrs Mary Whitehouse and Sir Gerald Nabarro sitting in the third row of the stalls, eyeing me closely and making little notes on their programmes. I couldn't see what they were writing, but they seemed to be doing it with glee, and indeed enjoying the whole business, which disturbed me.

Clutching my shawl (which fortunately appeared just then) tightly round me, I attempted not to sway in time with the music, but it was very difficult. At last I screamed in sheer terror and dismay, and woke myself up.

Oh! what a relief to find myself in my own little mahogany bed at home in Kensington between the pictures of the Stag at Bay and The Last Sleep of Argyle! What a relief also to discover that I was still veiled in the decent, if dainty, obscurity of my blue flannel nightdress! It was only later I discovered that, during some unguarded moment in the dream, I had succeeded in taking off both my bedsocks.

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FREETHINKER

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ANNOUNCEMENTS

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

Humanist Postal Book Service (secondhand books bought and sold). For information or catalogue send 5p stamp to Kit Mouat, Mercers, Cuckfield, Sussex.

EVENTS

Ashurstwood Abbey Secular Humanism Centre (founded by Jean Straker), between East Grinstead and Forest Row, Sussex. Telephone Forest Row 2589. Meeting every Sunday, 3 p.m.

Humanist Holidays. Details of future activities from Marjorie Mepham, 29 Fairview Road, Sutton, Surrey, Telephone: 01-642 8796.

Humanist Holidays. Long weekend in Holland; either four days from 21 October or three days from 29 October. Cost of flight from Southend to Amsterdam and bed and breakfast: £21 or £18. Can be arranged if 12 people apply immediately to Marjorie Mepham, 29 Fairview Road, Sutton, Surrey. Telephone 01-642 8796.

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—East Anglian Daily Times

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NEWS

NO GUNS FOR RELIGIOUS FANATICS

Despite all advice and warnings the British Prime Minister capitulated to Brian Faulkner, the Orange Order's puppet at Stormont, and internment was introduced. It was used as a means of rounding up opponents of the Unionist Government and directed exclusively against Civil Rights and Republican supporters. The bland assurances and the extravagant claims for the success of internment were discredited within days, and the British public soon realised that the operation had been a fraud and a flop.

There is now the dangerous possibility that the British Government may commit yet another blunder in Northern Ireland, and one which will lead to far more disastrous consequences than the aftermath of internment. Agitation for bringing back the Orange Order's private army, the B Specials, has been given a fillip by the Border incident in which a British soldier was killed. The disbandment of the Specials was never accepted by the Protestants, and Ian Paisley and William Craig have made clear their determination to have the force revived. They have the backing of not only the Orange Order, but the entire Unionist movement in the province.

If the B Specials are reformed, under any guise or name, it will be the greatest folly and a signal for the massacre of Catholics, Civil Rights workers and even the mildest critics of the Unionist regime. And it will not stop there. One of the greatest confidence tricks in the history of Anglo-Irish politics is the protestation of loyalty to Britain by Ulster Unionists. But their loyalty is on the same level as that of white Rhodesians. It is largely display and bluster, but when the chips are down they don't give a fig for Britain or anyone else. Their aim is to keep the authoritarian, repressive clique in power, with Britain footing the bill and the lives of British soldiers being sacrificed to do so. It is never wise to give a gun to a fanatic of any kind. It is total madness to give guns to religious fanatics. For the time may soon come when the guns, supplied by Britain, will be turned on British troops also by Ulster's religious fanatics.

If, as a change from dancing hornpipes on the deck of *Morning Cloud*, Edward Heath dances a jig to the accompaniment of an Orange flute on the question of the B Specials, his name will be added to the long list of politicians who were broken by the Irish question.

REFUNDED

A man who sent £1 in support of the OZ editors' defence found himself host to a senior police officer recently. John Gibbs, of Maesteg in South Wales, addressed a postal order to Judge Argyle, together with a letter requesting the postal order to be passed to the right person. Judge Argyle was reported to be "much offended" by the action. The police officer said Mr Gibbs had "shown disregard for the judiciary". Mr Gibbs, a former secretary of the South Wales Liberal Party, intends to raise the matter with the Minister of Posts and Telecommunications, and Liberal peers.

The policeman returned Mr Gibbs' postal order.

S AND NOTES

COMPULSORY SEXUAL EDUCATION IN DENMARK

RELIGION IN HOSPITAL

Britain's 120 hospital chaplains are campaigning for a substantial wage increase to bring their remuneration up to the level enjoyed by their fellow labourers who minister to the spiritual needs of Her Majesty's guests in prisons and the armed forces. An officer of the National Association of Local Government Officers says these gentlemen of the cloth are very militant. No doubt they are; the question is "are they necessary". It is doubtful if they would be greatly missed if they decided to transfer themselves to another corner of the Lord's vineyard—preferably where their wages were not paid out of public funds.

Hospital patients can usually arrange for their minister to visit them if they so wish. If there are those who cannot make such an arrangement surely there are retired clergymen who would be willing to under take hospital visiting. But it is outrageous that the non-religious or religiously indifferent public should pay the wages of Church employes.

It is impossible to relate wages to production in this particular sphere. Whatever benefits, if any, chaplains may bring to some patients, are offset by the annoyance and disruption caused by ward services and other intrusions. The time has come to rid hospitals of religionists who impose themselves on captive audiences.

RESIGNATION FROM THE PRIESTHOOD

Although Father Peter De Rosa is not leaving the Roman Catholic Church, his decision to give up the priesthood is probably the most serious setback of this kind the Church has experienced in this country since Charles Davis left. Peter De Rosa, 38, is one of the best known and popular Catholics in Britain. He has often appeared on television and has written several theological works. He resigned his post as vice-principal and senior theologian at Corpus Christi catechetical college, London, in June.

In 1968 De Rosa played a leading part in getting over 50 priests to sign a letter to *The Times* protesting against the Papal encyclical on birth control. He favours a scientific approach to the population problem, "the direst problem with which mankind has ever been confronted".

In a statement announcing his resignation Father De Rosa said: "Even in a developed society such as ours, the only means of controlling birth by official Catholic teaching are totally unrealistic. Strict adherence to the principles of *Humanae Vitae* would lead and has led to incalculable marital misery.

"It will be sad if married Catholics awake too late to the fact that their love and respect for each other have waned; or their family life has been broken beyond repair; or children have been born when they did not want them and could not care for them; or one or other partner has collapsed, physically or mentally, under the strain. And all for the sake of a disciplinary law which eventually was reformed or bent by moralists out of all recognition."

Gurli Layton-Klingenberg and Jean Straker write: A circular on sexual education in schools published by the Danish Ministry of Education has recently been sent to county councils, local councils, school commissioners, school governors, teachers' associations and headmasters outside Copenhagen. The circular is a sequel to an earlier booklet issued in April under the title *A Guide to Sexual Education in Schools* which was published by the Folkskolens Laeseplansudvalg, the central committee concerned with the formulation of the official programme to be followed in schools.

The point is made that it has been found necessary to run a number of seminars for those who are to teach sexual education in accordance with the Guide. The proposals of the official programme are as follows: The schools are to try to encourage free and natural behaviour towards human sex life and they are to put this across in such a way as to create security for the pupils.

The object is to transmit knowledge which can help the pupils to avoid experiences of uncertainty and fear (which otherwise could give them neuroses) and so bring about an understanding of the links between intercourse, love and sexual stimulation. This is to enable the individual pupil to have the chance to discover his or her own level of stimulation, harmoniously adjusted to his or her own personality and to underline the importance of sexual responsibility and thoughtfulness towards the partner.

Family Relationship

As sexual education is now compulsory it is no longer necessary to obtain parents' consent for children to attend sexual education classes. In order to achieve a reciprocating system between school and home it is necessary for parents to know the form and extent of the sexual education programme. At meeting held to establish contact the parents are told that the school does not seek to destroy the close family relationship in the home, but to make possible a closer working relationship. This integrated method makes it possible to discuss the material just at the point of time when it will be most natural, taking the rest of education into consideration. This only has been possible since sexual education has been compulsory. By such contact the school gets greater knowledge of the child's social and personal background, at the same time making the subject timely and relevant.

But it is not necessary, nor even advantageous, to hold special parents' meetings on sexual education alone, as the subject then takes on a special character, it is discussed naturally together with other subjects. Compulsory education starts at the age of seven, and sexual education is given at all levels as part of the ordinary school curriculum: Danish, religion, biology, history and family knowledge. Children from 13 to 16 are given supplementary lectures by a doctor or qualified teacher.

The official guide has been written by a consultant, Dr Henrik Hoffmeyer and school-director Ingolf Lath. With a few alterations and additions it forms the legal basis for the foundation of sexual education in Denmark from 1 August, 1971.

BOOKS

THE CHOSEN PEOPLE: A STUDY OF JEWISH HISTORY FROM THE TIME OF THE EXILE UNTIL THE REVOLT OF BAR KOICHEBA.

by John M. Allegro. Hodder and Stoughton, £3.

You have to give John Allegro his Jew. If only Sumerian word-plays weren't quite so esoteric, his outrageous punning would make him the nation's leading comic turn. As it is, the only thing to do is to commiserate that such fame will never be his, apart perhaps from a somewhat scatological notoriety that he has earned among biblical scholars.

Mr Allegro, who believes that Jesus was a toadstool, now argues that the Jewish deity, Yahweh, was simply a kind of code-word for a Sumerian original meaning "spermatozoon". Judaism and Christianity are offshoots of the original fertility religion of the ancient Near East, centred on the cult of the sacred mushroom, "Amanita muscaria". This hallucinogenic fungus was a manifestation of the phallic god, and the consumption of the mushroom gave its devotees direct mystical access to their deity. To preserve the centralised nature of the cult, the patriarchal myths of Abraham and Moses were invented; all Israel sprang from the loins of Abraham, and this purity of the race engendered a certain exclusiveness among the Jews that brought them into repeated conflict with their gentile neighbours. As the Chosen People, the Jews not only enjoyed a direct hot-line to God. It was their duty to transmit to future generations the methods by which Yahweh was to be worshipped, namely the secret fertility rites of the sacred mushroom. Drug-crazed zealots, including the early Christians, inevitably incurred the wrath of the secular authorities, and were directly responsible for the catastrophic destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans in AD 70. It is not for nothing that Mr Allegro describes the period in Jewish history from the destruction of the first Temple by the Babylonians in 586 BC to the Roman holocausts of 70 and 135 as an "awful tragedy".

Tragic it certainly was, but you don't necessarily need drugs, mushrooms or otherwise, to get high on religion; nor do you need fungal hallucinations to make people eager to give up their lives for their beliefs. Considering that Mr Allegro's extraordinary theories depend heavily on speculative reconstructions of Sumerian word-forms, it is just as well that his phallus-theology is almost totally irrelevant to the basic story his book unfolds. For Mr Allegro starts his description of Jewish history at a point when Yahweh had been transformed from a global god into a universal Lord. The ancient Hebrews had regarded Baal, say, as a legitimate god, and an appropriate object of worship for his followers, the Canaanites, though naturally inferior to Yahweh. But by the time of the Second Isaiah, Jewish monotheism had made Yahweh not one god among many, but God uniquely. To be a Jew was to accept this rigorous belief in one God, and to submit to the practical obligations of faith in Yahweh, the assiduous cultivation of the Jewish Law or Torah.

Now whether Yahweh was originally a "mighty penis in the heavens" showering semen on mother earth, or was not, pales into insignificance besides this basic fact of Jewish religious development in the sixth century BC. For as Yahweh was universal Lord, it was the duty of his Chosen People to campaign for his universal recognition and worship. As there was also a general belief, based on Old Testament prophecy, that provided zeal for the Law

FREETHINKER

was maintained would appear to lead the Jews out of bondage in the period following Pompey's annexation of Judaea in 63 BC, it was hardly surprising that the Jews of Palestine bitterly resisted the paganising tendencies of their successive rulers. Contrary to what Mr Allegro seems to believe, Judaism in this period was an aggressively proselytising religion. The exclusiveness which he connects with the arcane rites of the drug cult was the product of the despair felt by the Jewish survivors of the Roman devastation of their country. Following the collapse of the second Jewish revolt, led by the messianic aspirant Simon bar Koicheba, in AD 135, Judaism retreated into itself, reshaping its practice around observance of the Torah and worship in the synagogue. The end of the Temple cultus led to an eventual reconciliation between the Jews and their Roman rulers, and ironically to the final break between Judaism and Christianity; for the Pauline version of Christianity which superseded the original Jewish form of the faith after AD 70 proved, in the end, much more hostile to Judaism than even the pagan Romans. The Jews were indeed to pay a high price for their unbounded faith in Yahweh's providence.

Mr Allegro at last forsakes his mushrooms to tell this part of the story well. The commitment of the Jews to political action in support of their religious faith dates back to the time of the Babylonian exile, which implanted in the Jews of the Diaspora the belief that worship at the old Temple in Jerusalem had exemplified the "pure" Yahwism of the prophets. This religious idealism was coupled with hatred of the Babylonian overlords, and a fierce determination to resist further incursions on the mythology and institutions of the national faith.

After the collapse of Babylonian power before the army of Cyrus in 539 BC, and the return of many Jewish exiles to Jerusalem, the rededication of the Temple in 515 BC once more restored a national shrine to Yahweh. However, the fact that a great many of the exiles still preferred the fleshpots of Babylon to the ancestral home of Jerusalem underwrote the urgent need of Israel to make a new covenant with its deity. The welding of the Jews of Palestine into a religious and racial unity continued, despite the successive waves of foreign invasion and the exposure of the Jews to Hellenic culture. Resistance to oppression reached its climax when the Seleucid king, Antiochus Epiphanes, placed an enormous statue dedicated to Zeus in the Jerusalem Temple. This "abomination of desolation" referred to in the book of Daniel inspired Judas Maccabeus—the Hammer—and his followers to restore the national state in defiance of the crumbling Seleucid empire. Independence under Hasmonean rule was maintained, despite internal feuding, until Pompey added Judaea to the Roman province of Syria in 63 BC.

Roman policy was to make religious tolerance a mainstay of imperial rule, for obvious reasons of expediency, and indeed the Romans went to great lengths to placate the Jews. In return for the help given to him by the Jews in his Egyptian campaigns, Julius Caesar issued a whole series of decrees in the Jews' favour, and Josephus duly records the many privileges that the Jews enjoyed in the Roman empire. Paradoxically, this turned out to be a major blunder. For the initial magnanimity of the Romans in granting complete religious freedom and full political rights to the Jews overlooked the fact that post-exilic

REVIEWS

Judaism could never give its consent to foreign rule, however indirect, over the Holy Land, nor acquiesce in the daily violation of its Holy City by the presence of Roman troops.

The tightening grip of Rome provoked the growth of Zealotism as an active resistance movement. Predictably, Mr Allegro derives the name "zealot", or Hebrew "Quanna'im", from a lost Sumerian original, "gan-na-im", which means an arched canopy stretched across the heavens and is a reference to the shape of the sacred mushroom that the Zealots used to drug themselves into frenzy. Again, however, fanaticism does not depend on the availability of mushrooms. Since it is far from clear that "Amanita muscaria" was freely available in Palestine anyway, many of Mr Allegro's long-suffering readers will prefer a less flamboyant explanation of Jewish religious aspirations.

The 60 years from the assumption of direct Roman rule over Judaea in AD 6 to the outbreak of the fatal revolt in AD 66 are marked by a series of clashes caused as much by the folly and cupidity of successive Roman governors as by the religious intransigence of the Jews. The initial success of the insurgents when open revolt broke out in May 66 was countered by the invasion of Palestine by Cestius Gallus, the governor of Syria, with a strong force of legionary and auxiliary troops. Meeting little opposition in the outlying areas of Galilee and Samaria, Cestius pushed his attack on Jerusalem to the point of breaching the Temple walls when, for some extraordinary reason, he withdrew from the final assault, and his army was later routed by the pursuing Jews. Inexplicably, Mr Allegro fails to mention this enormous fillip to Jewish morale. For to the besieged Jews it seemed that the vengeance that Yahweh had wrought on the army of the Seleucids, in the glorious days of the Maccabees, was now to be paralleled in the destruction of the Roman legions. The fervour of the Jews was so greatly intensified by this remarkable triumph that when Vespasian, one of Nero's most able generals, entered Palestine in the spring of AD 67 to restore Roman prestige he found his task of overcoming the insurgents immeasurably more difficult. Now a whole series of fortified towns had to be overthrown before the rebellious capital could be seized. The success of the Romans was delayed by the elevation of Vespasian to the imperial purple in 69, thus fortifying the rebel Zealots in Jerusalem. The war was not ended until the final siege of Jerusalem by Titus in the summer and autumn of 70. After immense loss of life, the Roman siege engines battered down the ramparts of the Temple and the revolt was over, apart from the mopping up of pockets of Zealot resistance in the country.

By and large, the Diaspora had not made common cause with the Jews of Palestine in this terrible war. The seeds of Jewish messianism were, however, far from extinct, and further revolts occurred in Africa, in AD 115, and in Judaea again in 132-135. The immediate cause of this second major revolt was the decision of the emperor Hadrian to rebuild the ruined city of Jerusalem as a Hellenistic centre with a shrine to Zeus. This insult to Yahweh could not be tolerated, and once more Jewish religious nationalism plunged itself into hopeless revolt against Rome. The inevitable, and bloody, suppression of the revolt finally taught the Jews that Roman power was invulnerable.

From now on, the Jews would have to resign themselves to living among the gentiles, and to find solace in the Torah and the study of the Talmud, not the ritual of the Temple.

A final judgement on Mr Allegro's mushrooms is not within my competence to make. But to blame the disastrous religious fanaticism of the Jews on drug-crazed malcontents is, to say the least, bizarre. In many ways, the Jewish rising of 66 was as much a social revolution as a civil war. The religious grievances of the Jews were aggravated by the economic stringency produced by Roman misrule, and hatred of the Roman yoke extended also to the pro-Roman Sadducean aristocracy in control of the Temple. This antipathy to the rich, which incidentally finds very clear expression in the gospels and consequently gives us valuable insight into the nature of the early Christian movement, was evident in the general plundering and massacring of the wealthy that preceded the siege of Jerusalem by Titus. In such a situation of economic hardship and religious frustration, the Zealots commanded widespread support among ordinary Jews. Their delusions of grandeur derived, not from fungal hallucinations, but from their faith in Yahweh.

PHILIP HINCHLIFF

THE POPULATION BOMB

by Paul R. Ehrlich. Pan Books, 30p.

This brilliant and passionate book, now published in Britain for the first time, has already become a classic in the three years since its original publication in the United States. I read it with a growing sense of unreality during the summer holidays, on a huge, unpopulated Northumberland beach, with only the seagulls for company. The facts it relates are so appalling that they were difficult to take in in such a setting. I returned to London to read the next day (23 August) in *The Guardian* a statement by the Director of the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organisation to the effect that this year "production increases have not met the growth in population, and the food available to each person has actually *fallen* in Africa and the Middle East".

As Ehrlich grimly points out "the battle to feed humanity is already lost, in the sense that we will not be able to prevent large-scale famines in the next decade or so". India's population alone is growing "at a rate of 14-18 million people per year". The statistics of the population explosion are on such a scale they numb the mind. The ecological consequences of flogging the earth to yield up the wherewithal to maintain these cascading millions in some semblance of what is laughingly called "life" by those who have never experienced it in this form, is examined with devastating clarity. Also, the social and medical consequences. Even in the affluent city of Los Angeles "the human population has exceeded the carrying capacity of the environment—at least with respect to the ability of the atmosphere to remove waste". Los Angeles and similar cities are pronounced "unfit for human habitation". And so of course they are, though this view contains an implicit value judgement about what it is that renders an environment truly fit for "human" as opposed to sub-human habitation. Professor Ehrlich's standards are too high for some. The Pope, for example. On his visit to the United Nations in 1965, His Holiness called on the nations to abjure "artificial birth control, which would be *irrational*

(Continued on back page)

LETTERS

David Tribe Answers Critics

in answer to my critics (*Freethinker*, 28 August) may I quote without comment from two recent sources. The first is a letter to *The Times* (12 August) by Sir Alfred Ayer. The second is an article in the *Tablet* (28 August).

(1) "As one who declined to give evidence on behalf of the editors of *Oz*, since I did not feel able to say that this publication was not obscene, I now feel obliged to protest against the severity of those sentences."

(2) "Edward Oliver, secretary general of the Social Morality Council, tells of the time, some eighteen months ago, when he and another member of the SMC Executive Committee, also a Catholic, were invited to the annual dinner of the British Humanist Association, the first non-Humanists ever to attend. There were about a hundred people present, with A. J. Ayer, as retiring president, in the chair. Certain of the diners were at great pains to explain to Mr Oliver that the anti-Christian image was out of date; rather, Humanists were now extremely interested in the reforms and changes going on in the Church. One committee member leant across and said: 'These days, if we want to use a dirty word about a group, we call it anti-Christian'."

"In the midst of this love feast", Edward Oliver recalls, "their guest speaker, Ludovic Kennedy, got up and promptly said the exact opposite—that the purpose of Humanism was not so much to champion social and political causes as to disabuse our fellow-countrymen of the superstition of religious belief. People ought to have the courage of their lack of conviction, he asserted: those who had ceased to believe should campaign against religion."

"This caused embarrassment. The committee man commented: 'I told you that this kind of anti-Christianity still lingers in some local groups; you now see that a few of our top people still stick to it too.'"

No doubt Mr Oliver, a man of great geniality and tact, coped well with the situation. I do not know who the other Catholic SMC committeeman might have been. Presumably it was not the president of the council, who happens to be the Catholic Bishop Butler. Heaven knows what one would find under a bed!

In what was intended as an academic paper I must apologise for language which has been found complex or even "Delphic". When I return to the subject of the open society—if it lasts that long—I promise a swashbuckling style that leaves nothing to the imagination.

DAVID TRIBE.

Sex Education and the Child

H.W. Day's letter (*Freethinker*, 28 August) is confused and confusing. He is blaming someone for "an increase in the number of 12-year-old children becoming mothers and the incidence of VD among teenagers", but whether he blames sex education, the freethought movement or publications such as *OZ* is unclear.

If he is asking whether the freethought movement has made children happier the answer is clearly in the affirmative. By its pioneering work in family planning the movement has helped to reduce child poverty and create a situation in the family and the school where the child is considered a person who matters.

If he is asking whether sex education has made children happier the answer, equally clearly, is "Yes". What a burden of misery has been lifted because boys have realised that masturbation does not lead to blindness, insanity, TB and eternal damnation, and girls do not think that they are pregnant because they have been kissed, or dying because they are having their first period.

MARGARET MCILROY.

Defending the "Freethinker"

As a "gurgling protest" H. W. Day's letter achieves a fine flow of irregular bubbles. One gathers (albeit tentatively) that Mr Day thinks the *Freethinker* should (1) be in favour of treating the subject of sex education "on a good rational basis"—which means drawing a line at sex education "bull"; (2) be less predictable in the face of intolerance towards "the dissemination of anything akin to the *OZ* publications; (3) be able (and obliged) to prove indisputably that "this movement" has made one child "one whit the happier than were children of 50 years ago".

It could perhaps be argued that the *Freethinker* has been (1) consistently defending and promoting rational sex education and attacking all obscurantist "bull"; (2) consistently opposing intolerance of the dissemination of "non-Establishment" publications; (3) consistently concerning itself with the unhappiness resulting from both sexual ignorance and intolerance.

CHARLES BYASS.

William Stewart Ross

With reference to J. Stewart Ross's letter (*Freethinker*, 4 September) I am pleased to help clean up the grave of William Stewart Ross ("Saladin") and pay tribute to him as a poet.

However, the only muck which covers Saladin's character is that which he, Charles Mackay and G. Chetwynd Jones ("Lara") stockpiled to throw at Bradlaugh.

NIGEL SINNOTT.

(Continued from Previous page)

(my italics) in order to diminish the number of guests at the banquet of life". But what kind of "banquet" is it for half the world's population? "Many Western Europeans are under the delusion that an Asian can live happily on a bowl of rice a day. Such a diet means slow starvation for an Asian, just as it would for an European". So much for the "banquet". But the message has not yet penetrated the Vatican. How many more of the defenceless Faithful will have to perish of slow starvation in Latin America, before it does?

The most painful chapter of all is the one that deals with what our policy should be with regard to international aid. After all, good liberals that we freethinkers mostly are, we have been brought up to believe that indiscriminate aid to the starving is the self-evident duty of the developed nations. Ehrlich points out that even America's food surpluses are limited and getting smaller every year. Consequently, the richer nations will have to concentrate their resources on those countries that can be made self-sufficient if given prompt and effective aid. Some countries are already so far behind in the "population-food game" that they are anyway doomed, and must be left to sink, lest they drag everyone else under with them. Tragically, India is in this category.

Professor Ehrlich's conclusions are stark and bitter, but the force and logic of his argument and the wealth of his evidence suggests to me that they are unlikely to be refuted. The impact of the population explosion on what we like to call "Western values" are devastating indeed, and we have not yet had the courage or the imagination or the realism to begin to come to terms with it.

MADELEINE SIMMS

FREETHINKER FUND

Although August is a bad month for financial appeals the amount contributed to the fund was the highest for some time. We thank the 24 readers who sent donations and urge others to help the *Freethinker* at a time when rising costs are a constant worry. The *Freethinker* operates with a minimum of staff and limited resources. Our printers have always kept their charges as low as possible, but another increase in the price of paper has just been announced. It's up to everyone who values a weekly, freethinking journal to sustain it by helping to increase its circulation and contributing regularly to the fund.

Thanks to Mrs Bennett, 45p; J. W. Bellamy, £2; S. Clowes, £1; W. V. Crees, 50p; R. Cadmore, £10.36; W. H. Dobson, 20p; H. Etherington, 95p; O. H. Floyd, £1.50; H. Fiddian, £1.45; A. Foster, £1.70; D. F. Heath, 45p; J. R. Hutton, 45p; H. H. Jones, £5; E. Lidseen, £3.50; P. J. McCormick, 25p; D. Molyneux, £1; Mrs Mainland, 45p; A. K. Philpot, 45p; P. Rom, 35p; G. B. Stowell, £5; J. Sykes, 20p; K. Unsworth, £1; Mrs Vanduren, 25p. Already acknowledged: £103.75; total to date: £141.66.