

## NEW CATHOLIC ATTACK ON EUTHANASIA: CRUDE PROPAGANDA BY DOCTORS AND MPs

A study group of 14 prominent Roman Catholics, eight with medical, and five (including a Labour and a Conservative MP) with legal qualifications, have published a book this week attacking euthanasia. It is entitled *Your Death Warrant?* and, in case the significance of the title is missed, the bright red dust cover carries a picture of a man divided vertically in half, the one half a doctor, complete with stethoscope, the other half a headsman, complete with axe and dripping block. At his feet lies the figure of a man, the upper half horribly emaciated, the lower half a skeleton. The book is kindly dedicated "To Those Who are at Risk", and no less a person than Cardinal Heenan, Archbishop of Westminster, has written the preface. He advises readers: "Keep religion out of this. Just read about this plan to kill you and anyone else who becomes old or incurably sick . . . If enough people read it thousands of lives will be saved. Yours, perhaps, among them".

### One Side of the Question

Margaret McLroy writes: *Your Death Warrant?* purports to be a rational examination of a serious and controversial question. There is an historical survey of past attitudes to euthanasia, and summaries of parliamentary debates and legislative proposals. But the book raises every possible legal and verbal quibble to prove either that it is impossible to decide who is a fit subject for euthanasia, or that people might be "euthanased" who obviously should not be. While arguing that because of the availability of pain-killing drugs there is no need for euthanasia, the authors assume that doctors are uniformly conscientious, considerate and sound in their judgements. In discussing what would happen if euthanasia were permitted, they seem to think doctors cannot be trusted to act intelligently at all, but would cheerfully kill off healthy young people who have not given themselves time to come to terms with a recent disability, or patients in the early stages of cancer, who are neither suffering seriously nor certainly doomed. They worry about "the feelings of patients in a ward where one of them has just been killed", but, typically, don't consider the feelings of patients who have seen a companion die horribly. They think children would suffer from hearing family discussions before a decision on euthanasia, but do not worry about children—or adults—haunted for years by the groans of the dying. They are concerned lest patients who, in health, had made a declaration for euthanasia should await it in terror when sudden illness had deprived them of the power to communicate their change of mind; they have no sympathy to spare, however, for the predicament of a patient who might bitterly regret not having made his declaration while he could. Many of the problems raised are real ones, but the authors' total refusal to consider the other side to each of these questions marks their book as crude propaganda.

### Blinkered

The authors would do better to drop the pretence that their views are not determined by Catholicism. They only reveal how completely conditioned they are by their religion, unable to conceive how the world looks to non-

Catholics. They should lay aside their inefficient disguise. If they said that God, numberer of stars and sparrows, designed the length of every human life, one could respect, even while disagreeing with them. However, they, and Cardinal Heenan, declare continually that they are not writing as Catholics. "The authors of this work", according to themselves, "have tried to approach the subject in what might simply be called a humanist manner, leaving aside from their reasoning such insight as they may gain from faith". Unfortunately humanist thinking is something these learned men cannot attain to, either because they are so blinkered by the Catholic "party line" that they cannot consider rationally anything contrary to it, or because Catholicism induces in its adherents a morbid fear of death so intense that Catholic thinkers cannot envisage other people being without it. Until recently—still in some areas—Catholic infants have been brought up on hideous stories of a fiery hell, and even though a devout Catholic may be fairly sure of not qualifying to go there, the possibility must nag away at a corner of his mind. Even if he is safe from hell, a dose of Purgatory seems almost inevitable, and that is hot and uncomfortable enough, according to some of their theologians who suffer from the extraordinary delusion that physical pain is somehow purifying. A Catholic might well, therefore, cling to the dregs of life, however agonising, rather than risk plunging uninvited into such horrors as these, and possibly offending a god who hands down such penalties like a bad-tempered mother dealing out smacks.

### Euthanasia is Voluntary

In numerous purple patches, the authors dwell upon the terror they expect the euthanasia "victim" to feel when faced with the merciful death he has himself asked for. "Imagine the uncertainty on the part of the patient at the entry of the doctor or nurse—to be killed now or to be made, by *not* being killed to live another hour or another day?" They quote Desdemona begging Othello, "Kill me tomorrow, my Lord, Let me live this night". (One wonders

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why a patient who feels like this ever signed a euthanasia declaration, or why having done so he does not simply revoke it.) Later they say, in the same tones of breathless horror, "The implication can hardly be avoided that the patient must assent to the pill . . . or injection. It is a scene which must be conjured up clearly if one is to appreciate its inherent inhumane qualities". Many of us can conjure up appalling scenes only too readily from our own experience or from first-hand accounts, such as a man dragged struggling away from the gas oven by his wife and daughters, a few weeks before his death from cancer. Well, if our authors really find the thought of an overdose of morphine more terrifying than the last stages of chronic bronchitis or cancer of the throat, that is up to them, but they really should not try to inflict these things on the rest of us—and then have the cheek to pretend they are saving our lives.

### Freud's Courage

That great freethinker Sigmund Freud suffered from cancer of the mouth for the last 16 years of his life. He underwent numerous painful operations, and had to have a bulky device forced into his mouth daily—a very unpleasant and uncomfortable process, but without it he could neither eat nor speak. He continued to work until the smell of his disease grew so revolting that his dog shrank from him. Then he decided that to continue the struggle was pointless, and, by appointment, his doctor and friend, who had kept him going for so long, administered an injection of morphine from which Freud died the following day. No doubt the doctor's promise to do him this service contributed to the strength of mind with which he fought death off all those years. He was a very brave man, not because he accepted the final needle cheerfully, but because he deferred it, not only until his life was of no pleasure to him, but until it could not benefit anyone else either.

A particularly frightening line of argument is that by which the authors convince themselves that if voluntary euthanasia were permitted old people would "inevitably" soon find themselves being killed off as a matter of State policy. (People who think in religious or political blinkers are always inclined to tell us that things are inevitable.) A more rational view is that compulsory killing could become possible only if public opinion accepted it, and that is inconceivable (at least this side of a nuclear holocaust). After all, Catholics would for once be lined up alongside liberals of all kinds, and that would make a pretty powerful block. One of the good results of easier abortion has been the efforts of some Catholics and anti-abortionists to cut down the demand by giving practical assistance to pregnant women in difficulties; and one can reasonably hope that the legalising of euthanasia will encourage the provision of better facilities for the incurable. Perhaps Hugh Rossi and William Wells, the MPs among our authors, will start an agitation in Parliament now.

My own expectation would be that euthanasia, if legalised, would be used in a large number of cases, but for the most part by people who were in any case very near death, shortening life by a matter of days or weeks, rather than months. It would give peace of mind to many who feel themselves increasingly sick and infirm to know that they need not suffer beyond what they themselves find bearable.

### Catholicism and Truth

It would be insulting to the eminent authors to suggest that they do not believe what they are saying, but most of their arguments are so weak that it seems hardly less insulting to assume they do believe it all. The fault presumably lies not in the individuals themselves, but in the Roman Catholic Church. This book demonstrates clearly what the ex-Catholic theologian Charles Davis meant when he wrote, in *A Question of Conscience*: "It is sad to go through popular Catholic writing of the past few decades and read the earnest but biased arguments used to defend the indefensible . . . Arguments are valued not for their power to reveal the truth, but for their apparent usefulness in supporting the official line". There is a need for a serious and detailed book on the various aspects of euthanasia, but this is not it.

*Your Death Warrant?* is edited by Jonathan Gould and Lord Craigmyle, and published by Geoffrey Chapman at £1.50.

The Clarence, Whitehall, London, SW1

(One minute from Trafalgar Square)

## PUBLIC LECTURES

Friday, 22 October, 8 p.m.

BARBARA SMOKER

### IS DEMOCRACY POSSIBLE—OR DESIRABLE?

Friday, 5 November, 8 p.m.

AVRO MANHATTAN

### RELIGIOUS TREASON AND PLOT, PAST AND PRESENT

Friday, 19 November, 8 p.m.

RICHARD HANDYSIDE

### THE LITTLE RED SCHOOLBOOK AND RELATED ISSUES

Friday, 3 December, 8 p.m.

MICHAEL LLOYD-JONES

### SEXUAL MYTHOLOGY

Friday, 17 December, 8 p.m.

R. J. CONDON

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THE FREETHINKER

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# FISH ON FRIDAY

R. J. CONDON

Not long ago, the Church of Rome released its followers from their obligation to eat fish on Fridays, thereby breaking one of its many links with the pagan past. The fish, as a religious symbol, had a prominent place in many ancient cults. Its origin is almost certainly to be found in primitive totemism. Early man regarded the animals and himself as practically kindred. Tribes readily adopted the idea that they manifested the qualities of this or that animal, such as tigerish ferocity, foxy cunning or fishy elusiveness, which were to be accounted for by direct descent from the particular animal.

Members of totemistic societies identify themselves with their animal relatives by wearing their skins, and by refusing to eat them except on ceremonial occasions when they mystically unite themselves to their putative ancestors. One or both of these customs were prominent in all fish-cults, of which the Babylonian is the earliest known. The gods Ea, Dagon and Oannes, who were probably one and the same, were represented as part man and part fish. Their priests dressed as fish, complete with tail, the head forming a mitre.

Berosus, a Babylonian priest and historian of the time of Alexander the Great, left an account of Oannes. This being appeared out of the sea at a very remote period. His body was that of a fish, but under the fish's head he had a human one. Human feet were attached to his tail, and he had the power of speech. A gift to man from Anu, the supreme god, Oannes taught them the arts and sciences of every kind, retiring into the sea at sunset each evening. The name Oannes is virtually the same as the Greek Ioannes or John. Some scholars, notably Dupius, have seen in Oannes the original of the mythical Baptist of the Gospels. Like John, Oannes "came neither eating nor drinking". He has, too, correspondences with the Jonah of the Old Testament.

Dagon, whose name means "fish-god", was adopted by the Phoenicians and the Philistines, a fitting object of worship for those maritime races. Although many Babylonian religious ideas found their way into Judaism, fish-worship was not one of them, at any rate officially. All the same, the law against making images of fish (Deuteronomy 4 : 18) indicates that this was not entirely unknown.

## A Universal Symbol

In Indian mythology the first incarnation of Vishnu was as a fish. He is pictured, like Jonah, as a man emerging from a fish's mouth. Some Indian temples had tanks for the sacred finny tribe, the priests performing their ablutions in the holy fish-water before officiating.

The prodigious fecundity of the fish, together with its shape, naturally led to its adoption as a sex symbol. By analogy it was thought to be a powerful aphrodisiac, a superstition hardly extinct today. The Pythagorans, who were ascetics, refused to eat fish on that account.

Fish were closely associated with the mother-goddess under her various names. Statuettes of the Egyptian Isis show her nursing the infant Horus, her head surmounted by a fish which is oval in shape, the oval being a universal symbol of the female pudenda. Isis, like many divine mothers, was ever virgin, and the fish was and still is an

emblem of virginity. The Sanscrit "mina" stands for both fish and virgin, while the woman who dedicates her virginity to God is still called a fish, that being the meaning of "nun" in Semitic languages.

The Babylonians, whose brain-child the Zodiac goes back to their totemistic Accadian period, also devised the seven-day week, naming the days after the sun, moon and the five planets then known, a custom which has been followed ever since. Their day of Istar or Venus, the planetary representative of the mother-goddess, was our Friday, itself named after Freya or Frigga, a Scandinavian Venus. In the Zodiac the fish-sign Pisces stands directly opposite Virgo, the astral virgin-mother, the two thus being mystically connected. Moreover, Venus is in astrological terms the exalted planet in Pisces. All this emphasised the link between the fish and the female deity; hence the custom of eating fish in her honour on Friday, the Dies Veneris.

Atergatis, the Dea Syria of Lucian's treatise, was called "fish-mother". The goddess' temple at Hieropolis had attached to it a lake containing sacred fish wearing golden ornaments. The fish were of course too holy to be eaten except ceremonially by the priests. At the door of the temple stood two phalli, incredibly said to have been 150 yards tall, twelve times higher than those in front of Solomon's temple (1 Kings 7 : 15-22). The priests of Atergatis were eunuchs, and there were periodical religious orgies at which some men were sure to castrate themselves in the goddess' honour, using the swords which the priests thoughtfully set out for the purpose. The worship of Atergatis has long departed from Syria, but sacred fish-ponds survived there until modern times, at mosques in Tripolis and Edessa.

Mylitta, a form of the Babylonian Istar, and whose name means "birth", was a fertility goddess to whom cakes called "mulloi", shaped like the pudenda, were offered in adoration (cf Jeremiah 7 : 18). Her fish was the mullet, which still bears her name. The Greek "mullos", incidentally, means both the fish and the vulva. In some places where fertility goddesses were worshipped their priestesses pretended to prophesy through that organ, probably by ventriloquism.

## "The Great Fish"

Around 350 BC the sun at the vernal equinox began to move out of Aries, the zodiacal Ram, and into Pisces. Solar gods, typified by a ram or lamb under Aries, now began to be represented as fish. Horus of Egypt, as the Divine Fish, appears in some ancient planispheres as fish-tailed and holding a cross. Buddha was called Dag-Po or Fish-Buddha. Bacchus was Ichthys or Fish in Greek; so too was the saviour-god of the new religion which was beginning to emerge from the mystery cults of the pagan world some 1900 years ago.

Early Christian inscriptions made frequent use of the fish. In the Roman catacombs the two zodiacal fishes are displayed on Christ's forehead, at his feet, on an altar before him, and hanging from a cross. On eucharistic monuments the food before the banqueters is invariably bread and fish. A popular word-play, alleged to have been found in the pre-Christian Sibylline Oracles, was IESOUS

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## FREETHINKER

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## ANNOUNCEMENTS

The *Freethinker* is obtainable at the following addresses. London: Collets, 66 Charing Cross Road, WC2; Housmans, 5 Caledonian Road, King's Cross, N1; Freedom Press, 84b Whitechapel High Street (Angel Alley), E1; Rationalist Press Association, 88 Islington High Street, N1; Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, WC2; Freethinker office, 103 Borough High Street, SE1. Glasgow: Clyde Books, 292 High Street. Brighton: Unicorn Bookshop, 50 Gloucester Road (near Brighton Station).

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.

Guildford Humanist Group, Guildford House, Guildford, Thursday, 14 October, 7.45 p.m. Tony de Reuck: "Barriers to Communication".

Humanist Holidays. Details of future activities from Marjorie Mephram, 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 22 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 Mephram, 29 Fairview Road, Sutton, Surrey. Telephone 01-642 8796.

Leicester Secular Society, Secular Hall, 75 Humberstone Gate, Leicester, Sunday, 10 October, 6.30 p.m. F. H. Amphlett Micklewright: "Secularism and the Law Today".

South Place Ethical Society, Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London, WC1, Sunday, 10 October, 11 a.m. Ron Mason: "Time, Memory and Marcel Proust". Tuesday, 12 October, 7 p.m. Discussion: "Will Marriage Survive?"

Printer's error on the printed order of worship of First Presbyterian Church New York.

**HYMN OF ADORATION:**  
"Immoral, Invisible".

## FESTIVAL OF BLIGHT

Although the Festival of Light rally did not attract the huge numbers quoted in some newspapers it would be exceeding foolish to write it off as a flash in the pan. Its supporters are fired with that fervour which only the deadly combination of religion and politics can produce. Judging by the first reactions in the religious Press it is evident that this movement for repression and censorship is going to be very much a part of the British scene during the 1970s. It has the support of the high priest and priestess of purity, Malcolm Muggeridge and Mary Whitehouse; Lord Longford will be a tower of strength at Westminster; the police and sections of the media will add their support.

Probably the most important asset to the puritans is the back-room boys who thought up this new form of campaigning. One of them, Peter Hill, is only 27, but is an experienced missionary and preacher. He says that he committed his life to Christ at the age of 18, but he was a very enthusiastic follower for some years before having made his first "decision for Christ" at the age of ten. He and his colleagues are not in the same category as the clownish Jesus Freaks of America. And they are much more dynamic and shrewd than those pathetic types who harangue cinema queues and carry posters through the West End proclaiming "The End is Nigh", "The Wages of Sin is Death" and similar glad tidings. This movement is very religious, but that will not prevent it finding sympathetic ears in all the political parties, sections of the media, police headquarters and among wealthy individuals.

Members of Parliament, Fleet Street, the BBC and Independent television companies are going to be increasingly pressurised by the puritans. Already it has been announced that the BBC is to hold an inquiry into the coverage of the Trafalgar Square demonstration. Broadcasting House was "flooded" with telephone calls and letters. Of course, such organisations have always been able to mobilise letter-writing campaigns, and the BBC is particularly sensitive to correspondence from the public. But will opponents of sons and daughters of light put pen to paper in order to counter puritan propaganda. We cannot honestly express feelings of optimism.

The alleged aim of the Festival of Light rally was to stir up public opposition to pornography. But even the most naïve of its organisers know very well that a hundred such festivals will not stop the sale of "dirty" books any more than an act of Parliament ended prostitution. What they are really trying to achieve is a climate of fear in which it will not be possible to produce books, films, plays, radio or television programmes which offend evangelical Christian tastes, and are not properly respectful towards Christian superstitions and institutions. And although they now protest their tolerance and concern for opponents, these religionists will show their true, bigoted and vindictive faces if and when they gain a mass following.

This new upsurge of religious fervour should not be lightly regarded. It is to be hoped that the lesson will not be lost on those who have sneered at the "old-fashioned, Victorian rationalism" of the National Secular Society and the *Freethinker*. All the battles have *not* been won.

# NEWS



# AND NOTES

# PUBLICATIONS

## BAN STAYS

Even the advance of the blessed cause of ecumenism will not persuade the Pope to lift a 450-year-old ban on Martin Luther who played a decisive and dynamic role in the Reformation. An appeal by 50 Worms Catholics has been rejected, and Cardinal Willebrands, president of the Vatican Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity, has told their spokesman that the raising of the ban was not "an appropriate means of expressing effectively the change in the Catholic attitude towards Luther or to encourage the rapprochement between Lutheran - Protestants and Catholics".

The rejection of the nine-page letter will have a chilling effect on the ecumenical movement soon after German Protestants and Catholics attended a service together at Worms where Luther was outlawed by imperial edict in 1521. The signatories argued that the ban had far-reaching implications and had caused misunderstanding.

## SCHOOL PROTEST

Further developments are reported in the campaign by Catholic parents in Stafford against sending their children to a denominational secondary school. One couple has even threatened to withdraw their son from the Church so that he can attend the non-Catholic Walton comprehensive school instead of the Blessed William Howard Roman Catholic School. The authorities have just spent £200,000 converting the latter into a comprehensive, and are insisting that the places are taken up by Catholic children. But they have ignored, or underestimated, the growing opposition among Catholic parents to denominational schooling. Parents staged a demonstration on the first day of term. Four parents who kept their children away from school eventually sent them, under protest, to the Catholic school when the authorities told them they were breaking the law. But they have withdrawn their children from RI classes.

### YOUR 1972 POCKET DIARY

This year, for the first time, freethinkers, humanists, rationalists, secularists, or whatever, can have their own pocket diary, containing 16 pages of specialised information (mainly useful names and addresses, plus a few forward dates of 1972 events in the humanist movement), as well as the usual week-to-an-opening diary pages and all the usual features, including London theatre and Underground maps. All this, incredibly, in a small pocket size (4.1" x 2.8") diary that won a design award last year. Just the thing for your own use, and that of like-minded friends to whom you may (dare we suggest it?) send Xmas gifts.

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## BOOKS

MAURICE

by E. M. Forster. Edward Arnold, £2.00.

Among E. M. Forster's books, when they were catalogued after his death last summer, was discovered half a shelf of Edwardian romantic novels. They weren't particularly good, and were unique in one respect only—the romance was homosexual. Not surprisingly, they were often sentimental, sometimes almost hysterical, but sensitive and deeply serious. Scarcely pornographic, certainly not explicit, they usually culminated in violent scenes of renunciation, in pregnant midnight farewells on doorsteps, in the incredulity of suburban girl friends and the condemnation of the Establishment.

Somewhere under all the Ethel M. Dell was buried a groaning tragedy; and somewhere in Forster's library was one novel worthy of the subject. Forster himself had written it in 1913, soon after *Howard's End*; it was circulated privately and never published, though constantly revised to keep it skipping abreast of the twentieth century's violent, if curiously unproductive, advances in awareness. Opinions were divided on its success: unlike his contemporaries, who condemned their erring heroes to frustration, feeling that they had sailed sufficiently close to the wind in broaching the subject at all, Forster had the assurance to give his book a happy and positive ending, and to assert the validity of happiness in a homosexual affair—a difficult, but perhaps a necessary, point to face. But that it's a major novel, in spite of Forster's apparent lack of confidence, one cannot possibly doubt.

What finally distinguishes it is the character of Maurice Hall himself. The book could easily have become, what *The Longest Journey* nearly is, a sentimental hymn full of nice and well-educated boys lying, little fingers linked, side by side on the Backs discussing Plato and Life, the sky an attic azure and the summer air heavy with the scent of limes and obliquely expressed confidences. But Forster mischievously makes Maurice a conventional member of the English middle-class, completely unlike himself in fact—quite unable to connect, disrespectful of other people's emotions and his own, and the last person naturally capable of contending with such a problem. In the process of recognising and finally accepting his condition, his surroundings, in Forster's words, "exasperate him by their very normality; mother, two sisters, a comfortable home, a respectable job gradually turn out to be Hell; he must either smash them, or be smashed, there is no third course. The working out of such a character", he adds, "the setting of traps for him . . . proved a welcome task"

As you would expect, those surroundings are drawn with wonderful accuracy and with that delicate, deadly wit. "Church was the only place Mrs Hall had to go to", says Forster of Maurice's mother, "the shops delivered". When Maurice says that the poor have no feelings and don't suffer as the rich would in their place, Clive's fiancée "looked disapproval, but felt she had entrusted her hundred pounds to the right sort of stockbroker". There is a splendid account of Maurice's school, whence "amid mutual compliments the boys passed out, healthy but backward, to receive upon undefended flesh the first blows of the world", and where, after a rosy talk about the joys of marriage and the rightness of sex, the senior assistant

## FREETHINKER

master pales with fear at the thought that his explanatory diagrams drawn in the sand may be seen by promenading virtuous ladies.

All this is fair game, and the bag is heavy. When Maurice has his first (platonic) relationship at Cambridge, the scent of limes drifts across the scene for a while; but after three years Maurice's friend Clive, charming, civilised, sane enough to recognise Maurice's real qualities beneath his conventional facade and capable of making him really happy, suddenly decides he must go straight, and in the book's most impressive section Maurice once more cracks up. He doubts the truth of his alienating experience; he consults a hypnotist to "cure" himself; and he hates himself whenever the sight of a pretty boy reminds him of what he is. Clive prepares to get married and invites him to stay at his country house. The conversation is inane, the shooting indifferent, and the rain relentless (a natural enough image). He is tormented by the baleful presence of Mr Borenus, the local rector, who, he fears, has guessed. (The humanist in Forster here rises to a splendid piece of insight—"he knew now that there is no secret of humanity which, from a wrong angle, orthodoxy has not viewed, that religion is far more acute than science, and if it only added judgement to insight would be the greatest thing in the world".)

But at that very moment Maurice's salvation is at hand. His love is reborn in another object, consummated, almost wrecked by a clumsy blackmail attempt, but the beloved finally elects to stay with him for what is apparently for good. In their final scene together, which Forster rewrote many times, it's impossible not to be moved, but difficult not to wonder whether it is a possible way of concluding what has preceded it. Forster wrote, rather disarmingly, "the temptation's overwhelming to grant to one's creations a happiness actual life does not supply". The fact that such happiness is now allowed surely means that it all the more needs to be celebrated. It's time someone took up the challenge in *Boys in the Band*: "show me a happy homosexual . . .". Whether Forster's Maurice really shacks up with the right man is a question readers must make up their own minds about, with the aid of the complex image which Forster's nuances combine to create.

One can't help feeling tremendous regret that Forster didn't publish this beautiful work, if not immediately then five or ten years ago—heaven knows it was necessary even then. The subject is handled with such tact and charm that one can't believe it wouldn't have increased people's awareness. In his final notes (written 1960) Forster seems pessimistic about society even achieving its present degree of tolerance, but the book's passion survives undimmed by the passage of time.

Certainly, as he saw, the leisured Edwardian atmosphere has a charming, rather saddening period quality, and one may be irritated by the incessant rotten-bad-form-chaps speech of the upper classes or the contrived carelessness of the lower (the gamekeeper, an important character in the book, is scarcely more convincing than Leonard Bast). What still lives, and unfortunately still lasts, is the dilemma and the suffering. And, as Forster observed in the last entry he ever made in his diary, how it rains!

TONY MASTERS



# REVIEWS

## SCIENCE AND SURVIVAL

by Barry Commoner. Ballantine, 40p.

From the title the reader would not expect to be regaled mainly with matters of nuclear war, radioactive fallout and the like. This basically is what this book is all about, although it briefly skims over other aspects of pollution. The author discusses what the statistics of a nuclear war actually mean. The Hudson Institute "scenarios" are extremely instructive. For example following an attack, government authority border controls cannot be maintained. Smugglers exposed to yellow fever carry infection from Haiti to Puerto Rico and eventually to Florida. The Everglades support the yellow fever-carrying mosquito. Such swamp areas become reservoirs of the disease which spreads to Miami, where there are crowded refugee camps. Mortality of 80 per cent; entire Gulf Coast is potential danger area.

Barry Commoner documents the real case of the nuclear explosion in the Van Allen belts (these are bands of atomic particles held in zones around the earth by its magnetic field). This was Project Starfish. The scientists protested that this would damage satellites, increase radiation hazards to astronauts and interfere with the natural Van Allen belts. Due to the whole affair being classified, discussion was hampered. After secret meetings it was publicly announced that "there is no need for concern regarding any lasting effects on the Van Allen belts and associated phenomena . . ." the effects would last "a few weeks to a few months". Despite military secrecy the results of the high altitude Starfish explosion were no more secret than the Van Allen belts. Astronomers all over the world found themselves with information the American Government considered top secret. The American-British satellite Ariel was damaged by radiation and it was finally thought that the affected parts of the Van Allen belts would take some 30 years to return to normality. So much for trying to conduct science in secrecy.

The most exciting part of the book is where the author makes a cogent case for scientists ensuring that the public are properly informed about scientific matters. He cites the St Louis Committee for Nuclear Information (CNI) and the role it played in several issues. At the Nevada nuclear test site radioactive iodine-131 was released. The Government repeatedly insisted that there was no danger to people in the area. The CNI scientists investigated but their conclusions were rejected by the Atomic Energy Commission. The AEC failed to monitor iodine-131 because they said there were no techniques available at the time (1952-1957); the CNI scientists referred to descriptions of such techniques published in 1948 and used by AEC themselves in 1953. Then the AEC claimed that iodine-131 would not get into milk because there were no dairy cattle in the region. The CNI then reported a milk-cow census showing that there were 6,000 dairy cows in the area. The net result of this public discussion was that US Public Health Service took up the CNI proposal to survey children in the region.

Another case was the AEC's Project Chariot to blast a harbour in Alaska with H-bombs. The AEC selected a site that was in the middle of a long uninhabited stretch of coast. No-one seemed to know that the Eskimo villagers

intensively hunted in this "empty" region. The CNI scientists were able to compile a series of studies which showed that the food supply of the Eskimos would be threatened. The AEC report ignored the biological aspects. The Eskimo villagers along the west coast have no written language but in every village they have tape recorders. The Chariot information and CNI bulletins got to the tapes and swept the coast. One Alaskan biologist recorded meeting an Eskimo driving a dog team and "by golly, he had a copy of the CNI bulletin tucked inside his parka". The Chariot Project met no opposition until the Alaska Conservation Society and CNI explained the biological consequences. That killed the Chariot Project.

Barry Commoner stresses that the CNI programmes were two way processes. A scientist working on strontium-90 in bones and teeth noted that if shed milk teeth could be collected it would give valuable information. The CNI, being concerned with fall out, organised the Baby Tooth Survey, beginning December 1958; by 1966 200,000 teeth had been collected: "Donation of baby teeth had become a way of life among St Louis children".

With so much current condemnation of science and scientists, it is refreshing to read a book like *Science and Survival*. Scientists made a point of ensuring that the public was properly informed on scientific matters. Their aim is an informed citizenry. As Barry Commoner writes: "Experts have everywhere intruded between the issues and the public. The Jeffersonian concept of an educated, informed electorate appears to be a naive and a distant ideal. But at least in one area—science and technology—an effort is being made to make the ideal a reality". Margaret Mead calls this "a new social invention" and it is on this that our future survival will depend.

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## A FREETHINKER RETURNS TO INDIA

**An Indian freethinker who has lived in Britain for many years recently spent six weeks in his native country. Here is his account of developments and problems facing the Government and people of India.**

The problems resulting from the influx of refugees from East Bengal, and the restoration of democratic rights in that part of the sub-continent, are now the central issues. And while the Indian newspapers are widely reporting the Bengal tragedy, there are other disasters which are causing grave concern. The Ganges and her tributaries are in flood, and scores of thousands of homes have been completely destroyed. It has been reported that the army was called in to build flood barriers and to get people away from the stricken areas. But, as the floods recede in one area, other towns are affected downstream, adding to the miseries of the refugees. At the other extreme, there has been drought in Eastern Maharashtra.

Despite these setbacks there is confidence about food supplies because the "green revolution" is making steady progress. The use of hybrid seeds, fertilisers and tubewells is giving hope to an increasing number of farmers. At the same time there is an awareness of the fact that population growth must be restricted. The birth rate is falling, but so is the death rate.

### New Attitudes to Contraception and Abortion

News came from Kerala of the successful campaign to encourage vasectomy. Centres had been established and, significantly, Roman Catholics were responding better than expected. There has been a change in the abortion laws. Before the reform, abortion was legal primarily if a woman's life was in danger. Now other medical and social reasons will suffice. A couple who do not want a child can ask for an abortion if contraception has failed. There was some hesitation and opposition when the reform was first suggested, but it was passed without any uproar. *The Times of India*, a weighty, conservative paper, expressed editorial approval and the only letter of dissent came from a Roman Catholic layman.

Another interesting development is the promotion of pig farming and the popularisation of pork among Hindus. The vast majority of Maratha Hindus are willing to eat egg, chicken, goat or fish. But, for reasons of religion and custom, they will not eat beef. Pigs are sometimes kept by the most backward castes among Maratha and they kill them for food. But butchers are, in most cases, Muslims. So pork is not generally available at the butchers, and in any case most Marathas do not eat the pig because of its scavenging habits. But if pigs are raised on modern farms it is felt that the sanitary objections will be removed. This is regarded as a more practical way of increasing the protein content of the Hindu diet than trying to clash with deep and irrational objections to eating certain kinds of meat.

### Support for Bangla Desh

On the central issue of East Bengal the Left-wing parties are united in the demand for recognition of the Bangla Desh Government, and support for the guerrillas. This

demand has equally vigorous support from the Jana Sangh, the conservative party which is Hindu-dominated, but enjoys some Muslim support. Only the small, extreme Hindu Mahasabha maintains that the Hindus of East Bengal are entitled to a portion of the country which India should occupy on their behalf. In rejecting this extreme position, Jana Sangh argues that the Pakistan army has itself destroyed the political basis of the separatist Islamic ideology and therefore the Bengal Muslims could be trusted to set up a secular state which would be acceptable to the Hindu minority.

Incidentally, most non-Bengali Muslims—apart from a Left-wing minority—have been inclined to express support for West Pakistan. But the realisation that to defend Pakistan, when she has perpetrated atrocities against the Hindu minority would make their own position in India highly incongruous and there is an apparent softening of this attitude.

The new Congress, under Mrs Gandhi's leadership supports the eventual recognition of Bangla Desh. She has an absolute majority in Parliament, but her hesitation has caused much frustration among the masses who will be satisfied only when East Bengal has been liberated from the theo-fascist forces in Pakistan.

### FISH ON FRIDAY

(Continued from page 323)

CHRISTOS THEOU UIOS SOTER (Jesus Christ, Son of God, Saviour), whose initial letters in the Greek alphabet form ICHTHUS. Fish allusions abound in the Gospels; we have the disciples as fishermen, the money in the fish's mouth, the miraculous draught of fishes, plus a wonderful miracle wrought with the aid of the zodiacal "two small fishes".

In patristic literature Christ and the fish are as one. Julius Africanus furnishes a fair sample: "Christ is the great Fish taken by the fish-hook of God, and whose flesh nourishes the whole world".

Christian bishops still wear the Babylonian mitre, though it is not so obvious a fish-head as that used in the Middle Ages, when great pains were taken to produce a life-like replica, with eyes and teeth. A token form of the pagan sacred fish-pond may still be found at the doors of Catholic and High Anglican churches, called the piscina. The Pope still wears the Fisherman's Ring, and claims the entire shoal of humanity as his rightful catch. But the Piscean Age is fading out, and its religion with it. The vernal sun is now firmly established in Aquarius, the one sign of the Zodiac which is wholly Man.

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