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IRELAND: A NEW EASTER LILY?

The British Government's decision to prorogue Stormont and institute direct rule in Northern Ireland from Westminster may shed a faint ray of hope upon a political situation that should have been faced more sensibly half a century ago. It is ironic indeed that for fifty years the men who set up the Ulster Volunteer Force to oppose Home Rule have been running a six-county statelet in which they exercised powers almost identical to those once proposed at the turn of this century for an all-Ireland home rule parliament. Now at least Unionist theoreticians will have to face a consistent set of choices: either to plump for *bona fide* union with the rest of the United Kingdom, and accept the political standards expected by the British public; or, alternatively, throw in the sponge and make some sort of accommodation with nationalist elements in Ireland.

The Permanent Solution

Direct rule, at least in its present form, cannot and should not be looked upon as a final solution to the Northern Ireland crisis, though inevitably some British politicians will tend to forget about "Ulster" in the manner of one who has swept the dust under the carpet and left it there. Even if these people "don't want to know" we can be certain that extremist Orange and I.R.A. opinion will neither forget nor relent.

The "Irish Problem" is not one that can be solved by simplistic formulae. Readers may be familiar with the joke about the Englishman who solved the Irish Question only to find the Irish had, in the meantime, changed the question. The Irish in turn regard any pontification upon this matter from beyond their own green shores as impertinence and hypocrisy. And then there is the anomaly of the Ulster Unionist who, despite his fervent loyalty to an almost mythological Britain of days past, is completely distrustful of all but hard-line rightist thought from across the water: "[British] liberals have always been the enemies of Ulster!"

Religion in Ireland

Much has, of course, been written on the rôle of Christianity in Ireland, and whether the present conflict is, or is not, primarily religious. With the exception of the Unitarian *Inquirer*, which has said that the conflict is religious, the churches have tended to pick and choose. Violence was un-Christian and due to political waywardness if it threw a harsh light on the churches; any good news that came out, on the other hand, was "proof" of the edifying value of the faith (whichever one that was). Similarly, freethinkers have seen the Northern Ireland strife primarily as excellent propaganda material for indicting organised religion.

In reality I would contend that the truth is rather more subtle. Those who say that the Northern Ireland "troubles" are just caused by religion are only half-right; they are like people who suppose that malaria is spread by swigging aquatic mosquito larvae (when the disease is actually spread by the flying adult stage). Get rid of the larvae and you will curb malaria, but you will be right for the wrong reasons.

This writer interprets the Northern Ireland situation in terms not of religious sectarianism *per se*, but as an old colonial and communal situation with fossilised seventeenth century political overtones (and seventeenth century politics was nearly always couched in religious phraseology). Religion has, however, played a crucial rôle in ensuring that the two original communities, planter and Gael, remained at loggerheads by virtue of penal legislation, discouraging intermarriage, and by separating and marking out their descendants from birth by means of sectarian "education". Certainly if there is to be peace in Ireland its cause will be prospered by a diminution in the power of organised religion. We forget, however, that the political aspects of the conflict themselves breed religious polarity: in other words we have a vicious cycle.

The Border must go

In a country of the size, nature, and population of Ireland the present border is a ludicrous English civil servant's anachronism that should never have been put there in the first place. It merely serves to perpetuate the siege mentality of the two communities and thus the fear and hatred upon which religious sectarianism feeds. Having lived, albeit briefly, in Ireland I have come to recognise the demerits of the two communities, but not least to admire their respective virtues. I am a liberal, but no "enemy" of the Ulstermen: indeed I believe they are made of sterner stuff than to be washed away in a united Ireland; ultimately, in a unified island I think they would be able to show best "what Ulster can do".

Three issues are critical. In a united Ireland religion must be subordinated to politics; such a state will not work unless it is *de jure* and *de facto* secular. Regional feeling, such as that of the Ulstermen and the Gaelic speakers must be matched by decentralised, provincial government; and finally for those Irishmen who want a "British connection" some formula, such as reciprocal citizenship with Britain, must be found. Government by bomb, bigotry and bishop must go.

For fifty years Irishmen have worn white lilies at Easter-time; Unionists still sing of the Orange Lily-O. It is time that a blossom of a different hue was given a chance to bloom.

NIGEL SINNOTT

THE PHARAOH'S CURSE

R. W. MORRELL

Probably the most interesting exhibition to be staged in London for many years opens at the British Museum on 30 March, when a selection of the more outstanding items from the tomb of the Egyptian Eighteenth Dynasty Pharaoh, Tutankhamun, opens for a six month run. Even the Post Office has joined in and is to issue a special stamp featuring the pharaoh, while refusing, naturally, to issue any commemorating Richard Carlile and Thomas Paine, to name two individuals more worthy of such an honour.

The importance of the tomb of Tutankhamun lies in the fact that to date it is the only royal pharaonic tomb to have been discovered in a relatively undisturbed state. Although many of the items found in the tomb are of the highest artistic standards they are not, contrary to many press reports, the finest or even most important such things discovered in Egypt.

The So-called Curse

Perhaps the best known tale associated with the tomb of Tutankhamun concerns the so-called pharaoh's curse. This tale spread far and wide when the deaths of certain individuals associated with the tomb's discovery and clearance were presented as being sudden and unexpected. However, the truth of the matter is that no such curse exists, or is known on an Egyptian inscription. The genesis of the tale appears to have been Egyptian ideas concerning the importance of preserving the body. To the ancient Egyptians the maintenance of the personal identity of the corpse was of primary importance, and so methods were devised to prevent decomposition of the body. The reason behind this is found in the idea that the body had two spiritual entities, a soul or *ba*, and the *ka*, the exact nature of which has yet to be fully explained but which appears to have been viewed as a vital life force, double, and conscience, that entered the body at birth. At death both these entities went to the hereafter, where the *ka* (the double) lived a life little different from that on earth (this explains the items buried in Egyptian tombs which if the appropriate religious formula was repeated could be used in the afterlife). However, the enjoyment of this afterlife depended upon, firstly, the objects in the tomb remaining there; secondly, the ownership of the tomb being left to the original occupant; thirdly, the body and tomb displaying the owner's name; and fourthly, offerings being made at the tomb by the living.

That the four conditions given above were carried out was of paramount importance to the ancient Egyptian. If the objects were removed or the identity marks on them obliterated, the body desecrated and its identity tags or inscriptions removed, the tomb usurped and the original owner's name removed, then the *ka* would not be able to locate its eternal house, and so not gain nourishment from the offerings (to enable the *ka* to enter the tomb a false door was carved on the outside and the British Museum has several in its collection on display in the Egyptian sculpture gallery), thus it was doomed to wander lost in a form of limbo. It was against the re-use of the tomb and the removal of a body's identity that Egyptian texts were concerned with, and it is this which appears to have given birth to the curse story.

Those familiar with Egyptian monuments will know of many on which the original dedicator's name has been

obliterated and frequently replaced by that of another, who thus in the case of historic texts usurps the acts of another. This had the effect not only of making it appear that the usurper was greater in that more monuments bore his name—Ramesses II went in for this in a big way, but also of robbing the individual who originally erected the monument of part of his chance of enjoying immortality in a happy state, for it reduced his status in the afterlife. Consequently the systematic removal of the name represented to the ancient Egyptian fearful retribution.

Amun and Aten

Tutankhamun died in his early twenties, some even suggest in his teens, and the richness of his tomb, that of a very minor king, gives some indication of what the tombs of the really great kings contained; little wonder tomb robbers were willing to take great risks to obtain entry. Tutankhamun began his short reign as Tutankhaten, but his name was changed after the old cult of Amun achieved power once more, having been cut down to size by Tutankhamun's predecessor Akhenaten. His relationship with Akhenaten has as yet not been established, for although we have his mortal remains those of his predecessor have not been identified with any degree of certainty, and so no physical comparison can be made. Whether Tutankhaten was wholehearted in his conversion to Amun we also do not know, but as his throne (one of the items in the London exhibition) shows on its back panel the Aten shedding its rays over the king and his queen, and other items found in the tomb show Aten symbolism, there is a suggestion that his conversion might have come about from political motivation, perhaps even force, rather than personal conviction. In all probability we shall never know the truth.

The tomb used for the burial of the young pharaoh was not originally intended for him, being among other things of different shape from any other in the Valley of the Kings of his period. Several items found in the tomb had been made for use by another, an example being the miniature gold canopic coffins (used to contain his viscera) which were originally made for Akhenaten's co-regent, Smenkhkhere, as the altered cartouches illustrate. This suggests that the pharaoh's death was unexpected (there is a theory that he was murdered), and while his reign was short it was of sufficient length to have allowed the construction of a proper royal tomb, as is indicated by the considerable construction work he had carried out such as a colonnade in the Luxor temple and quartzite colossi for his mortuary temple.

A Lost Chapter

Tutankhamun's tomb was lost by accident, workers' huts for masons working on the tomb of Ramesses VI being erected on debris from the new tomb above the entrance to the earlier burial. Horemheb, a general who seized the throne from Tutankhamun's successor, Eyc, systematically obliterated all trace of Tutankhamun (he even took over the colossi mentioned above) and Akhenaten, and so the heresy period (as it appeared to the state cult of Amun), became a lost chapter in Egyptian history until the spades of modern archaeologists revealed it to an astonished world. Tutankhamun has now achieved an immortality on a scale he would never have dreamed of, and, if they exist, his *ka* and *ba* have no fear of limbo.

MORE PHALLIC SURVIVALS

R. J. CONDON

Judging from the enormous numbers made and sold each year, the Easter egg and the hot cross bun are probably the most popular of all religious symbols. Yet it is safe to say that very few of the givers or recipients of these familiar objects have the slightest idea of their real significance, or of their remote origins.

The Traditional Egg

The egg, an obvious emblem of resurrection and new life, was a sacred Easter offering in ancient Egypt, as it still is in Europe. The spring festival common to all early religions was above all one of fertility, whose openly phallic rites and symbols have been toned down in Christianity almost beyond recognition. Eggs, from their size and shape, typified the testes, these organs being called "eggs" in both ancient and modern oriental languages. The "eggs" were actually deified in Babylonia, as Anu and Hoa, the right and left testes, making a holy trinity with the phallic god Asher. It was felt, logically, that Asher would be unable to exercise his fructifying powers without the aid of his appendages. In Egypt the egg was often pictured encircled by the serpent, itself a phallic symbol from the ability of some species to inflate and erect themselves. It was sometimes associated with the bull, a universal type of masculine sex. An egg thirty feet in circumference, with a bull carved on it, has been found in Cyprus, probably of Phoenician workmanship. The most celebrated emblems used in the Greek Mysteries were the phallus, the egg and the serpent, represented by the letters I and O, and the Greek letter Phi, the I and O combined. The union was supposed to yield the serpent-power or driving force of life.

Easter Cakes and Buns

Our word Easter is derived from Eostre, a Saxon goddess of spring, whose name is suggestively similar to those of the Babylonian Istar and the Egyptian Aset or Isis. Istar was said to have been hatched from an egg which fell from heaven to the Euphrates—the original Istar egg!

Buns, known as such, were used in the worship of Istar, the Queen of Heaven. Diogenes Laertius wrote of Empedocles: "He offered one of the sacred cakes called Boun, which was made of fine flour and honey". This was the kind of offering noted in Jeremiah 7:18, which runs: "The children gather wood, the fathers kindle the fire, and the women knead their dough, to make cakes to the Queen of Heaven". At the present day the buns are not offered, but eaten, on the festival of Istar, but there can be no doubt as to their origin.

The appearance of our modern hot cross bun, round and marked with a cross, is similar to the eucharistic cake or loaf illustrated on Mithraic monuments. Mithraism being pre-eminently a solar religion, the cakes evidently represented the sun crossing the equinoctial plane, or crucified. The "bouns" offered to Istar and other deities were made in the shapes of the male and female sexual organs, or both combined. One name for them among the Babylonians and Hebrews was *cunim*, a word which survives little altered in one of our modern vulgarisms. Martial, in his Epigrams, speaks of such things in first-century Rome, and they lasted in Europe until the early nineteenth century. At Saintonge, near La Rochelle, cakes baked in the form

of a phallus were made as Easter offerings. In the town of Saintes, the Palm Sunday festival was called the *Fête des Pinnes*, *pinne* being a popular word for the male organ. The women and children carried in the procession phalli made of bread, at the ends of their palm branches. The palm itself was an ancient phallic symbol. These *pinnes* were subsequently blessed by the priests, and carefully preserved by the women during the following year as amulets. At St. Jean d'Angely small phallic cakes were carried in the Corpus Christi procession, until the practice was suppressed by the authorities. Old French cookery books give recipes for making cakes in these obscene forms, the female ones under the gross name of *cons sucrés*.

Such confectionery never made its appearance in Britain, unless we except a Nottingham custom of making cakes of lozenge or diamond shape, marked sometimes with a cross, but more often with the Virgin and Child, at Christmas, the modern form of the Roman Saturnalia. The lozenge, like the oval, was anciently a euphemism for the vulva, and the sign of Istar, the celestial Virgin. Even this relatively innocent usage has died out. One need not be a Christian to feel regret at the passing of so many colourful religious practices.

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ODE TO SPRING

Winter has left us, and in his place
Spring turns towards us with a smiling face,
In a fresh green mantle, newly made,
And decked with flowers—a winsome jade.

Rough Winter was an awkward guest;
He nipped our fingers, and in rude jest
Froze taps, burst pipes, and then for sport
Uprooted trees, blew down chimneys, tiles, in short
Outstayed his welcome: 'til the Magic Wand
Of Spring hastened his departure from the Land.

Now the sap rises in the trees, and we
Who have survived the incivilities of Winter shall be
Renewed by some strange alchemy as old as Time;
An annual chore of Nature, since from the primeval
slime
We made our first beginnings; and nurtured by the Sun,
Conceived our instincts in its yearly run.

So now, young lad, go out and seek
A bright-eyed wench with rosy cheek.
Housewife clean your paint and polish,
Cobwebs, dust and dirt demolish.
Farmer sow your seed, depend
A crop you'll see ere this year's end;
Throw bounty to the birds, who'll sing
A welcome that we'll echo—to most welcome Spring!

W. HIGSON.

THE FREETHINKER

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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.

Freethought books and pamphlets (new). Send for list to G. W. Foote & Co. Ltd., 103 Borough High Street, London, SE1.

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

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.

Brighton and Hove Humanist Group, Imperial Centre Hotel, First Avenue, Hove. Sunday, 2 April, 5.30 p.m.: speaker on "Democracy in the Melting Pot".

South Place Ethical Society, Conway Hall, 25 Red Lion Square, London WC1. Tuesday, 4 April, 7 p.m.: Stanislav Velinsky, "Psychology and Cultural Values". [No lectures on 2 April.]

NEWS

George Melly, jazz singer, film critic, and writer has accepted an invitation to become President of the British Humanist Association for the year 1972.

HUMANIST HOUSING

The latest Humanist Housing Association* Newsletter reports that tenants have now moved into the new extension of Rose Bush Court, Hampstead. The formal opening of the extension will take place during the annual garden party on 15 July.

Building is also about to commence on the H.H.A.'s Sun Hill Place scheme at Pembury, Kent.

* 35/41 Parkhill Road, London, NW3 2YE.

WOMEN'S LIB.?

A woman clown read one of the lessons at the annual service for circus clowns held at Dalston on 12 March last.

CHE BANNED FROM SCHOOLS

Mr. M. M. Scarr, the Cambridge City Education Officer, has refused a request from the Campaign for Homosexual Equality to heads of local secondary schools for sending visiting speakers to talk on homosexuality. Mr. Bernard Greaves, a spokesman for the local branch of CHE, "Gay Cambridge" is reported by the *Times Educational Supplement* as saying that sex education in schools is not designed to prevent prejudice against homosexuals. "Medical, psychological, and religious attitudes tend essentially towards the belief that homosexuality can in some ways be cured—by therapy, analysis or prayer", says Gay Cambridge.

The headmaster of Netherhall Boys' Secondary Modern School said that he preferred to explain the facts of homosexuality "in the course of religious or moral education".

CATHOLIC SCHOOL TO CLOSE

The Sacred Heart boarding school for girls at Tunbridge Wells, Kent, founded in 1915, is to close down in the summer of 1973. The school is run by the sister of the Society of the Sacred Heart of Jesus.

The main reason for the closure, according to the *Catholic Herald*, was "the shortage of vocations". While the "educational effort" of the Sisters of the Sacred Heart "had more than doubled in the past 50 years" in Britain, "there had been no corresponding increase in personnel".

CONTRACEPTIVE COINCIDENCE

It is a small world. Charles Rudd, who reviewed *Prejudices and Antipathies* in this paper a few weeks ago, happened to come across a thirty-six-year-old book that still contained the publisher's review slip made out to *The Freethinker*. It was *The Medical History of Contraception*, by Norman E. Himes, published by Allen & Unwin in 1936. Mr. Rudd writes: "The book is a fairly extensive survey of the subject at a time when such research was more difficult than it is now, with much source material deliberately left uncatalogued or restricted. Dr. Himes was Professor of Sociology at Colgate University, Hamilton, New York".

S AND NOTES

Herbert Cutner described the book in his review in *The Freethinker* for 27 September 1936 as "one of the finest treatises of its kind so far written". he also wrote:

It is not so long ago that the words "birth control" were considered quite shocking—particularly in the mouth of a "young person" . . . It referred to a subject that decent people only discussed behind closed curtains, so to speak. The people who were not decent, some of whom called themselves Freethinkers, were doing their best to "corrupt" the younger generation with open and unashamed reference to what was after all *sin*. They were to be shunned as something unclean; they were, indeed, only hopeless atheists.

—Has a curiously contemporary ring, does it not?

ONE HUNDRED YEARS AGO

The past few months have brought a succession of painful news from India, including, in the first place, a series of reports of the progress of an expedition to punish a plundering border tribe, the Looshais. The *Times of India* reports of the progress of this expedition: "The gallant Major Macintyre, in the course of a four days' raid, had the satisfaction of burning 192 dwelling-houses, 58 granaries, containing 150 tons of rice, and he captured and brought in 25 head of cattle and 100 fowls!" . . . In another part of India a small body of a tribe called the Kookas attacked a Government fort or station. They killed one or two soldiers, but were repulsed. They were then literally hunted down. Fifty captives were executed on the spot, and sixteen at Umballa . . . It appears that at least forty-nine of these were *blown from guns!* And this atrocity under the *Christian* sway of England, A.D. 1872.

[From *The National Reformer*, 31 March 1872.]

JOY AND LIGHT FOR NORTHERN IRELAND

The Lord's Day Observance Society, so they tell us, does not cease to pray "for our dear friends" in Northern Ireland "in their time of tribulation". In the meantime, says the current number of the L.D.O.S.'s harbinger of glad tidings, *Joy and Light*, "the preservation of the Lord's Day is not overlooked by God's people in the Province. Mr. J. A. Fullerton, our L.D.O.S. representative, reports one incident, for example: 'A Show-Biz football match, to be followed by a cabaret show, was arranged . . . at Dunmore Stadium . . . , co-organised by the Ministry of Community Relations, Hollywood Cabaret Artistes, and the Women Together League. I only learned of this on the Thursday before the event was due to take place and I immediately contacted the Minister of C.R., who . . . told me that the Ministry had nothing whatever to do with organising the event. A disclaimer to this effect appeared in the *Belfast Telegraph* on the Saturday. I was very pleased when I found that the owners of the Dunmore Stadium had withdrawn permission to hold the match and show on their ground.'

Last February the Borough Council of Coleraine (Co. Derry) also rejected, by six votes to three, a move to have the town's fields open on Sundays as "the ratepayers generally were opposed to Sunday sport".

A WHALE OF A SAINT

An "underwater statue" of Saint Paul is to be erected off the Italian Riviera next year following his being proclaimed

Patron Saint of Italian divers by Pope Paul. Apparently the prophet Jonah was also considered, but Paul won the honour on the strength of his having allegedly survived three shipwrecks.

Nevertheless, Jonah might still, one supposes, be considered for the post of Patron Saint of Submariners, or at least of submarine escape experts. His performance was, after all, far more spectacular.

"OPERATION NEWSAGENT"

One of the more dubious gimmicks dreamt up by the perpetrators of the nationwide Festival of Light is "Operation Newsagent" by which members of the public will "seek to persuade" their local newsagents and bookshops to discontinue the display "and, if possible, the stocking—of blatantly pornographic magazines".

EXPOSE "RELIGIO-SADISTS"

"The real danger to the Christian Faith comes from the long-faced misery-makers whom our Lord called 'whited sepulchres' and whom he recognised, centuries before Freud, as being motivated by unrecognised corruption within. It is time the sexual perversion of the religio-sadists, who delight in condemning and hounding those who are most handicapped in their sexual lives, was exposed for what it is. Those who suffer from it should receive sympathetic treatment if they are willing, and, if not, should be ignored—for the sake of public decency."

—The Rev. Chad Varah (founder of the Samaritans) opposing (another) "public decency" petition in a letter to the *Church Times* (17 March).

FIFTY YEARS AGO

The Hon. Bertrand Russell's address on "Free Thought and Official Propaganda", the thirteenth of the Moncreu Conway Memorial Lectures, attracted a large audience to South Place last Friday evening. The lecturer emphasised the necessity for arousing public opinion in defence of free thought, and not taking it for granted that individual liberty was an assured possession. In the narrower sense free thought meant thought that did not accept the dogmas of religion. He himself was a dissenter from all known religions, and he hoped religious beliefs would die out altogether . . . For William James's "will to believe" he would substitute the "will to find out". Strife was the logical outcome of the former. Let us encourage the spread of the scientific spirit—a different thing altogether from mere possession of the result established by science.

[From *The Freethinker*, 2 April 1922.]

OBITUARIES

Two veteran members of the National Secular Society died recently. FRED WARNER played an active rôle in the Society's work for many years and was secretary of the former West Ham Branch of the N.S.S. W. D. S. DUNN, of Liverpool, was also a staunch freethinker.

JIM COOPER, a former secretary of the Leicester Rationalist Trust and an active member of Leicester Secular Society, has also died, aged 83.

The above-named were all cremated following secular committal ceremonies. We should like to take this opportunity of offering our sympathy to the families and friends of the deceased.

BOOKS

Voltaire's PHILOSOPHICAL DICTIONARY,

edited and translated by Theodore Besterman.

Penguin Classics, 55p.

The little portable volume that Voltaire believed was more likely to make a revolution than the twenty volumes of Diderot's great *Encyclopédie* was produced for that purpose more than 200 years ago, and in Voltaire's own revised and expanded editions eventually numbered 118 articles of various length, some very brief. It is not of course a dictionary. It is more like Montaigne than Larousse. That is why it is still abundantly worth presenting in English after two centuries. And we owe this excellent translation to the zeal and erudition of the foremost living student of Voltaire, who has devoted his life and fortune not merely to the memory of Voltaire but also to making all of him available as accurately as possible. This particular little volume (which does not pretend nor need to be a critical edition) puts into popular currency what was meant to be popular, and includes plenty of Voltaire at his most readable. Exhilarating and emancipating as it was to those who were disposed to be freethinkers six generations ago, it is still stimulating to a present generation of freethinkers, partly because of Voltaire's own compelling qualities of head, heart, and style, partly because it reminds us vividly of what Christianity meant in the Catholic Church of eighteenth century France. That it does not mean this any longer, and perhaps can never mean this again, is a result of freethinking propaganda of the kind represented by this volume.

As Dr. Besterman says in his Introduction, Voltaire's method was to stir things up in an interesting and provocative way that raised the questions and left the reader to draw his own conclusions. There is no doubt that it was devastating in effect, to the extent that the writer could never openly avow his authorship.

Here is Voltaire's ranging, mischievous mind focussing on this spot or that in the human scene, playfully or with burning indignation. Three paragraphs on self-love end: "This self-love is the instrument of our conservation; it resembles the instrument that perpetuates the species: it is necessary, it is dear to us, it gives use pleasure, and it must be hidden". In "War" he is savagely serious, and modern, denouncing the preachers and moralists who hunt pornography and have no thought for the victims of Vietnam.

Dr. Besterman has maintained that Voltaire was an atheist, but the article "Theist" proclaims the characteristic natural religion of the Enlightenment, the religion of Tom Paine: "To do good, that is his cult. To submit to god, that is his doctrine". Incessantly and insistently, Voltaire preached that morality is always and everywhere the same, and on reflection is immediately plain to human reason and that doctrines and opinions are invented and are different and should be indifferent, for they rend humanity and destroy brotherhood:

"It cannot be too often repeated that all dogmas are different, and that morality is the same among all men who use their reason. Therefore morality comes from god like light. Our superstitions are nothing but darkness. Reader, reflect, spread this truth, draw your conclusions."

FREETHINKER

Whatever his private theological beliefs, Voltaire as a public man dedicated himself to denunciation of the inhumanity of the French Catholic Church, the mischief of metaphysical systems and creeds, the barbarity of intolerance and persecution, the vileness of hypocrisy, the blindness of patriotism, the enormity of war. He had his own weaknesses and prejudices, which he would not have denied, but they pale into invisibility in the light and warmth of his passionately human intelligence. Freethinkers not only have much to thank him for historically, they still have plenty to learn from him, and he can still rouse an ovation in our hearts, a personal response that makes us feel better and do better. Voltaire, Diderot, Condorcet, all passionate intelligences, are the great *philosophes* who head the roll of modern freethinkers and show us what reason and humanity united in one person can be and can do. The *Dictionary* is probably the best single work to represent this force in human affairs, and Dr. Besterman is to be warmly thanked for putting it into our hands in English at a modest price.

H. J. BLACKHAM

A SINGULAR INIQUITY: The Campaigns of Josephine Butler by Glen Petrie. Macmillan, £3.50.

It is a fashionable view that we live in a degenerate age and that the country is fast going to the dogs. Professor Ian Donald of Glasgow, a leading opponent of the 1967 Abortion Act, and chairman of the B.M.A.'s abortion committee, remarked in a lecture last year: "It is not an age to be proud of. History may record it in terms of the sex-sodden prurience of the '60s and '70s". ("Abortion and the Obstetrician", *The Lancet*, 12 June 1971.) In subsequent correspondence with Professor Donald, I suggested to him that he might read Glen Petrie's important and carefully documented book in order to obtain a little historical perspective on the subject. I make the same recommendation to reader of *The Freethinker*.

Mr. Petrie's book is a hideous record of "sex sodden prurience" liberally laced with Victorian hypocrisy. Long after we abolished the slave trade, one of our principal unacknowledged exports was English children for the purposes of prostitution, to continental brothels. The savagery, sadism and corruption this book reveals makes for painful reading. One closes it grateful to be alive in the 1970s not the 1870s when any working class girl seen talking to a soldier or sailor in a garrison town could be seized and forced to submit to what passed for a medical examination, ostensibly to see whether she had a venereal infection. Often she was sexually assaulted into the bargain, so that if she did not have V.D. to begin with, she acquired it subsequently. "Nobody", comments the author, "will ever know how many innocent women suffered personal tragedy as a result of the Contagious Diseases Act".

The abuse heaped on Josephine Butler in the course of her long, heroic campaign to repeal these Acts has a disconcertingly familiar ring. Amongst others, she was described as "an indecent maenad, a shrieking sister, frenzied, unsexed, and utterly without shame". Only last year, a supposedly Humanist M.P. described the women members of the Abortion Law Reform Association as out to emas-

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culate or castrate their menfolk. It is sobering to be reminded how little the tone of voice of opponents of civilisation has changed in the intervening century.

MADELEINE SIMMS

THE RED-GOLD FLAME by A. V. Sellwood.

White Lion, £1.60.

One's first reaction is one of despair; surely not, with so many rich veins of Irish history still untapped, another book on the Easter Rising. Yet the first impression (as is so often the case) is deceptive, and not only because *The Red-Gold Flame* is not strictly speaking a new book, but merely a hard-cover edition of a paperback Corgi slipped out unnoticed in the middle sixties. Mr. Sellwood's book has faults; there are tiresome errors of detail—de Valera was, for example, a teacher of mathematics, not of Irish—and a totally inexcusable omission of a street plan of Dublin, without which a reader unfamiliar with that beguiling city could hardly hope to follow the narrative. It has, however, merits which fully justify the reissue.

The author employs the now standard journalists' technique of animating his account with impressions and comments gleaned from interviews with surviving participants. This, of course, has been done before in popular accounts of 1916, most notably by Mr. Max Caulfield in his book, *The Easter Rebellion*. What makes Mr. Sellwood's book so valuable is that he has not confined his bag to witnesses from the rebel side, nor his reading to the works of nationalist historians.

Thus we are treated to glimpses of that once large—and now largely forgotten—group, the Dublin loyalists. Particularly revealing is the recollection of one who, as a small boy, saw tears spring to the eyes of an elderly woman whose basket of fruit was spurned, on the orders of an officer, by newly landed British troops, and remembers his grandfather's angry comment: "Who ever heard of an Irishman stooping to poison? Why in the devil's name, do they always make the same mistakes? Why don't they send people here who know something about the country?"

We are treated, too, to the clearest account, outside of the specialist military histories, of General Lowe's unflurried handling of the operation, a minor masterpiece in the economic application of force in an unprecedented tactical situation through which the object was gained with the minimum of casualties, civilian and military (apart from the disaster—which is well described—to the Sherwood Foresters in Northumberland Road).

Inevitably, however, the main interest lies with the leaders of the Rising. Militarily inept though they may have been, their vision, which was the vision of poets, was true. A hundred tellings cannot dim with tedium the epic of the sacrifice that lit the red-gold flame of freedom in the heart of Roman Catholic Ireland. It is one of the great stories of history. It is sad to reflect today, as one walks through the gallant embattled little streets of Protestant Belfast, that, with an irony that would have been understood by the author of *The Napoleon of Notting Hill*, the spiritual successors of Pearse and Connolly have taken up arms to destroy the secular democracy of a very different breed of Irishmen.

T. K. DANIEL

LETTERS

The Base, Brutal and Bloody Editor

I refer to your reply to my letter published under the caption, "The Base, Brutal and Bloody Saxon" (18 March)—your words, not mine (If the cap fits . . .).

As you are not God nor a Christian priest I failed to see how you could write, "would have found". Having a high opinion of the English I gave you credit for meaning, "might have been found". I feel I must be scrupulously fair especially to the English.

I chose the Black and Tans rather than Cromwell as they were more the contemporaries of the Free State soldiers and Orangemen mentioned in your offending article. Besides some of us Irish tend to overdo the Cromwell bit and I never waste time either vilifying Cromwell or lauding King Billy.

You must not suppose I would have you believe anything I do not declare. We Irish can be all those nasty things you mention including base, brutal and bloody. Our being so does not normally hurt our neighbours. Your being so does.

J. R. ROCHE.

I omitted the Black and Tans for precisely the same reason that Mr. Roche omitted Cromwell. I am, for the record, of English, Irish, Scottish and Welsh extraction. Modesty must overcome the temptation to answer the point about my not being God . . . (Ed).

Irish Nationalism and Catholicism

In practical terms Citizen Tom Paine was very conversant with an "Ulster" problem. It was in North America. Ironically enough it did not concern Ulstermen, the greater part of those in America being in Washington's army. They are known to American historians as the "Scotch-Irish" and their progeny has included a number of presidents. This "Ulster" problem was posed mainly by Scottish Highlanders whose leaders had been suborned by the authorities and was resolved by their migration to Canada. From this eighteenth century analogy with contemporary Ireland it is clear that Mr. Marcato's invocation of Tom Paine in support of the mixture of bullying and toadyism that distinguishes those who claim to be the authentic voice of Protestant Ulster has no validity whatsoever.

I have no wish to see history repeat itself in this respect. Ireland would be the poorer for any mass migration of Protestants; such migrants would feel completely lost in any other country but South Africa or Rhodesia. By pandering to a "point of view" that has helped to poison Anglo-Irish relations and seriously retarded the emergence of a united and enlightened Ireland Mr. Marcato is helping to bring about a *pieds-oranges* dénouement to the Ulster drama. Such a dénouement is to be deplored by all progressive opinion.

PADRAIG O CONCHUIR.

Mazzini, McGregor and hypocrisy

The reason for my "short piece on Mazzini" was quite evident from the context, namely the centenary of Mazzini's death.

I never claimed in my article that Mazzini was an atheist, and was well aware that he entertained a highly individualistic brand of theism—a fact which caused some friction between him and Garibaldi. My "pantheon of liberty" is largely dedicated to great atheists such as Bradlaugh, Foote and Garibaldi; but is sufficiently large and I trust, magnanimous, to include deists such as Thomas Paine and the eighteenth century *philosophes*, and the odd theist such as Mazzini. Indeed, I would add to it also at least two men of the cloth: Fr. Ugo Bassi ("Chaplain" to Garibaldi's Redshirts during the 1849 Siege of Rome, and who was later shot by the Austrians) and the Rev. Stewart Headlam, a close friend of Bradlaugh who defended the civil rights of the freethinkers of the 1880s and who also stood bail for Oscar Wilde. And what about, for instance, Giordano Bruno in an earlier age?

Mr. McGregor evidently has a bee in his bonnet about hypocrisy—other people's. Gross hypocrisy is, I admit, a vice, but at the other extreme I would commend Iain McGregor to heed the words of Emerson: "A foolish consistency is the hobgoblin of little minds". Never mind about *Dio*, Mazzini deserves to be remembered for *Popolo* and *Libertà*!

NIGEL H. SINNOTT.

In Defence of Israel

That was a ferocious criticism of Israel and of Jews by Pat Sloan (*The Freethinker*, 12 February). Hitler and his one-time friend Stalin could not have done better.

To compare Israel with Nazi Germany is obscene. To label Israel an "aggressor state" is grotesque. Look at a map: tiny Israel, bereft of real friends, remains surrounded by huge tracts of populous and violently hostile Arabs. In addition to a refugee-exploiting, newly-imperialist Arab world, Israel also has to contend with the enmity of imperialist Russia (Hungary, Czechoslovakia), imperial-

ist China (Tibet, soon Taiwan), sour-grapes France (defeated by Germans, Vietnamese and, most rankling, Algerian Arabs) and a tut-tutting Britain and U.S.A. (not to mention the U.N.).

In these circumstances Israel deserves admiration and congratulation in having avoided the fate of Biafra. Pat Sloan's evaluations are grotesque. Can he really be a rationalist, evaluating situations calmly and fairly? If rationalism entails discarding the Christian mumbo-jumbo while retaining the Christian prejudices then there is little to be said in favour of rationalism.

Another matter: what is wrong with a father considering his own child very special and precious? Our god is our father-figure and we are his chosen. We do not object to the same claims by others, to Christians being chosen by their god (1 Peter 2: 9, 10, etc.) or Moslems by Allah (Koran 3:110).

Our own cemeteries? Certainly. We do not object to others having their own cemeteries. Is anything immoral involved? Our exclusiveness in life and death is self-directed; we do not impose it on others, who are free to pursue their own way. And if they are so resentful or so envious of our claims and ways let it be known that we are not racially exclusive: anyone can become a Jew, including Pat Sloan.

Johannesburg, South Africa.

P. T. COHEN.

Reply to my Critics on Lenin

Please may I thank Messrs. Fretton, Morgan and Sloan for the enjoyment their letters about my Lenin article gave me. Trevor Morgan's "papilionaceous mental waftings and flittings" was a beauty and Mr. Sloan's "conscienceless quotation clipping" came a good second.

But I am afraid not one of them answers my main argument, namely: Lenin himself admits that the export of capital only became important after imperialism had been in force many years and therefore imperialism must have been caused by something else, probably national sovereignty. (Mr. Sloan's quotations do not seem to mean anything.) And none of them replies to my claim that it is more important to work for World Government now than it is to worry about capitalism.

The Rabkrin incident seems to have happened after the Russian Civil War. My point is that if Lenin had not been so doped with Marxist dogma he might have realised there were other dangers besides capitalism, he would have kept a better watch on Stalin and the horrors of the Stalin era might have been avoided.

About the laws in pre-1914 Germany which restricted capitalists who are supposed to be the real rulers—Lenin's words are "the magnates of German finance" as I quoted though Mr. Sloan hints I said "the magnates" (conscienceless quotation clipping—your phrase, Mr. Sloan). In other words the bankers, whom Lenin thought the dominating power in the German economy and were in effect the same as the big industrialists like Siemens and Krupp (see Chapter 2, "Imperialism"). I am afraid Mr. Sloan's remarks (and Lenin's) are not consistent with the idea that the State is "the executive committee of the bourgeoisie".

Still, I am delighted to find that these gentlemen have taken such an interest in my article. By the way—Trevor Morgan says I have not "disturbed the dust on Lenin's monument"—I agree, there is an awful lot of dust on Lenin's ideology, and it would take a team of bulldozers to remove it.

I. S. Low.

Economic Basis of War

I. S. Low, in his sneering attack on Lenin (4 March), tries to score off the latter's work on imperialism by denying that capitalism and the struggle for markets caused the "First World War". Well there is proof—published proof—albeit very secret, that Britain *deliberately* caused the 1914-18 war! The evidence was revealed by one of the chief plotters, namely, Lt. Col. A'Court Repington—a personal friend of Royalty—chief correspondent for the *Morning Post*—since defunct. It is all there in two volumes, *The First World War 1914-1918* by Lt. Col. A'Court Repington. The author even had to resort to trickery to get the book published.

Repington stated in Vol. 1 that he and certain members of Asquith's Cabinet—he names them—held secret meetings in Paris during these years mentioned. The main and only reason, according to Repington, being to prevent the Kaiser's Germany from ruining British capitalism by ousting British manufactured goods from the world market; even in the British Isles as I well remember, German manufactured goods were in every shop. Repington in Vol. 1 tells of all this and the fear of consequent British bankruptcy, unless some means were employed to stop Germany. In the circumstances it was decided that a war was the only means of British survival as a great capitalist power.

Only a few were in the secret of the plotting, always in Paris. Repington tells of millions of golden sovereigns which were secretly shipped to France. Newspaper tycoons, politicians and

others had to be bought! Repington cynically stated that "Perfidious Albion" was no longer heard in France! He also dealt with the incident of the Czar's Foreign Minister who "welshed" with millions of British sovereigns and had the cheek to deny he had ever had such money. Repington said that we had to pretend to believe him, we dare not try to expose him, so we had to go through the motions of believing him and we handed over more millions to the cad, hoping he would not rob us a second time. Luckily for us he acted as a "gentleman" this time.

Now the interesting thing about all this is that it really *did* happen and yet hardly anyone—even amongst political scholars knows of it. I. S. Low apparently has not even *heard* of these volumes. Had Repington not been so high in Society he might have been suitably dealt with.

Over forty years ago, one Neil MacLean, M.P., caused an uproar in the Commons when, armed with Repington's book he challenged Sir Edward Grey to deny that he and other British Ministers had deceived the nation over the origin of the 1914 War. Grey sat white-faced with fear and refused to answer. A row developed lasting for over an hour. Only Lansbury's *Daily Herald* reported the incident.

Another man, Admiral Consett, wrote his diary showing the Royal Navy's powerlessness to stop war material passing on to Denmark during the 1914-18 war. Consett's job was to stop such traffic, yet he did not dare carry out his duty. Consett later disappeared—to a far off station.

CHARLES DORAN.

Electoral Reform—"Sad Reading"

The letter from the Director of the Electoral Reform Society made sad reading. Are we seriously being asked to believe that the present system of representative democracy can be revitalised by a little patching up? It seems so! This is surely absurd.

The lessons of our time include the message, it seems to me, that the representative principle is itself played out and that we need a higher and better form of democracy altogether.

At present we have one M.P. for about 100,000 electors, three ward councillors for thousands of ratepayers and tiny boards of directors and executives for vast public and private companies, trade unions and professional bodies. The growth of scale has at the same time put the effective decision-making in the hands of the full-time officials. The representatives cannot in the very nature of things do much more than go through the motions. This is not their fault. The situation has so changed that they have become anachronistic.

The simple way to solve this problem (it is staring us in the face, but we still cannot see it, such is the effect of customary blinkers) is to replace the representative principle by the *Volunteer* principle and publicly recognise the *professional* principle as well.

A local ward might, for example, have 21 councillors instead of three. They could all be volunteers, they could all serve on the committees that interested them and cease to be pressed men; and if there were more than 21 offers the 21 might be chosen by lot. Nut-cases could be eliminated by some such device as requiring every volunteer to produce a certain number of ratepayers' signatures in endorsement of his offer to serve.

In practice in most of our voluntary organisations we already work on a version of this principle. If you go along and say your piece then in no time at all you are on the committee! Can we now recognise the principle of what is happening there?

The professional principle is that the people in the job and with the expertise should be recognised for what they are—critically important decision-makers—and means should therefore be devised to make them properly accountable to each other and to the public. The most important decision-makers in this country are the administrative class of civil servants, some 7,000 of them, yet hardly anyone even knows who they are and even M.P.s are forbidden to approach them (they can only do so through the Minister). This is quite absurd.

In each case we need to know where the buck stops and how to get there. At present the representative principle is one great camouflage obscuring everything and making democracy all but impossible.

As to Parliament there is nothing much that can be done. The nation-state has had its day and Parliament is being recognised as the cypher that it has become since 1914. Its powers have been by-passed by the vast growth of Whitehall and able men and women will not go near the place. The answer to Westminster is 44 British republics and a vast complex of non-political national agencies to deal with all those functions like railways, roads, electricity and postal services that require national treatment. They do not require the national state.

All this is all the more possible since the last war has been fought in Europe and the Armed Forces—the essence of the nation-state—are now redundant.

PETER CADOGAN.