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STILL MUCH TO BE DONE

NATIONAL SECULAR SOCIETY'S PRESIDENTIAL ADDRESS

Members of the N.S.S., at the annual general meeting in Brighton last Sunday, were told that, "During a century of history that has been notable above all for its phenomenal rate of social change, the National Secular Society can justly claim a considerable contribution in the field of reform; both generally, in helping to create a climate of more tolerant and humanitarian opinion; and specifically, through its campaigns on a wide range of particular issues, from the right to affirm instead of taking the oath, through abolition of capital punishment, and homosexual law reform, to the recently enacted Sunday Theatres Bill."

Former convent pupil elected President

The speaker was Miss Barbara Smoker, who was elected as the new President of the N.S.S. at the meeting. Miss Smoker, born in London in 1923, was educated exclusively in convent schools and her adolescent ambition was to become a nun. She left the Roman Catholic Church in 1949 and since then has played a leading rôle in the free-thought movement. She continues the N.S.S. presidential tradition of professional writing and editing, having contributed articles on matters of social concern to such publications as *The Guardian*, *Times Educational Supplement*, *New Statesman*, *The Freethinker* and the *British Journal of Criminology*. She edited *The Shavian* (1960-63) and the *Ethical Record* (1964-70), but regards as by far the most effective form of political journalism the odd paragraph published in the correspondence columns or read out on radio programmes.

The main theme of Miss Smoker's presidential address was the continuing relevance of the National Secular Society's principles and objectives. She continued:

Outstanding birth-control pioneers

"In the category of half-won battles is the spread of family planning, which has been one of the chief aims of the N.S.S. from the first—indeed, among some of its members (notably Charles Bradlaugh and Annie Besant) were some of the outstanding birth-control pioneers who suffered vilification, prosecution, and even imprisonment, for daring to publish factual pamphlets on this subject. If the N.S.S. had nothing to its credit at all except for its pioneering work in spreading knowledge of family planning techniques, it could still claim an enormous impact on society—an impact that will continue as long as humanity survives, and may well play a large part in prolonging its survival.

"But there is still a lot to be done. Until various methods of contraception are available freely, easily, and free of charge, to everyone at risk, of whatever age or marital

status, the N.S.S. cannot rest on its laurels. It is not only a matter of the basic right of a woman not to bear a child she does not want, nor even of preventing the misery of the unwanted child, but also, as is now beginning to be generally realised, the dire threat to the future of humanity of an ever-increasing world population. And this country, of course, is one of the most densely populated of all.

Unfair church privileges

"Among N.S.S. objectives that have yet to be won are the legalisation of voluntary euthanasia and the abolition of separate church schools and of compulsory religious worship and religious instruction in State schools. Also, the erosion of the unfair historical privileges enjoyed by the churches in the areas of law, politics, taxation, broadcasting and television time, and the ownership of property—which rightly belongs to the whole population, mostly having been purchased on compulsory tithes or donated by our ancestors—and which is criminally under-used while families are forced to live in overcrowded conditions.

"The National Secular Society," Miss Smoker concluded, "is by no means redundant yet."

New Vice-President

The A.G.M. re-elected Mr. S. O. Kuebart as a Vice-President of the Society, and a second Vice-Presidency was filled by the election of Mr. William Shannon.

Mr. Shannon has played an active part in the N.S.S. for many years; he was Honorary Treasurer of the former Marble Arch branch of the Society, and has been a member of the N.S.S. Executive Committee since 1962. He was born and grew up in Northern Ireland, but now works in London and lives in Burgess Hill, Sussex. He is married, with three children.

A report of the business of the A.G.M. will appear in next week's *Freethinker*.

THE FREETHINKER

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The views expressed by contributors are not necessarily those of the Editor or the Board.

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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, WC1; Freethinker Bookshop, 103 Borough High Street, SE1. **Glasgow:** Clyde Books, 292 High Street. **Manchester:** Grass Roots Bookshop, 271 Upper Brook Street, 13. **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.

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

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

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

Rationalist Press Association. Conference on "Rationalism and Humanism in the New Europe," Churchill College, Cambridge, 11-13 August. British and Continental speakers. Coach from and back to London. Details from R.P.A., 88 Islington High Street, London N1 8EW (Telephone: 01-226 7251). Bookings close 28 July.

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.

Havering Humanist Group, Harold Wood Social Centre, Gubbins Lane. Tuesday, 20 June, 7.45 p.m.: Derek Wilkes, "Is There Such a Thing as Pornography?"

Leicester Humanist Society, Vaughan College, St. Nicholas Circle, Leicester. Monday, 19 June, 7.45 p.m.: Dr. J. Crighton, "Drug Addiction."

London Young Humanists, 13 Prince of Wales Terrace, London W8. Sunday, 18 June, 7.30 p.m.: discussion on Victorian morality.

South Place Ethical Society, Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London WC1. Sunday, 18 June, 11 a.m.: Dr. D. B. Halpern, "Intuition in Life, Science and Art."

Welwyn Garden City Humanist Group, 55 Orchard Road, Tewin. Sunday, 18 June, noon onwards: Garden Party c/o Beatrice Haggis.

NEWS

DEATH OF WINIFRED ROUX

News has just reached us of the death of Mrs. Winifred Roux, former chairman of the South African Rationalist Association and editor of its monthly journal *Die Rasionalis*. We hope to publish a full obituary in a forthcoming number of *The Freethinker*.

INDEPENDENT ADOPTION SOCIETY

According to the latest Annual Report of the Independent Adoption Society* (formerly Agnostics Adoption Society) the Society managed to place 59 babies with adoptive parents during 1971. As with other bodies in this field, there is now a long waiting list of would-be adopters (296 in this case) and "it appears unlikely that we shall be able to re-open it for general applications in the foreseeable future." The report also extends thanks (which we all echo) to Mrs. Kirstine Richards for her 6½ years' service to the Society as Adoptions Administrator and Case Worker (Mrs. Richards retired earlier this year).

The eighth Annual General Meeting of the I.A.S. will be held on Saturday, 24 June, at 2.45 p.m. at the Post-Graduate Centre, Royal Northern Hospital, Holloway Road, London, N.7, and it is hoped that Sir Alfred Ayer will be in the chair. After the formal business there will be an "Open Forum" for discussion on topics concerning adoption. All those who are interested in the work of the I.A.S. are welcome and tea will be served after the meeting. * 160 Peckham Rye, London, S.E.22.

NINETY YEARS AGO

United Ireland is a paper owned by Messrs. Parnell, McCarthy, Biggar, and a few more Land Leaguers. Its title is a huge joke. Ireland has always been anything but *united*, except after the fashion of the Kilkenny cats. Well, this journal with the facetious title is very wroth with the Government for allowing the *Freethinker* to "circulate in thousands in England every week." It is aghast at our "horrid blasphemy," and bitterly complains that "an Englishman may insult God, but an Irishman may not whistle 'Harvey Duff' to a policeman." What dreadful oppression! The English people should bestir themselves, and settle the Irish question at a single stroke. Let every Irishman enjoy the privilege of whistling "Harvey Duff" to a policeman, and boycotting will speedily die out, agrarian outrages will soon cease, and even the pigs will share in the national content. We advise Mr. Gladstone to inaugurate a new policy. What Ireland wants is plenty of "Harvey Duff."

—From *The Freethinker*, 18 June 1882.

HUMANIST HOLIDAYS

The Secretary* of Humanist Holidays writes to say that there are still some double room vacancies at the Whitby Centre for two weeks beginning 19 August, at an hotel near the sea and the Yorkshire Moors (all ages welcome!).

For those who have not heard of Humanist Holidays, it is a voluntary, non-profit-making society, founded in 1964, and run for freethinkers and their families and friends. With approximately forty visitors at a centre, three-quarters now are people who have been before and evidently enjoyed their holidays with the society. Mrs.

AND NOTES

Marjorie Mepham, the Hon. Secretary, points out that Humanist Holidays' main problem is now one of publicity as advertising tends to be confined to journals within the humanist movement (general advertising is too costly). If you are interested in Humanist Holidays, write to Mrs. Mepham for details and prices; and if you attend a local humanist group, please give Humanist Holidays a mention there.

Humanist Holidays are also to run a small Youth Camp near the Essex coast (6-13 August), and another of the society's members can offer boating facilities in Essex at weekends this summer.

* Mrs. M. Mepham, 29 Fairview Road, Sutton, Surrey. Telephone: 01-642 8796.

GUY ALDRED'S WORKS

Thanks to the help and generosity of Mr. John T. Caldwell, of Dalmeir, we have acquired the remaining stock of two pamphlets originally issued by the Strickland Press of Glasgow, once run by the late Guy Alfred Aldred (1886-1963), one of Glasgow's great "characters."

Born* and educated in London, the young Aldred became known as the "Holloway Boy Preacher" when he served with the Lyric Gospel Mission, but eventually founded his own "Clerkenwell Freethought Mission" in 1904. He became a radical journalist, anarchist and socialist pamphleteer, and was sentenced to twelve months' imprisonment for sedition in 1909. In 1923 he was convicted of selling an "obscene" book, Margaret Sanger's *Family Limitation*. In 1938 he launched his own paper, *The Word*, which he edited until his death (Mr. Caldwell carried on with the paper until 1965). Copies of *The Word*, printed on an ancient press—often by the editor himself, are now scarce collectors' items.

While stocks last, we can offer readers copies of *Richard Carlile, Agitator; his life and times* by Guy A. Aldred (3rd edition, 1941) for 25p (plus 8p postage); and *Jail Journal and other writings* by Richard Carlile (edited by Guy A. Aldred, 1942) for 15p (plus 4p postage). Orders should be addressed to G. W. Foote & Co. Ltd., 103 Borough High Street, London SE1 1NL.

* I am obliged to Mr. Caldwell and Mr. R. S. Montague for biographical details of Guy Aldred (Ed.).

GOD AND RACIALISM

Bob Jones University of Greenville, South Carolina (from which the Rev. Ian R. K. Paisley obtained his doctorate in theology) is currently embroiled in litigation over its policy of racial segregation. According to the April number of *Church & State* the United States Internal Revenue Service has ordered Bob Jones University to integrate the races in its faculty and student body or else lose its tax exemption. The University has replied that it cannot comply as it believes that God ordained racial segregation, and it contends that the order, if obeyed, would destroy its free exercise of religion. The University has now gone to a federal district court seeking to enjoin the Revenue Service from revoking its exemption. This has been granted pending a trial "on the merits." The court held that the case involves a substantial conflict between freedom of religion and freedom not to be racially discriminated against.

MORE VIETNAM ATROCITIES

As if in some macabre competition to outdo the incidence of rape and massacre committed by the Americans and their clients in Vietnam, the North Vietnamese and their allies are now reported to be systematically killing and mutilating half-caste infants and any adults—or children—who have had any connection with the Americans.

So long as men believe in absurdities, wrote Voltaire, they will commit atrocities, and, judging from reports from the African state of Burundi, it requires even less than that to spark off wholesale massacre. Were Voltaire alive today, he would doubtless have some withering remark to make on Vietnam, but as he is not, we can only comment: "A plague o' both your houses!"

SEXUAL IRRESPONSIBILITY

"Even where sex education is provided, the evidence demonstrates that the emphasis being given to the sexual responsibility of the male is woefully inadequate."

—Baroness Birk, in the report for 1971 of the Health Education Council (quoted by the *Times Educational Supplement*, 19 May).

UGGGGGGGGGH!!!

The March number of *Progressive World* (Oakland, California) reports that the traditionally conservative New York Bible Society has published a tract aimed at America's "Jesus People." It addresses them thus: "Brothers and sisters, where are you at? You can cop out on the whole scene . . . you can bad-mouth Jesus . . . or you can let him turn you on to heavy vibes of forever joy. Dig it!"

A MATTER OF TASTE

"In those days [his adolescence] I was entirely in the Bradlaugh camp. My associates were Bradlaugh himself, Holyoake, and Foote. Foote was a most overbearing man and had no interest in life except expounding the doctrine that there is no life after the grave. I could not help noticing as a boy that they were all very unhappy men . . . Theirs was a pitiable faith in the mortality of human flesh, which I have never shared . . . In the days when I was with Bradlaugh, Holyoake, Foote and the rest, I was a boy in a hostile camp who had no chance of ever meeting the leaders of spiritual thought such as Newman or Manning."

—Horatio Bottomley, journalist, fraud and swindler, quoted in *The Freethinker* of 18 June 1922.

FREETHINKER FUND

We are most grateful to those readers who so generously subscribed to the Freethinker Fund during May.

Our thanks to: Donald Baker, £3; Mrs. D. Behr, £1; A. Bradley, 70p; J. G. Burdon, 25p; J. Hind Charles, £2.10; W. V. Crees, 35p; H. W. Day, £1; W. H. Dobson, 35p; D. Goldstick, 68p; W. H. Goodall, 45p; E. R. Grenda, 45p; D. Harper, £4.35; E. Henderson, £4; T. Myles Hill, 70p; F. W. Jones, £1.45; Miss G. M. Jones, 45p; Norman Leveritt, £1; I. S. Low, £5; Rupert R. McGarry, 13p; C. Juanita Monrad, 65p; J. F. Porter, 45p; H. R. Scobell, 25p; Robert H. Scott, £1; A. E. Smith, £1.45; P. R. Smith, £1.45; John Vallance, £1; Lily Vanduren, £4.90; E. Wakefield, 20p. Total for May: £31.76.

Please remember to make a donation to the Freethinker Fund from time to time, particularly when renewing your subscription.

THE JESUS OF JEWISH TRADITION

R. J. CONDON

When the Gospels began to circulate in the second century, the Jews as a general rule accepted that the story told in them had a basis in historical fact. The rabbis had little notion of scientific criticism, and even if they had wished to make an investigation, the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans in 70 A.D., with the dispersion of its inhabitants, would have made such a task difficult if not impossible. Some rabbis, however, were curious to know more about the Jewish heretic who had founded a new sect. On searching their records they found two men named Jesus with whom they vaguely identified the Christ of the Gospels, some thinking he was one and some the other. The earlier of the two, Jesus ben-Pandera, was said to have been a shady character who had been executed during the reign of King Jannaeus (103-76 B.C.) for practising sorcery. The other, Jesus ben-Stada, also executed for sorcery, was a contemporary of Rabbi Akiba, who lived in the second century A.D. Since neither of these men had lived anywhere near the period assigned to the gospel history, it is clear that the Jews had no record or tradition whatever of Jesus of Nazareth.

The stories of these two men, together with details taken from the Gospels, were combined to form a Jewish legend which persisted into the Middle Ages. Briefly, it ran as follows: During the reign of King Jannaeus, a man of Bethlehem named Joseph Pandera seduced a girl called Mary, who as a result bore a son, Jesus. This Jesus, surnamed ben-Pandera, grew up to become a magician, declaring himself virgin-born and the messiah foretold by the prophets. Arrested and charged with sorcery, he was beaten and given vinegar to drink, and a crown of thorns placed on his head. He escaped and fled to Egypt, where he remained until the Passover. On this return he rode into Jerusalem on an ass, in order to fulfil the prophecy of Zechariah 9:9. Recognised by one Judah Iskarito as a wanted man, he was seized, stoned and hung on a tree on the eve of the Passover Sabbath. The followers of Jesus subsequently claimed he was not in his tomb, but had ascended to heaven as he had prophesied, though actually the body had been removed by a gardener and buried elsewhere. The story concluded by stating that these followers sought to overthrow Judaism by redating its feast days and repudiating its rituals and dietary laws, and by declaring that their leader now sat at the right hand of God and would return with all power to condemn unbelievers to eternal torment.

The Teacher of Righteousness

The noted Hebraist Dr. Leopold Löw argued that Jesus ben-Pandera was the founder of the Jewish monastic sect of Essenes, who observed different feast days and rituals from those of other Jews. More recently Professor G. A. Wells appears to sympathise with this view, judging from a somewhat cryptic remark on page 201 of his *The Jesus of the Early Christians*. Dr. Martin A. Larson, in *The Religion of the Occident*, further identifies ben-Pandera with the executed Essene Teacher of Righteousness mentioned in the Habakkuk Commentary found among the Dead Sea Scrolls. These must remain hypotheses, for the historical existence of ben-Pandera cannot be established from the few and late references to him in rabbinical literature, and we have yet to learn the name of the Teacher of Righteousness.

Christians as well as Jews accepted that the family name of Christ was Pandera or Panther. The fourth century church father Epiphanius wrote that Joseph was the brother of Cleophas, the son of James, surnamed Panthera. As late as the eighth century John of Damascus gave the names Panther and Barpanther in his genealogy of Mary. Even in the present century Jews have been known to refer to Jesus contemptuously as "Pand'ra."

Another Hebraist, R. Travers Herford, thought the names ben-Stada and ben Pandera were "relics of ancient Jewish mockery against him [Christ], the clue to whose meaning is now lost." Mockery they may have been, but in the case of Jesus ben-Pandera we are not entirely without clues. There was an earlier saviour-god than the Christian one whom the Jews had particular cause to hate. Ben-Pandera, meaning "son of a panther," could well have been applied to Bacchus, from the circumstance that panthers were his nurses and bringers-up. Panthers were accordingly sacred to him, and walked in his religious processions. Bacchus, too, was a Jesus. His sacred monogram, IHS, was adopted by the Church, under the pretext that it stood for Jesus Hominum Salvator. But the Greek H is our long E, so IHS is really IES, which with the masculine suffix-OUS makes IESOUS or Jesus.

Bacchus and Moses

How, it will be asked, could a pagan god have been transformed into a Jewish adventurer? Strange as it may seem, Bacchus was believed by Plutarch and other classical writers to have been worshipped by the Jews. The error, if such it was, arose from the remarkable similarity of many details in the life of Moses to events in the mythical history of Bacchus. Like Moses, Bacchus was born in Egypt, was found floating in a basket, and had both real and foster mothers. Like Moses, he drew water from a rock by striking it with his staff. He was a law-giver, and like Moses wrote his laws on two tablets of stone. Moses and Bacchus both had rods which they could turn into snakes, and both crossed the Red Sea dryshod. As Moses and his army had a pillar of fire to lead them at night, so Bacchus and his followers marched at night by sunlight. In Exodus 17:15 Moses is said to have dedicated an altar to Jehovah-nissi, a term cognate with Dios Nyssos or Dionysus, the best-known title of Bacchus. Perhaps the most astonishing parallel between Moses and Bacchus is that both wore horns on their heads. The Hebrew phrase in Exodus 34:29, 30 and 31 translated in our Bibles "the skin of his [Moses'] face shone" really means "his face was horned," and was so rendered by Jerome in the Vulgate. For centuries the Vulgate was the only version of the Bible in use, hence artists usually portrayed Moses with two horns. Michelangelo's famous statue of Moses, on the tomb of Pope Julius II in Rome, is distinctly horned.

From time to time there were attempts forcibly to identify the Jews with the worship of Bacchus. According to 2 Maccabees 6:7, the Syrian King Antiochus Epiphanes (175-164 B.C.) compelled them to attend the Dionysia or Feast of Bacchus wearing ivy, an emblem of the god. A few years later came a threat to demolish their temple and erect one dedicated to Bacchus (2 Maccabees 14:33). The third book of Maccabees, omitted from our Apocrypha, relates that the Jews in Alexandria had earlier

been branded with the sign of the ivy, on the orders of Ptolemy Philopator (222-204 B.C.). With Jerusalem under Roman rule, we find Bacchus and his panthers figuring on the coins of the Jews, indicating that they were obliged to recognise him as a patron-god of their own holy city.

In view of the foregoing it seems probable that the Jews, fearful of attracting further persecution from their pagan

overlords, concealed their hostile references to Bacchus under the name of Jesus ben-Pandera, reducing the virgin-born miracle-working dying-and-reviving god to a mere executed sorcerer. Later, when the memory of their unhappy experience had faded, he would come to be regarded as a historical character, and placed with the notorious oriental indifference to chronology in whatever period in time took their fancy.

THE WORLD MALAISE IN TIME

R. READER

Many people in their forties and fifties, today living abundantly, regard overpopulation as an essentially Asian problem—one which may have unfortunate effects on European living as a whole, but which can never produce really unpleasant changes in their own lives. Yet ominous signs are not wanting of the fate that awaits many, now in the prime of life, when they reach old age.

Elderly people who, 25 years ago, were also living abundantly, are now being steadily squeezed out of society. They have to make do with inferior food, inferior housing, inferior living of all kinds. Some lack the most elementary comforts. They can, of course, put their names down to enter a home, but there are long waiting lists and in any case an elderly person who is not hopelessly infirm finds separation from a familiar *milieu* a terrible blow. Furthermore, they fear that, once in a home, they will be more and more ignored.

This situation is the inevitable result of overpopulation and the fundamental difference between the objectives of the old and the young. Old people, unless very wealthy, can no longer be exploited by unlimited quantitative expansion. They are incapable of bringing yet more life into the world: procreation is a thing of the past. Nor are they interesting commercially. One cannot do business with them because they are no longer swayed by the wild hopes, ambitions, phantasies, and catastrophes of the commercial bear-garden. They cannot be used either for defence or aggression because their very presence hampers military operations. They are no longer interested in calculations and investments, and a few cannot even reach the polling booth to vote. No: these people constitute a very real check to unlimited quantitative expansion because they have come to terms with the human space-time framework. Whatever their religious convictions, all they now ask is to be allowed to live out their lives to their natural ends as peaceably and comfortably as possible—a rational objective, as opposed to the utter irrationality of unlimited quantitative expansion.

Situation may get worse

Many of the elderly who, as a class, are the least able to defend themselves, are also being steadily pushed out of society by the mounting numbers of the middle-aged, many of whom, 25 years hence, will find themselves in a similar or worse plight, their places then having been taken by the ever more numerous young.

This situation could have been foreseen half a century ago, when religious neurosis and economic expansion decreed that abundant young arms were necessary to work

to support the elderly. We were not told who was going to support the abundant young arms when the latter aged in turn. No doubt resort was to be had to even more abundant young arms and so on, *ad infinitum*, until rising pressure spread all humanity on to some more spacious planet.

The present plight of the elderly is one result of unlimited expansion, but it is not the only result. The young, also, are deeply involved. Britain and many other Western European countries had an unusually abundant crop of young arms in 1946-7—"A bumper year for babies" as one newspaper put it at the time. Those abundant young arms reached late teenage in 1968, but the student riots of that year clearly showed that many of them, far from being able to earn pensions for the elderly, were meeting great difficulties in finding means to support themselves. The lot of the young, in fact, was hardly more enviable than that of the elderly. Some of the young are now living abundantly, it is true, but the remainder have been conditioned to live in mini-flats, dress in mini-clothes, eat mini-steaks, drive mini-cars, work in mini-offices, smoke mini-cigarettes, and to accept mini-art, mini-science, mini-music, or just noise—in a word, to put up with less of everything in order that expansion may be able to lurch on a little longer before the final collapse comes. The students have been momentarily appeased by promises of all kinds. But Governments are finding it impossible to make good these promises—an inevitable consequence of the ever-increasing demands on the shrinking 200 yards square.* The economists and financiers rush frantically to patch up the boundaries of that square, but here, again, the writing is on the wall. Ominous cracks are now appearing in many monetary systems—again an inevitable consequence of there being too many human beings on the earth. Money can do nothing to remedy the situation because money ceases to function when it can no longer be converted into *real* values.

There is one, and only one, way out. We cannot suppress human beings already in the world, but we can, and must, prevent others from entering it, until such time as qualitative expansion becomes humanity's goal, as opposed to unlimited quantitative expansion. Furthermore, as the individual life then becomes progressively richer, it will make progressively greater demands on living resources, and this will ineluctably make necessary a progressive, and further decrease, in total world numbers. The present demented swarming no longer has any significance whatever in time, for it is simply leading us all, young and old alike—into the oblivion of total extinction.

* See my article "The World Malaise in Space" *Freethinker*, 25 March 1972.

THEATRE

THE HOSTAGE by Brendan Behan. Theatre Workshop.

Like many heroes of our time Brendan Behan owed his celebrity as a dramatist less to the size of his canon, his poetic flights or his intellectual insights than to his personality. To the hormonally inadequate literary establishment there was something thrilling about his life (and death) of drink, rudery and rough-houses, and since much of his writing was in the cause of Holy Ireland and thus righteously anti-British, anti-empire and anti-police his outrageous behaviour could always be invested with nobility.

The Hostage, according to his biographer, was first written in Gaelic in 1957 (the programme note suggests it was commissioned in English) and put on by Theatre Workshop the following year in a jazzed-up and, in the biographer's view, inferior version a year later. Not knowing or being able to understand the original, I cannot draw comparisons; but unless Joan Littlewood completely rewrote the text I find little in it redolent of O'Casey or Synge. In fact it reminds me most of a pub near where I live, frequented by Irish "poets."

With her flair for publicity Miss Littlewood has chosen a good time to revive and redirect this amiable farce, however macabre it may be in the light of recent atrocities. Interestingly Behan saw clearly the dichotomy between the romantic-Marxist and Catholic-sanctimonious traditions of the I.R.A., from which came the split into Officials and Provisionals in 1969; although the organisation(s) has become more ruthless and efficient since his day. Though anyone deeply committed to either side in the present conflict may take offence, the director is, I think, right to present this essentially light-weight material as a charade full of gags, blasphemies, songs and stage business. She is well served by a seedy-classical Dublin set (by Guy Hodgkinson and Mark Pritchard) and a lively cast. Apart from more songs (not enough to qualify the piece as a "musical," which is just as well as the singing is barely adequate) and partial updating (which involved the prostitute simultaneously recalling Queen Victoria and President Nixon!), the new production offers scope for more indecent fondling, homo- and hetero-, than I recall in the original. In all the shenanigans Patience Collier as a "sociable worker" for St. Vincent de Paul, Meg Dillon as a brassy madam and Philip Davis as a Cockney British soldier and the hostage of the title give most pleasure in an entertaining evening.

DAVID TRIBE

BOOKS

GEORGE ROBEY "THE DARLING OF THE HALLS"
by Peter Cotes. Cassell, £3.25.

George Robey was beloved by many in a generation that was before mine, a generation that knew the colour and fun of the Music Hall which I can only imagine from reconstructed versions on television or such as was done at the Edinburgh Lyceum last Christmas. This book goes a considerable way towards filling this gap in my theatrical knowledge, for which I am grateful to Peter Cotes.

Similarly I would imagine it has great reminiscence value to those who were actually there to witness this artist at work. He died in 1954 having lived a life which Peter

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Cotes lays out with infinite sympathy and precision, and a succinct, convenient categorising of the stages of Robey's career. He was a variety performer, a music hall star, who sustained an unrivalled popularity with the public for many years. Besides this he made numerous films—"a career of nearly forty years, starting in 1914, must surely make Robey qualify as the hardest-working but least-known film star in the world." There was an actor behind those droll eyebrows and red nose by which we recognise him, demonstrated by his remarkable performance as Falstaff in *Henry IV Part I*. And the tale turned to legend with the song that will surely live as long as the human race: "If you were the only girl in the world."

Robey, the clown, the droll, the "P.M.," was the last of the great red-nosed comedians. Even those who never watched this entertainer entertain can laugh in retrospect at the mock-puritan who assailed chortling audiences with such expressions as "Pray temper your hilarity with a modicum of reserve!"

LINDSEY HARRIS

GAELIC-ENGLISH AND ENGLISH-GAELIC DICTIONARY. Compiled by Neil MacAlpine and John Mackenzie. Glasgow: Gairm Publications, £3.

Scottish Gaelic (*Gàidhlic*) is a member of the Celtic group of languages which were originally spoken in Europe by peoples belonging to a civilisation known as La Tène. "La Tène" means "the shallows" and refers to the site of the excavated lake-side dwellings in Switzerland whose name was given to this culture; it does not refer to any capacity, or lack of it, among the Celts. This old language was first brought to Scotland by Irish colonists during the fourth and fifth centuries A.D., and it eventually supplanted Pictish, the tongue of the former masters of the region.

The Scots have now become so Anglicised as to absorb English—albeit in an odd form—and have practically let their Gaelic die. When this dictionary was first published in the nineteenth century it was probably adequate for students to translate from, or into, the English of those days—provided they did not want to mention new-fangled inventions, such as railways!

This volume contains two separate works which are also obtainable separately: MacAlpine's *Gaelic-English Dictionary* which first appeared in 1832, and Mackenzie's *English-Gaelic Dictionary* first published in 1845 as Part II of MacAlpine's. The 1971 reprints are still not penetrated by railways, let alone aeroplanes! Surely cross-reference to Irish Gaelic, its close relative, or a word in the ear of a native Scots Gaelic speaker would enable gaps for a modern vocabulary to be filled. The absence of such words in a work not claiming to have any value other than that of a modern dictionary—represents this language as static in its development. A static language is limited in expression and as it grows more limited over the years becomes totally obsolete.

Studying a language like Scottish Gaelic, knowing that it is still spoken (if only by a few) surely raises the ghostly feeling in the student that he or she is learning a language shortly to become dead forever.

REVIEWS

In view of rumours of a monumental dictionary under compilation in the University of Edinburgh and due out in about ten years' time, Gairm Publications' production of this interesting fossil seems wholly inadequate to act as even a stop-gap measure, for in another decade it is possible that the ancient language of the Celts will cease to exist upon Scottish soil whereupon the study of Gaelic, so beautiful, so precise, so laden with songs and prose of exceptional virtues will seem so pointless. I hope not.

S. MAG FHLOINN

GOODBYE, BELOVED BROTHERS by Norman Adams.
Aberdeen: Impulse Books, £2.50.

Two middle-aged spinster sisters left a chapel service in tears. As they walked away they were followed by two shouting and gesticulating ministers. Their crime was that, as poultry farmers, they had had dealings with the Egg Marketing Board. Not long afterwards the sisters walked hand in hand into a pond and drowned themselves.

Suicide was a fairly frequent occurrence among those members of the Exclusive Brethren who had fallen from grace by having contact with "unbelievers," as those outside the sect were called. Big Jim Taylor, the New York draper who became the leader or "Archangel" of the Exclusives in 1959, announced in the following year: "We are to become a separate people," basing his edict upon 2 Corinthians 6:14. Its rigorous enforcement brought misery to hundreds of families throughout the world, and resulted in thousands leaving the sect. Those who stayed were either too frightened to leave, or else had an unshakeable faith in their leader. In *Goodbye, Beloved Brethren* the activities of Taylor and his sadistic ministers are related in considerable detail by Norman Adams, a Scottish journalist, who makes good use of many private letters and hitherto unpublished documents. The Brethren are, or were, strongly represented among the Scottish fisherfolk, whose ports and coastal villages form the background to much of the narrative.

Taylor's reign of terror could almost have been modelled on that of the seventeenth century Church of Scotland, of which we have a graphic account in Buckle's *History of Civilisation*. Once again there were the compulsory attendance at marathon religious services, the constant spying on sect members, the invasion of privacy, the brainwashing inquisitions, and the "courts" at which offenders might find themselves "withdrawn from" or excommunicated, all too often a death sentence for those who could not face being cut off from the only way of life they had ever known. If the Brethren did not, like the Presbyterian clergy of former times, have their own prisons, there are cases on record of people being forcibly detained in their own homes. A particularly nasty feature of the Taylor régime was the deliberate breaking up of families. Men who had fallen out with the sect would return home from work to find their wives had left them, transported to secret destinations by the Brethren. Everything was meticulously planned beforehand, the husbands being kept completely in the dark. Taylor claimed he knew nothing of this, but he never forbade the practice, which continued until his death.

The Archangel himself was anything but a model of rectitude. An alcoholic who drank whisky by the tumblerful, he permitted the Brethren to touch liquor for the first time in their history; in fact it was an order. Under the influence of drink, normal inhibitions disappeared and Brethren services degenerated into scenes of unbelievable vulgarity. With the Song of Solomon as scriptural warrant, Taylor ordered the women to discard their foundation garments to facilitate sexual fondling. When the press got wind of it he explained: "The members are not encouraged to touch everyone's sexual parts. But breasts are for Christ . . . It's the best part of the meeting."

In the summer of 1970 occurred the event which resulted in the downfall of Big Jim, and the final break-up of the Exclusive Brethren. The Archangel was discovered by his Angel or deputy, Stanley McCallum, in bed with Mrs. Madeline Ker, the wife of a sect member. Taylor protested in vain that it was a spiritual occasion, the lady having been washing his feet and drying them with her hair like the woman in the Bible. Mrs. Ker was naked, it was pointed out, and for once Big Jim was lost for a precedent in Holy Writ. Those of the Brethren who still remained faithful to him soon found one. Their leader was seventy, after all; had not the aged King David taken a young virgin to bed to keep himself warm?

His drink-sodden mind now quite unhinged, Taylor spent the last few weeks of his life preaching sermons of unprecedented obscenity and blasphemy. In October 1970 he held a three-day meeting in New York in an attempt to re-assert his leadership. At first he appeared full of energy and confidence, but before the assembly rose for the final hymn he told them: "I must go . . . Goodbye to you, beloved Brethren." He died six days later.

How, it will be asked, could such a man remain a church leader for more than ten years? According to those who pulled out, his influence depended only partly on personality. He had an undoubted ability to trade on the deep and instilled fear among the Brethren of being excommunicated. That, says Mr. Adams, was the Archangel's secret weapon of terror.

R. J. CONDON

LETTERS

Marxism and Religion

Philip Hinchliff's "Marxism and Christianity" (*Freethinker*, 20 and 27 May) presented a very negative sort of argument. If Marxism is only a religion or superstition, what does he put in its place?

As I understand it, Marx described the cause of social development from a materialist point of view: that as man improved his tools and techniques he changed his social conditions to correspond with these new ways of production. We have only to look at history to see that this was the case, and I can also see that capitalism is laying the foundations of socialism by revolutionising machinery and making production social, as well as by making the class struggle more acute. This will eventually lead to a revolution where the workers will take over the means of production, resulting in social ownership to correspond with social production.

Christianity, on the other hand, says that change is brought about by some superhuman power up above, not by natural reasons. If, as Mr. Hinchliff says, Marxism is only a religion, then what was or is the cause of social development? H. HENKE.

Adolf Hitler as a Strategist

In his review (3 June) of *Hitler: the Man and the Military Leader* S. D. Kuebart states that as a military leader Hitler was a disaster. However, the facts seem to me to suggest anything but this.

Any soldier knows that an army can only be defeated if it is outmanoeuvred, and this did not happen in the case of the German army as long as it had adequate military material. If one reads any account (even Russian) of the war on the Eastern Front it becomes clear that Hitler's army was beaten only by the willingness of the Russians to make most terrible sacrifices to that end.

The German army only started to retreat on all fronts when the Allies had an overwhelming superiority of men and material. I am sure that Hitler and the German High Command knew of this, and had hoped to forestall it by building a vast war machine and adopting the strategy of *Blitzkrieg*—a lightning war to defeat opponents before they had time to organise their economic superiority. A careful reading of the history of World War II will show how nearly this succeeded.

J. H. MORTEN.

Trajan and Suetonius

Nicholas Reed (*Freethinker* letters, 3 June) might have made some interesting points in criticism of me had he kept to what I wrote rather than what he imagined I did. Thus he concludes that I thought Trajan should have emulated Nero while what I did suggest was that he might have found something of value had he checked the records of Nero's reign.

In my letter I did not dispute the authenticity of the passage in Suetonius (nor did I in my articles), what I did question was its use as supporting the tale of the Neronian persecution.

ROBERT MORRELL.

Voluntary Euthanasia

In his letter of 3 June, J. Stewart Ross argues: "Abortion prevents misery, euthanasia tries to forget it." But surely one could as well argue: abortion prevents a "wanted" life, euthanasia allows a "wanted" death.

Mr. Ross's reference to "opening other doors" would seem to stem from a certain resignation. While our society may not yet be good enough for voluntary euthanasia, some of us like to think of ourselves and others as reformable.

CHARLES BYASS.

Mr. Ross's letter (3 June) raises a very important point. There is nothing wrong with using an emotional argument, as long as it is not an argument from emotion alone: Mr. Ross uses so many emotive terms that it is difficult to get at the logic underneath. However, I did not say there was a parallel between abortion and euthanasia. My point was that it is perfectly possible to use exactly the same argument which Mr. Ross uses against euthanasia to oppose all forms of abortion. I adapt his letter accordingly: "As soon as we accept the principle that the mothers of those who would not be happy amongst us may opt out once and for all, then the pressures upon society to adapt itself to accommodate joyfully to each individual are greatly diminished. We lose a great force for reform" (The reform in this case would be freely available contraception for all). Either this argument holds in both cases, or it holds in neither, and if Mr. Ross does not oppose abortion, then he cannot use this argument to oppose euthanasia.

As a second argument, Mr. Ross produces that old chestnut "the thin end of the wedge"—as used against every progressive reform of this century (including abortion law reform). But such reforms do not in practice seem to extend themselves—on the contrary, there are normally so many reactionaries around that it is difficult enough to make such reforms effective (witness the difficulties many women still have in obtaining abortions even when eligible for them).

Lastly, Mr. Ross makes the incredible statement, "Abortion prevents misery, euthanasia tries to forget it." *Who* tries to forget it: the doctor who eliminates it or the doctor who stands by saying "Yes, I know you're in agony, but it's all in a good cause"?

NICHOLAS REED.

The B.B.C.'s Search for Jesus

I wonder if other *Freethinker* readers who listened to the B.B.C. Radio 4 programme, "The Search for Jesus of Nazareth," on 30 May thought that programme was a calculated "switch-off"?

Some of the material, casting doubt about the Christian story, was quite telling, notably the virgin birth, the resurrection, and inconsistencies of geography and dating. Otherwise the programme was extremely difficult to listen to, with conversations recorded in noisy trains, and bad lines for the few telephone questions.

And, of course, the twists in the theological mind were both infuriating and hard to follow! One of the searchers claimed to be a scientist who intended using the scientific method, but in spite of the pre-broadcast publicity (that had included some doubts

about Jesus) all the participants were believers from start to finish. One telephone questioner was very distressed at criticism of the virgin birth, but was told to look at the story as a whole (without looking too closely at its authenticity?).

Obviously I had expected too much when switching on.

JIM LITTLE.

Pornography and Cruelty

Mr. Broom (*Freethinker* letters, 27 May) suggests that I am obsessed with sex and never write about anything else nowadays. On a rough count, my present spate of books amounts to about 1 million words, of which 100,000 are about sex. The rest are about poetry, education, and are imaginative works. By contrast, a recent survey of 60 films in London found 46 of them in the "X" or "AA" categories, in which the staple was the depiction of sexual scenes, homosexuality and masturbation. And one only has to look at novel reviews, to see where the obsession with sex is to be found. As the *Character and Energy Journal* said recently, this obsession in England "has reached the level of a national perversion." And as the *Journal of the Institute of Jewish Affairs, Patterns of Prejudice*, has said, we are reaching a situation, as in Nazi Germany, in which "evil things may be done with a clear conscience." Yet in this situation, if one's books argue coolly, they are either ignored, or else greeted with intolerant prejudice.

One of the most frightening aspects of the whole problem is that people do not see where, morally, they have got to. Mr. Broom enjoyed *The Devils*. Yet in *Seven Days* Nicholas Garnham wrote, "The audience are encouraged to indulge their taste for perverse sex and violence, but this indulgence is made respectable because it is touted as history . . ." In my *Times* today a pornographic film is called "lively" and "lusty."

What I am trying to do is to get people to see that in the exploitation of sick and sadistic phantasies in our culture they are being influenced by something which is much worse than the old Victorian repression—not least because it is welcomed as a friend (see David Boadella, "The Return of the Repressed" in *Character and Energy Journal*, January 1972). It is also horribly cruel and depends upon a gloating enjoyment of the humiliation of woman, as a symbol of our creativity (according to Equity, in the filming of *The Devils*, young actresses engaged to play nuns were "terrified, humiliated and badly manhandled during filming"). It is, in its psychological processes, a kind of insanity akin to racism (in *Oh, Calcutta!* for instance, a black girl is introduced to give that little extra kick to the sado-masochistic racist feelings in the background of pornography).

I know, from my ten years' research, and my million words of analysis of meaning, that the obsession with sex in our culture is a madness, a collective psychopathology. The worst aspect of it all is that, in being destructive of meaning and values, it undermines those very qualities on which we shall have to rely in order to become capable of meeting and overcoming the threatening eco-catastrophe (discussed in the current issue of the *Teilhard Review*, for example). In such a situation, to be only cool and rational might itself be a treachery. Young people, especially, have been deeply corrupted, and, indeed, I am no longer sure, after visiting an exhibition of work by youth at Bath Festival of Arts, that we can ever find a way out, so corrupted is the next generation. The cycles of hate breed hate, and there are signs that men are giving way to a panicky destructiveness. As this escalates, I believe that a large part will have been played in it by the degradation of the human image, not only by cheap pornography, but by the *avant garde* themselves. The clue to the psychological disorder underlying it all is to be found in W. R. D. Fairbairn's analysis of schizoid states and their moral inversions: "Because the joys of love are debarred from me, I may as well give myself up to the joys of hating." This message is impelling us towards a sense of the loss of meaning. When meaning goes, it will not be worth surviving.

I say this as one who has, like Mahler, to try to find peace without God, and a sense of meaning without a faith. I believe this is only possible by achieving a sense of gratitude for having existed, and a sense of the meaning there has been in our existence. This, as Viktor Frankl says, may be found in love. The exploitation of sex, then, since it belongs to hate, threatens the meaning of man's life. It thus threatens his capacities to be able to find a sense of hope, meaning and values—by which to confront the eco-catastrophe by which he is menaced. One's serious arguments on these lines are maltreated in the media (not least the freethinking press), and because of this, I am afraid, one has to be awkward and noisy in public, as I have been. This seems to me inevitable in a situation in which the very discourse in which innocence can be defended against ugly and destructive degradation is being itself destroyed.

DAVID HOLBROOK.