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# The FREETHINKER

The Secular  
and Humanist  
Weekly

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## N.C.C.L.'s COMMENTS ON PRIVACY REPORT

The National Council for Civil Liberties and the Society for Individual Freedom, the National Union of Students and the Mothers' Union, the National Secular Society and the Knights of St. Columba were but a few of the many organisations that submitted evidence to the Younger Committee on Privacy, whose report was published earlier this month\*. "It is clear," says the Report, "that the quest and need for privacy is a natural one, not restricted to man alone, but arising in the biological and social processes of all the higher forms of life. . . Indeed the struggle of all animals, whether gregarious or not, to achieve a balance between privacy and participation is one of the basic features of animal life."

### No recording of students' beliefs

Comments from the National Secular Society's submissions are quoted in the Report's chapter on private detectives: "No qualifications or registration are required for the job and one can be in Dartmoor today and in business tomorrow." In its appendices the Report also lists the conclusions of the N.U.S./N.C.C.L. Commission on Academic Freedom and the Law, first of which is that "No mention should be made in any university or college record of a student's religion or political beliefs or activities."

The Report has been welcomed, with reservations, by the National Council for Civil Liberties. "We support the need for legislation giving the citizen a general right to privacy," says N.C.C.L. "We also advocate legislation which would require all data banks, computerised or manual, public or private, to be licensed and subject to inspection. We are disappointed that the Younger Committee had neither the courage nor the insight to advocate these measures. At the same time, we feel that many valuable suggestions are contained in its report and that these should be implemented without delay."

### "Creeping data pollution" by computers

N.C.C.L. regards the Younger Report as essentially a "limited programme of piecemeal reform" but is of the opinion that the Committee underestimated "the increasing threat to privacy arising from modern technology and commercial or political pressures," particularly what the Council calls "creeping data pollution."

"Information, as the N.C.C.L. has often pointed out, is a most potent source of power which can be wielded by institutions over individual citizens. . . All the Committee proposes for dealing with computerised data banks is a Standing Commission, which is five years too late, and merely another version of the 'wait and see' approach. . . If we continue to wait while the computer revolution runs its course we shall miss the opportunity to control an aspect of technology which could bring immense social benefits

but which could also be an invaluable instrument for dictatorship."

### Public accountability

The National Council for Civil Liberties is also of the opinion that the terms of reference of the Younger Committee should have been wider. "Most people will readily understand the need to control private detectives and snooping devices," says N.C.C.L. "At the same time it is difficult to understand why standards to be imposed on the private information gatherer will not be applied equally to the police and other public servants, such as the notorious cohabitation spies. . . There is a mountain of personal information about every single citizen in the care of public officials. While their standards of integrity may be high, it is only right that they should be accountable where the individual's privacy may be put at risk." Tony Smythe (N.C.C.L. General Secretary), in his Commentary on the Younger Committee Report, adds: "It remains obvious that arrangements for holding personal information by official bodies are notoriously insecure and subject to exploitation by commercial interests."

From N.C.C.L.'s point of view the most welcome parts of the Report are those dealing with private detectives and surveillance devices. Mr. Smythe comments: "The licensing of private detectives is long overdue," and the licensing authorities "must act with the utmost vigour and weed out the many shady and dubious characters who have been attracted to this kind of business." The N.C.C.L. also suggests that the controls over the use of technical surveillance devices should apply equally to the police as well as to private citizens.

Tony Smythe says that the Council is not in disagreement with the Report's conclusions in respect of education, medicine and employment, although "a more detailed response is called for from individuals and institutions working in these areas." He concludes that "the real question now is how quickly the major and more urgent recommendations can be implemented."

\*Report of the Committee on Privacy. Chairman: the Rt. Hon. Kenneth Younger. London: H.M.S.O., £2



## 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 Street, London, SE1 1NL. Telephone: 01-407 2717. Cheques, etc., should be made payable to the N.S.S.

Freethought books and pamphlets (new). Send for list to G. W. Foote & Co. Ltd., 103 Borough High Street, London, SE1 1NL.

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.

## 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 Society, Harold Wood Social Centre, Gubbins Lane. Tuesday, 1 August, 7.45 p.m.: reports from delegates to British Humanist Association Conference and A.G.M. (discussion).

Humanist Holidays, East Mersey, Essex. 6-13 August: Youth Camp. 19 August—2 September: Summer Centre. Details from Marjorie Mephram (see "Announcements" above)

# NEWS

## OPENING OF ROSE BUSH COURT EXTENSION

Members and friends of the Humanist Housing Association met in glorious sunshine on the afternoon of 15 July for the opening ceremony of the extension to the Association's Rose Bush Court scheme, Hampstead. Among the throng were representatives of the British Humanist Association, National Secular Society, Rationalist Press Association and South Place Ethical Society, together with members from numerous local humanist groups, and visitors from as far afield as India.

As the final remains of a splendid tea were cleared away, Mr. Harold Blackham opened the formal part of the proceedings by introducing Miss Rose Bush to the assembled guests. It was not for the want of a better name that the flats had been named Rose Bush Court, he said, but because so many people felt so strongly that Miss Bush's work for the Humanist Housing Association and the tenants deserved recognition. He also paid tribute to Mr. Lindsay Burnet, the Association's Secretary, for his "energy and zeal."

Miss Bush replied that she was not one of the original eight people who had founded the Ethical Union Housing Association seventeen years ago, but, she added, three of those eight, Mr. and Mrs. Burnet, and Mr. Alex Dawn, were still actively associated with the present Humanist Housing Association, and the organisation owed much to their vision and enterprise. Rose Bush added that with the completion of Rose Bush Court the H.H.A. planned to build two more blocks of flats, inside and outside the London area, and might be able to construct "some establishments to give that little bit of extra help ageing tenants require."

Rose Bush said that she was most honoured that the present building should share her name. She had thought of herself as a happy and compassionate person, and hoped that these qualities would be shared by those who lived there. She concluded, "I have much pleasure in declaring open this new extension to Rose Bush Court."

94-year-old Mrs. Fellowes, a resident of Rose Bush Court for 3½ years, then came forward and presented Miss Bush with a splendid bouquet of pink paeonies and white chrysanthemums.

A further tribute to the work of Lindsay Burnet came from the final speaker of the afternoon, Miss Diana Rookledge, the H.H.A.'s chairman. She also expressed the Association's gratitude to Camden Council, the architect of Rose Bush Court (Clive Alexander), the builders and the site manager, and for an anonymous gift of £200. Finally, Miss Rookledge thanked the existing residents of Rose Bush Court, who, though inconvenienced by the building of the new extension, had shown great patience and interest throughout. She hoped that their forbearance would be rewarded by the new friends they would make now that the extension was completed.

**"I believe in an America where the separation of church and state is absolute . . . where no church or church school is granted any public funds or political preference."**

—The late President John F. Kennedy (would that Richard Nixon believed likewise!).



# AND NOTES

## A HOLY WAR

The *Methodist Recorder* (20 July) carried a report of a recent meeting of the Methodist Peace Fellowship on the subject of peace and justice in Northern Ireland:

Mr. Brian Walker, the chairman and the Methodist founder of the New Ulster Movement. . . sought to explode four myths about the situation. (1) The Protestant myth that peace could only be achieved by separation from Dublin and Catholic domination. (2) The Catholic myth that peace could be achieved only by a united Irish Republic. (3) The myth that violence was the only tool to change the face of Northern Ireland. (4) The myth believed by the Irish Council of Churches, the British Council of Churches and the World Council of Churches that the basic problem was social, economic and political.

"Mr. Walker asserted that the problem was basically religious. This was a holy war."

## "RELIGIOUS APARTHEID"

A somewhat belated plea for an end to "religious apartheid" in education in Northern Ireland was made on 14 July last, by Mr. James Kilfedder, M.P. (Unionist, North Down) speaking in the Commons on the Education and Libraries (Northern Ireland) Order. He pointed out that community relations would not improve until children were able to play together. "One would have hoped," he added, on the subject of nursery schools, "at this tender age, up to six, that the churches would not object to children being educated together, but apparently this is not to be the case."—Not, at any rate, as long as obscurantists put the "salvation of immortal souls" before nasty, materialistic ideas about freedom and happiness for mortal bodies in this present world!

## RELIGIOUS INDOCTRINATION BEING

### "HAMPERED"

Our heart bleeds for the Bishop of Worcester, the Right Rev. Robert Woods. Writing in the July issue of his diocesan newsletter he says that every child is "entitled" to receive religious instruction, but the subject is suffering from the lack of specialist teachers.

"It is important to remember that you cannot make a school supply certain basic matters if they are not found at home. Assembly and religious education in our infant and junior schools are generally taken with great care, but what if there is no praying or if these matters are contradicted at home."

What indeed! An encouraging sign, surely, for free-thinkers to "keep hampering" until the privileges given to religion by the 1944 Education Act are repealed.

## HANSEN'S DISEASE

"In order to remove the stigma, the Fifth International Congress of Leprosy, meeting in Havana, Cuba, in 1948 . . . unanimously adopted a resolution that 'the use of the term "leper" in designation of the patient with leprosy be abandoned;' and the resolution has been reaffirmed at every subsequent Congress. Only the Christian Church has obstinately refused to abandon the odious word for its own selfish ends. It continues to print its fund-raising appeals with hypocritical, self-serving and misleading statements about the incurability of the disease. . . In India the disease

and the sufferers have been used by the Christian Missions as a cover for their proselytization activity only. It is on record that over 300 patients of a leper home . . . walked 30 miles to lodge a protest against their deliberate starvation for days by the missionaries . . . because the patients had refused to be converted to Christianity."

—From the militant Hindu monthly *Masurashram Patrika* (Bombay), April 1972.

## FAN-MAIL FOR APPARITION

According to the *Catholic Herald* (30 June) some 27,000 telegrams and 13 million letters of protest were delivered to the directors of the shrine of Our Lady of Aparecida after a Brazilian newspaper article had cast doubts upon the alleged apparition of the Virgin Mary there in 1717. The *Herald* added:

The devotion of millions of Brazilians to Our Lady is fostered by Radio Aparecida, operated by the shrine, which consistently scores the highest rating for broadcasting stations in Brazil. Most of its listeners are truck-drivers and motorists, according to recent surveys.

The largest Marian church in the world is still under construction at Aparecida, and is expected to hold 12,000 visitors. Our Lady of Tourism is obviously still a considerable asset, even in this allegedly sceptical age!

## RIFT OVER GREEK DIVORCE

The Greek Orthodox Church, which has been doing rather well for itself since the Colonels came to power and instituted the concept of "Christian Greece", has now been disobliging enough to bite the hand that feeds it.

A few weeks ago the military junta's Political Council discussed and approved a draft Bill allowing divorce in cases of seven years' separation. This, however, was promptly assailed by various members of the clerical hierarchy as "automatic" divorce and putting "dynamite at the roots of marriage", according to a *Guardian* report from Athens. The Bill will now be shelved or bowlderised.

You may wonder, gentle reader, what good Christians and chauvinists are doing framing a divorce law in the first place. Well, perhaps the fact that Colonel—I mean Mr.—Papadopoulos is himself a divorcee has something to do with it.

## FIFTY YEARS AGO

At the public dinner [of the Birth Control Conference] Mr. [Arthur B.] Moss replied to the toast of "The Pioneers of Birth Control," and took occasion to dwell on the efforts of Charles Bradlaugh and Annie Besant in this direction. There are no two people to whom the movement owes more, but now that it is getting "respectable" there is a tendency in many quarters to ignore them for fear of exciting religious prejudice. . . There is, indeed, hardly a reform movement in the country that does not owe much—sometimes everything—to the small body of avowed Freethinkers, although always their work is buried as soon as possible, and timid men and women who are reaping the benefits of their work imagine they are serving the cause in which they are interested by remaining silent and pandering to the religious crowd. Perhaps it will be recognised one day that there is nothing of such supreme importance in the world's affairs as intellectual fearlessness. If we had had more of that quality during the past seven or eight years the world would hardly be in the state it is to-day.

—From *The Freethinker*, 30 July 1922.



# MARXISM: SOME POINTS OF THEORY

HYMAN LEVY

In *The Freethinker* of 20 and 27 May there appeared an article by Philip Hinchliff, entitled "Marxism and Christianity." The writer scoffs because Marxists differ among themselves; he cannot see that this is a sign of vitality. In case readers are led to imagine that the long list of writers, artists, scientists, economists and active social revolutionaries to be found in every country and who admit to being Marxists, Neo-Marxists or influenced by Marxism, are in reality mere nitwits floundering in confusion, I hope to disperse a little of the mist into which Mr. Hinchliff has stumbled.

Let me state first that much of my Marxism I discovered for myself: from my early experiences; from my later scientific training and from my specialist interest in mathematics, in the scientific method and the logical structure of these disciplines. All this before I had read a single word of Marx, Engels or Hegel.

To me, therefore, Marx was a writer, a social analyst, who, using the data available to him in the middle of the nineteenth century only, had devised a method for exhibiting features of social change over a long stretch of history. Naturally he was restricted to what had been considered at each earlier epoch to be important for some purpose then. He was not therefore in a position to carry through a controlled experiment as a laboratory scientist might do. He was more like an astronomer who had to take what the stars and planets unrolled. It was a colossal task he undertook: to try to make real sense of history!

## History and change

I remember when, in my early 'teens, I suddenly realised that everything had a history of its own: the table, my boot-lace, the cat, and I myself! I visualised the table at the tree stage, the lace and the animal from which the leather had come, the cat and its limited vocabulary, its forgotten parents and its curious dependence on human beings; and finally me, myself, with my own private life, my family and friends. We were working class, and living in a tenement; others, the gentry, lived in large houses with servants . . . Then, as I grew older and heard of Darwin and evolution I got a wider view of history, that of living matter changing into diverse, specialised forms. I and my school and later student friends argued about these matters vigorously. It was part of the atmosphere of the period, and in breathing it we naturally felt we were freely choosing to think *open mindedly* on these matters. It was not easy to see that if we were the present outcome of an evolutionary process that was still proceeding we would be thinking with more experience tomorrow than today, with more awareness, with a greater store of imagery. *Logic could become more acute*, more self-critical; so thinking also had a history of change! A scientific theory was an attempt to piece together (mentally) how a part of the physical world was changing, or would change under *specified* conditions. An experiment was an attempt to set up these conditions, and to observe whether our thinking fitted the facts. If not, we corrected the theory, that is, we adjusted our thinking to make it *rational*, to make it "reflect" the changing world around.

This poses the question whether perfect rationality, a perfected logic, is not simply a mental aberration, neither attainable, nor expressible in language. On the other hand, every experiment that the scientist can "repeat," every

piece of technology he "creates" is evidence that he, the erstwhile victim of his environment is changing into its master. He, the individual, can now ask himself, "Are my assertions both partially true and partially false?" He and those who think and speak to him, may form a "self-conscious" group but the society that cradled him, although it has a history with developing institutions, does not think. Its individual elements do. It does not feel; it merely behaves, but in its own special way. It produces scientists, artists, philosophers, engineers, agriculturalists, bankers and bakers; not entirely blindly but, as a society, it is not *self-conscious*. It has a history like a flock of birds—thoughtful inventive birds, struggling for survival with other creatures and even individually with each other; more interestingly like a hive of bees with its workers and its drones, and its queens. Beehives had a powerful part to play in early primitive communist society, in relation to the provision of honey and to the fertilisation of plants. (One of the earliest decrees that Lenin signed after the Revolution was to exempt bee-keepers from taxation!)

## A child of his time

Marx, the individual, lived and wrote in the middle of the nineteenth century. To him nuclear energy, television, radio, motor cars, diesel engines, radar, supersonic flight, plastics, the Welfare State, smog, pollution, sputniks, lunar flights and the vocabulary of modern technology would have been meaningless. On his own analysis he was a child of his time. He wrote no "sacred book" and could not have professed to do so. He spoke in the language of his day, and so he thought in the imagery of his day, but as a materialist whose imagery was drawn or "abstracted" from the physical world. The Industrial Revolution was already well under way with its wage-earning class struggling as conscious beings to improve working conditions, making social history by the creation of trade unions; by joint action bringing a new kind of social grouping into existence.

Marx was no mechanist, no determinist. Unlike machines, men made their own history, perhaps gropingly but as thinking and feeling beings. To do this the nature of change, especially social change, had to be understood, and that could be read only in past history, and in present organised action. The latter emerged out of the past, which thus created its own "contradiction." It is an unfortunate image but that is a mere language difficulty. I am always *me*, and yet in being so I am becoming different. The moment you have carved out a truth you have begun to see beyond it and to expose its limitations.

Those who complain about the language of Marxism—"The unity of opposites," "Internal contradictions," "The passing of quantity into quality," have not realised the rôle of metaphor in explanation. Internal contradictions surround us—the "Everlasting Truths of Religion," war and the "Sanctity of Life," the H-bomb as a negation of war, the motor car that leads to traffic jams, the car headlights that blind us, the uses of technology that pollute our environment, the machine that economises in labour and helps drive the wage earner on to the dole, the change in the character of money when it changed from being a wonderful invention for diversifying barter into a commodity itself where it is lent out for money. I need not elaborate.



## No isolated events or truths

Above all, what this mid-nineteenth century social analyst, Marx, made me realise was that we are living in an inter-related universe in which there are no isolated events, and no isolated chains of cause and effect, no isolated truths; that thinking is not isolated from speech, and that every artificially isolated event contains—to use a metaphor—the “seeds of its own destruction.”

It should now, I hope, be clear why I have written all this. I do not like Mr. Hinchliff telling me that I am interested in “nothing but politics,” professing to be open-minded” in his approach to the world (unlike people like me); that I become “reconcilable with any events;” and

that I “believe in the coming revolution whatever the contrary evidence.” How on earth you can have *evidence* about the future I do not grasp; one can have a theory about a possible future but not evidence. He tells us that Marxists have a “belief in a Golden Future” and that this “logically depends on a belief in a golden past.” This dual use of the word belief, and its “logic” beats me.

Finally we are “reluctant to rely on reason as a guide to the fundamental problems of life.” That is correct because unlike Mr. Hinchliff and religionists I accept no absolutes; but as a mathematician I have shown sufficient confidence in reasoning in practice to depend on it for my daily bread. That is what a Marxist means by the “unity of theory and practice.”

## HALLELUJAH CHORUS

I. S. LOW

*Surely none can hold a candle  
To that great composer Handel.  
I'd go fifty miles to hear  
The masque "Acis and Galatea."  
And what could be nobler, higher  
Than the jolly old "Messiah"?*

to have frequented it . . . Formally Handel did not belong to the Church of England either . . .” Also Lang mentions some little-known facts about the *Messiah*; it was not called by that name (as a rule) in London till 1749 but *A New Sacred Oratorio*. And no score of it was published in Handel's lifetime.

Commenting on the famous remark attributed to Handel that when writing the *Messiah* he “did see the great God Himself,” Streatfeild says this refers to an effort of the imagination and says “Handel also saw the devil-dancers in *Jephtha*. Did this make him a worshipper of Baal?”

Handel mixed with people of all religions. In his youth he was probationary organist at Halle Cathedral, though it was owned by Calvinists and he was a Lutheran. In Italy he was friends with the cultured and enlightened Roman Catholic Cardinal Ottoboni. Sir John Hawkins (not the Elizabethan sea dog) records that Handel said he was glad he lived in England “where no man suffers any molestation or inconvenience on account of his religious principles.”

### The dramatic oratorios

What is the next outstanding point about Handel? The experts think his most characteristic works are his dramatic oratorios—that is, works sung by a chorus and tenors, basses, sopranos, etc., which tell a story like an opera, only without any action. Examples are *Saul*, *Sampson* and *Belshazzar*. And I must say I like the music in these better than the music in the *Messiah* and *Israel in Egypt*. *Saul* (composed 1738, libretto by Charles Jennens) is considered the best. It depicts Saul, the king of Israel, as a generous, honest man who is brought to ruin by his own jealousy, yet in the end faces his doom bravely (though I find this habit of hurling his javelin at David and Jonathan gets a bit comic at the third failure!). There is certainly some beautiful music in it; the great “Jealousy” chorus, the duet between David and his wife Michal, the musical description of Goliath striding along, Saul's recitatives in the scene where he consults the witch at Endor, and the final choruses.

My favourite is *Belshazzar* (composed about 1744, libretto by Jennens also). It is about the taking of Babylon by the Persians under Cyrus. It is like a thriller! There

(Continued overleaf)

That is the usual image of George Frideric Handel (1685-1759) the idol of Victorian England, and above all composer of the oratorio *Messiah* which is performed with unflinching regularity in Britain every Christmas.

Yet experts on music think the *Messiah* is not typical of Handel, and there is doubt as to what his religious beliefs really were. And it is widely agreed that his interest in Biblical themes was dramatic rather than religious.

### Handel and paganism

Winton Dean in his book *Handel's Dramatic Oratorios and Masques* says that the *Messiah* is a religious work but also says that it is “untouched by mystical feeling and inspired more by ethical humanism than by the doctrine of any church.” He adds, “But its immense popularity in England . . . has bred the notion that the entire group of some fifteen other scriptural oratorios . . . shared a similar religious basis. This assumption is palpably misconceived.” Dean also points out that apart from the *Messiah* only one of Handel's oratorios is Christian in theme. “He found little inspiration in Christianity; the Italian *La Resurrezione* is hopelessly pagan”; “Fitzgerald's remark that Handel was a grand old pagan at heart contains an element of profound truth”; and “If there is a bias [on Handel's part] it is in favour of the old pagan world.”

Paul Henry Lang, in his book *George Frideric Handel* agrees that Handel's interest in Bible stories was because of their drama: “*Saul* is pure tragedy, without a trace of religious philosophy.” In dealing with *Athalia* Lang says, “Though a magnificent music drama, it still remains one of the least appreciated. Can it be because even the most far-fetched interpretation cannot make it ‘sacred’?” Later he says, “We know that [Handel] was born and bred a Lutheran, but after he left Germany he gave not the slightest indication what communion he favoured. Although biographers do not mention the fact, Lutheran congregations had existed in London since the 17th century. In Handel's time St. Mary's Evangelical-Lutheran Church . . . was available to him, yet he is never known



## HALLELUJAH CHORUS

is a lot in it—political speculation, personal tragedy, action. There is a lively drinking chorus: “Ye tutel gods of our empire, look down,” and a drinking aria by Belshazzar himself. Cyrus is a bit of a schoolboy hero—but sometimes there is something to be said for schoolboy heroes. When the Persians craftily drain the Euphrates so that they can march into Babylon during the Babylonian orgy they sing a chorus “See from his post Euphrates flies” which I like better than any other piece of music Handel composed.

## Insistence on high standards

Although Handel lived his life in the glare of publicity we know hardly anything about his thoughts and ideas. For instances it is not certain whether he was just a musical business man or a dedicated composer like Schumann or Wagner. The fact that he went on composing Italian operas after it had become clear that oratorios were a better business proposition, and that he insisted on giving London music he considered really good in defiance of vested interests and even public opinion suggests the latter.

Handel was one of the most cosmopolitan of composers. He was a German by birth and upbringing, yet later became an enthusiast for Italian opera and culture. Later he settled in Britain and became absorbed in the British way of life. The *Messiah* was first produced in Dublin (perhaps if he had lived today, he would have been an ardent advocate of World Government!). An Irish clergyman said that Mr. Handel could tell a good story, but you had to know half a dozen languages to understand it!

Like most people who produced operas, Handel had trouble with his singers. The notorious prima donna Cuzzoni made a scene about an aria Handel had written for her. He picked her up and threatened to throw her out of the window! The threat was effective—and the aria a success. Another time a young man called Gordon objected to the way Handel was accompanying him on the harpsichord. A row developed and finally Gordon threatened that if his wishes were not respected he would jump on the harpsichord and smash it to pieces. “Oh!” retorted Handel, “When you do that, let me know and I will advertise it. I am sure more people will come to see you jump than to hear you sing!”

## Clerical displeasure

In Handel's times, the clergy, both Catholic and Protestant, seem to have been against oratorios. It was considered blasphemous to have works based on Bible stories performed in profane places like theatres. In particular there was a row about a work by Handel called *Semele*. This is about the love affair of Jupiter with a mortal girl called Semele (I should mention that the technical definition of oratorio is rather wider than is generally supposed; it includes some works based on Greek legend). It was considered Handel had thrown himself into the love-making parts with a bit too much enthusiasm. By the way, Handel enjoyed the beauties of nature more than, for example, Bach did, and liked depicting sunrises, hailstones and so on in his music.

Perhaps rationalists, humanists and freethinkers should sing a Hallelujah Chorus at the thought that the composer of that work may have been in sympathy with them!

## REVIEWS

## BOOKS

**SIR FRANCIS DRAKE** by George Malcolm Thomson.  
Secker & Warburg, £3.50.

In the mid-sixteenth century, the wonders of the wider world, recently made accessible by innovations in ship-building, cartography and navigation, beckoned to adventurous Europeans. In opening up the Americas, the Iberians gave notice to the northern Europeans of the unimagined wealth to be found there. Under Elizabeth I in particular, Englishmen responded with a display of shrewd, speculative investments in maritime explorations, in what proved to be the first major excursions of English capital into imperial investment. The probes of the so-called Elizabethan “sea-dogs” into the underbelly of the Spanish Americas led, in the short term, to the collapse of the over-extended Spanish empire; in the long term to the settlement and exploitation of the English New World empire.

Those early probes called for men of rare qualities. Tough inventive seamen, able to cajole their scurvy crews into hair-raising ventures; they were men with contacts in the City and were thereby able to raise essential capital; and with friends at Court who were able to smooth away

diplomatic troubles attendant on their piratical raids into other nation's empires. Francis Drake was one such man.

A sailor by training, Drake was spurred on by his religion, his imperialistic patriotism and, of course, by the burning desire to make money. Drake, and many of his contemporaries followed the Klondike trail pioneered by the Spaniards, showing in his staggering bullion raids the direction for further English enterprise. In the process, the life Drake imposed upon himself, and upon his less fortunate crews, was horrifying; dangerous, brutal and haphazard, but, with luck, profitable. Drake was, and remains, a hero to a nation obsessed with great men—men whose greatness is measured by the gravestones of their anonymous enemies.

Like heroes everywhere, Drake's mythology overpowers his reality. The old romance lingers on, despite some recent work on the motives and nature of sixteenth century adventure, in Mr. Thomson's beautifully produced, and already over-praised book. Thomson jogs our memory about Drake, but he adds little new or original. The book is replete with stories of the peculiar sea-faring qualities of the English; it is written in a style suited to a romantic interpretation of the subject.

Beneath all this lie the remarkable facts of the origins of the first British empire and hence the source of much British wealth. The major failings of Thomson's book are that the author fails to probe his material and to offer us more than an addition to the crowded rows of interesting but historically pointless biographies. Biography, used with skill and precision, can tell us a great deal about the subtle complexity of historical processes at work but, while this



book gives great scope for friendly reviews about Drake as a man, it tells us little new either about Drake or the times he so dramatically helped to fashion. The true heroes of this book are the thousands of wretches upon whose miserable backs and through whose miserable deaths, Drake rose to contemporary and historical fame.

JAMES WALVIN

**THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO JOHN** (The English text with introduction, exposition and notes) by Leon Morris. Marshall, Morgan and Scott, £7.

This is a conservative commentary, as one would expect from a volume in a series edited by Professor F. F. Bruce. For instance, Dr. Morris believes that the fourth gospel was written by the "apostle" John, the companion of Jesus (p. 30), although he admits that most continental scholars have "long since" abandoned this view, and that in recent years most British and American scholars have also given it up (p. 8). His view of the authorship naturally commits him to dating the gospel "before A.D. 70" (although he is tentative about this, p. 34), and this in turn leads him to argue that it is independent of the first three gospels (which refer to the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70). However, on these questions of authorship and sources, he gives a full and fair account of views other than his own. Difficulties are clearly and candidly stated, and this is impressive, even though his solutions to them are sometimes feeble. For instance, he discusses the differences between Jesus as presented in the first three gospels, and as portrayed in the fourth—differences which have led many theologians to affirm that the two portraits are incompatible. He solves the difficulty by arguing that "the great man will show different facets to different people," and that apparent incompatibility "simply indicates the gigantic stature of Jesus" (pp. 19-20).

Dr. Morris's conservative standpoint is again well illustrated by his account of the final chapter (21) of the fourth gospel, appended after the formal and solemn conclusion at the end of chapter 20. He takes this appendix at its face value as the work of the author of the rest, even though many theologians have set it aside as the attempt of a later writer to rectify the gospel's deficiencies. For instance, Luke's gospel confines the appearances of the risen Jesus to Jerusalem, while Matthew and Mark confine them to Galilee. Now while chapter 20 of the fourth gospel follows Luke here, the appended chapter 21 attempts to do justice to the contrary tradition, and makes Jesus appear by the lake of Galilee. Furthermore, this appendix makes Jesus speak of his second coming in a way that is in harmony with the first three gospels, but excluded by chapters 1—20 of the fourth. Such problems are more adequately dealt with in, say, R. Bultmann's commentary (2nd edn., 1950), than in Dr. Morris' work.

G. A. WELLS

**PAMPHLET**

**MEMO FOR SPRING** by Liz Lochhead. Edinburgh: Reprographia, 75p.

Sadness and disillusionment inevitably follow upon the realisation that love is not always synonymous with carefree happiness and joy. Liz Lochhead, a young Scots person,

female and sensitive, sets down the essence of that realisation in a short collection of very readable poems, which seem to follow a sequence.

Some are poignant and sceptical love poems, where the sadness of loving is declared, in such lines as "Love? I'm no longer exposing myself" and her "eyes are blank of illusions." These personal verses are interspersed between a number of acutely observant poems about things around her. Of her Asian immigrant next-door neighbour in Glasgow she says:

*Her children grow up  
with foreign accents  
swearing in fluent Glaswegian.  
The golden hands with the almond nails  
that push the pram turn blue  
in this city's cold climate.*

The poem is called "Local Colour." And the summer she spent in a sleepy New England Town where

*. . . nothing happens . . .  
where business is slow, says the soda-jerk,  
like molasses in janu-werry . . .*

The meanings and the feelings behind these poems are not obscure; written in a completely non-sentimental, searching mood by one who does not pretend to have any answers to the great mysteries which surround her.

On the theme of how we appear to others, and that great part of the iceberg of our personality that is hidden from others, even from a lover, she says:

*I, love,  
am capable of being looked at  
from many different angles. This  
is your problem.  
. . . you, love,  
set me down in black and white exactly  
I am at once  
reduced and made more of.*

The whole of this little book *Memo For Spring* can form half an evening's delightful and thought-provoking reading, straight through. Or it may be opened at any point for a breath of youthful freshness, tinged with a slight bewilderment at the pain of living, but with an unspoken hope for the future.

LINDSEY HARRIS

**LETTERS**

**Infant Welfare and Adoption**

Most professionally concerned people have every sympathy for unsupported mothers who face great difficulties in keeping their children, and the more tolerant social attitude of which William Bynner writes (letters, 22 July) is, of course, a great advance.

The provision of accomodation for young mothers and their children is highly desirable. However, difficulty in finding accomodation is only one of the many problems facing unmarried mothers, and an immature young girl on her own with a baby may be in a happy position compared with the same girl two years later, trying to deal with a normally naughty toddler, and perhaps with a difficult relationship between it and a boyfriend or a husband who is not the child's father. Thus many children come into local authority care at an age when they are not sought after by adopters, and may already have developed personality problems. They may even end up as battered babies.



The advantages of adoption to the child—particularly to the child of a very young unmarried mother—are inescapable.

MARGARET McILROY

### Celtic Social Philosophy

Normally an English reviewer, mentioning Celtic Chauvinism, leads with his chin. Mr. Rose (8 July), however, is a very exceptional exception to the numerous "internationalists" whose internationalism is merely a guise for the easier assimilation of England's untidy Celtic fringe. In deference to his accuser, Mr. Berresford Ellis ought perhaps to plead guilty, while urging provocation.

This metaphor does suggest that Mr. Rose's complaint about an over-idealised picture of early Celtic society is very much open to challenge. Whether or not viewed as a form of proto-socialism the Celtic system was based on the legal concept of the wellbeing and responsibility of the community, as distinct from that of the individual. It can be safely predicted that the now predominantly middle class environment lobby will ultimately put an end to the profit motive as the economic mainspring. The criterion of the good of the community, future as well as present, will replace it. This will in turn necessitate a "Celtic" legal system. The implication is that, without being a more sophisticated version of Rousseau's noble savage, the Celts had evolved a legal philosophy more "modern" than our present system, based as it is on the economics of the frontier.

PADRAIG O CONCHUIR

### John M. Robertson Remembered

My article on the historian, J. M. Robertson (in *The Freethinker* for 3 June last) has invited a very interesting letter from an American reader, Mr. Jack Benjamin of Pennsylvania, some portions of which seem to be worth a wider circulation. Of Robertson he writes, "For many years I have been an avid reader of his works and was fortunate enough to know him somewhat during his latter years, by correspondence. I might also state that I believe I have the greatest collection of his books in the U.S.A. Robertson seems to have been forgotten in these days of muddled Freethought, and I was made happy to see your article. Myself, I have been in the movement for 56 years. . . ." ERIC GLASGOW

### The Case for World Administration

I look forward to the day when name-calling and trivialisation fades from the freethinking press! In the meantime I simply refuse to respond to letters like that of I. S. Low. A reply will be found in an *intelligent* reading of my original letter.

The letter from Tony Mills is of a different order. The trouble with his argument, I find, is its wholly abstract character. He believes that we have to choose between a world dictator and a world parliament, yet it seems that the only possible contenders for world dictatorship are the Soviet Union, the U.S.A. and China, and he never mentions any of them or shows how the dictatorial situation might arise.

If the U.S.A. is defeated by tiny Viet Nam—what price world conquest? Where is the evidence for its possibility? Conjecture, of course, is not evidence.

I think we might begin to find some common ground if we considered world administration rather than world government. Government is, as such, all bound up with armies, central executives and vast bureaucracies—whereas administration can be functionally decentralised.

We already have a first class world administration, one we all use, in the International Postal Union and there are countless other institutions and working agreements like the ones that govern the "rule of the road" at sea. The thing is open-ended and capable of infinite development.

The concept of city-regional republics in the West—as the alternative to both the nation-state and world government—is a feasible proposition when it is seen in the setting of parallel national and international utilities. We can now have all the benefits that the nation-state has brought us over the last 500 years, especially civil peace and freedom of movement, without the critical deficiencies of over-mighty and mighty expensive central government. To this, now, it is possible to add *international* peace and freedom of movement to complete the picture.

We can do this if people will not only keep their heads (as Tony Mills argues) but *use* those heads in discovering new horizons.

PETER CADOGAN.

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