

The FREETHINKER

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THE BRITISH BRAINWASHING CORPORATION

'AUNTIE' AND HER "JADED CHRISTIANITY"

Judging from some of the pronouncements put out in recent years by the Clean-up-TV brigade one might be forgiven for supposing that the initials B.B.C. stood for Beelzebub's Broadcasting Corporation, or something worse, unless, however, one had read a press statement put out in 1968 by the then President of the National Secular Society, David Tribe. Mr. Tribe attacked the fashionable claim that the B.B.C. was liberalising its outlook and updating its image; he accused the Corporation of pursuing "its own path of indoctrination, its black lists of non-persons, and its internal system of snooping, vetting and dossiers to ensure that the faithful continue in the party line." He added: "The truth is that Auntie hasn't changed all that much at all . . . Underneath the mascara and the clotted foundation cream, the apricot wig and the lacy stockings, the old girl is still the self-righteous, canting, vindictive, equivocating, evasive, intolerant holy roller that married Uncle Reith. For some years now on behalf of secular humanism I have been amassing a correspondence with the old thing's apologists, frightening to anyone who puts honesty, outright dealing and human values before the imposition of a jaded Christianity on a majority of licence-payers who don't want it."

New N.S.S. pamphlet

"Some day," said David Tribe with a hint a menace, "I may get round to publication to show what a lying jade the old harridan is." That day has now arrived with the publication by the National Secular Society of a new pamphlet to coincide with the B.B.C.'s fiftieth anniversary: it is entitled *Broadcasting, Brainwashing, Conditioning* by —of course—David Tribe.

In 1968, Mr. Tribe writes, "I still hoped that, where many years of patient, behind-the-scenes diplomacy had failed, this frontal blast in the best Clean-Up-TV tradition might clear the air and lead to belated recognition of what, under this bombast, were modest and reasonable claims. Unfortunately, this dream was to be as unrealised as all my other broadcasting hopes."

Worse, in February 1970, in an unprecedented breach of contract, 197 B.B.C. staff members made similar allegations against their superiors in a series of letters to *The Times*. It was as if, said Sir Hugh Greene in a *cri du coeur*, he and his colleagues were all 'bloody liars'. Some of the critics were members, even officers, of the Association of Broadcasting Staff, originally set up by the Corporation as a tame lap-dog to preempt independent trade unionism. As further months have passed by I have grown increasingly disturbed by the implications of television in its broadest context, and increasingly hostile to the idolatry to the new medium shown by trendy communicators like Marshall McLuhan . . .

Make the churches compete

The first and obvious recommendation of David Tribe's pamphlet is that the Religious Broadcasting Departments should be scrapped.

With the best will in the world to invite non-Christian religionists and freethinkers to participate (and this will do exist) their host position gives them an inevitable advantage. The churches must compete for time with other voluntary

societies in features and news programmes. There is a place for the broadcast of important national services on national networks, but not every little parish event.

Otherwise, the pamphlet suggests that services should be broadcast on local radio, with a stipulated maximum time and the churches paying. "Where they are relevant to life at all church services are usually relevant to a district and not the nation."

Other suggested reforms

Mr. Tribe also advocates an increase in the time allocated for serious discussions, debates, talks and a 'Hyde Park' of the air, especially necessary "since much material concerning sociology, personal philosophy, morality, law reform and other matters (however badly or well presented) now comes under the umbrella of 'religion'." A 'Hyde Park' of the air was recommended as long ago as 1951 by the Beveridge Committee on Broadcasting—a time when, as Mr. Tribe points out, "Hyde Park was still a serious and important forum."

David Tribe also proposes that B.B.C.2 should be administered by a separate public corporation with a proportion of licence fees to maintain it; "The B.B.C. has grown too large and unwieldy and the medium badly needs more employers." If necessary, he also suggests that Radio One could accept advertising to increase broadcasting revenue. "After the *News of the World* articles on 'record plugging' . . . no one can have purist views on Radio One." The present "clique system" of B.B.C. recruitment should be done away with; there should be a fourth television channel for schools broadcasts and an expanded "University of the Air." Finally, news teams should be made more aware of the way in which "their thirst for 'good television' often glamorises antisocial activities."

Broadcasting, Brainwashing, Conditioning, by David Tribe, may be obtained, price 25p plus 4p postage, from the National Secular Society, 103 Borough High Street, London SE1 1NL.

THE FREETHINKER

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ANNOUNCEMENTS

The *Freethinker* is obtainable at the following addresses. London: Collats, 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.

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.

Promenade Gallery, Hornsey Central Library, Crouch End, London N8. 16 December—6 January (Sundays excepted): Exhibition of paintings by Oswald Blakeston.

EVENTS

Brighton and Hove Humanist Group, Imperial Centre Hotel, First Avenue, Hove. Sunday, 7 January, 5.30 p.m.: Connaire Kensis, "Marriage: the Shape of Things to Come."

Humanist Holidays, Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London WC1. Thursdays, 4 January, 6.30 p.m.: A.G.M. and Reunion.

Leicester Secular Society, Secular Hall, Humberstone Gate. Sundays at 6.30 p.m. 31 December: J. Dibbs, "Prevolution and its Bearing on the Social Scene" (to be read); 7 January: film show and discussion on war; 14 January: discussion.

Nottingham and Notts Humanist Group, University Adult Centre, 14 Shakespeare Street. Friday, 12 January, 7.30 p.m.: John Fox, "Encounter Groups."

South Place Ethical Society, Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, WC1. Sundays, 11 a.m. 31 December: W. H. Liddell, "Sir Thomas Moore"; 7 January: Prof. G. A. Wells, "Jesus, Nazareth and John the Baptist"; 14 January: Ronald Mason, "H. G. Wells". Sunday Forum, 3 p.m. 14 January: "Symposium on Peace". Tuesdays, 7 p.m. 2 January: G. K. Young, "The Evolution of Media of Exchange and Credit"; 9 January: Cecil King, "Theories and Thoughts on Inflation."

Sutton Humanist Group, 67 Jasmin Road, West Ewell. Saturday, 6 January, 7.30 p.m.: André Beeson, "Music of Protest."

NEWS

"Religions become liberal as misers become generous—on their death beds. The opinions the churches have fought for are surrendered when it is no longer possible to hold them with the slightest degree of profit."

—Chapman Cohen (1868-1954)

CHARITY LAW ANOMALIES

In the House of Lords on 7 December Lord Fenner Brockway put down an amendment to the Education Bill whereby it would be deemed charitable in law "to promote by education mental moral or social improvement." The amendment, which received wide support, was withdrawn after Lord Belstead (Secretary of State at the Department of Education and Science) had agreed to put the matter before the Home Secretary.

The British Humanist Association has recently published in leaflet form a report of one of its study groups on *Charity Law and Tax Advantages**, which deals with some of the historical anomalies in the present charity laws, and makes some useful proposals for reform, including a new category of "Non-Profit Distributing Organisation." In recent years several humanist bodies, such as the Humanist Trust and the Rationalist Press Association, have been struck off the Register of Charities. Other charities, such as Shelter and Oxfam, are precluded by their charity status from carrying out any form of political action. On the other hand, the churches (strange as it may seem) are permitted to pursue a wide range of political (often anti-humanistic) interest, and yet are treated as charitable for taxation purposes!

*Copies of *Charity Law and Tax Advantages* may be obtained by sending a stamped addressed envelope to the B.H.A., 13 Prince of Wales Terrace, London W8 5PG.

PRIESTS PROTECTED WAR CRIMINAL

According to a report in the *Dail Mail* (11 December), Paul Touvier, twice sentenced to death *in absentia* by Free French courts, and one of the most infamous Nazi collaborators in occupied France, is alive and well, and has been given sanctuary and shelter by a number of priests and monasteries for many years.

During the German occupation Touvier became district chief of the Lyon Milice (an equivalent of the Gestapo), and devoted himself to hunting down Jews and the Resistance. After a protracted campaign by Catholic Prelate Charles du Quaire, Touvier was granted a pardon in 1971, but it now transpires that this was given on the basis of a file which had been 'edited' by Lyon's present commissaire of police. An independent inquiry is now being held to find out "why priests, monks, a prelate and now a police chief have protected him all this time."

CIRCUMCISION DEATH

A two-month-old Nigerian boy died in London last month from loss of blood following a circumcision operation carried out by a witchdoctor with no medical qualifications. An inquest returned a verdict of misadventure.

S AND NOTES

ECONOMICAL COMMUNION

We read in *The Guardian* (6 December) that the vicar of St. Paul's, Knightsbridge, has substituted white wine for the traditional red variety at his communion services, not for any subtle theological reason, nor even to be trendy, but because it is 15p a bottle cheaper!

This news should send a few shivers down fundamentalist spines, but old rationalists will just smile. We have long suspected that both God and Mammon figured somewhere in the Christian trinity, and this story merely adds weight to that theory.

Red wine was presumably adopted in the past because it is of a colour similar to that of blood, and in the communion service is supposed to symbolise (or in some interpretations, even become) the blood of "Our" Lord. If this is the way modern Christians treat the "Blessed Blood", we can doubtless expect the "Blessed Body" soon to be reduced to crispbread or 'doorsteps' in the interests of economy. It is enough to make the angels weep!

EDUCATION IN STRAPLAND

In the 18 November *Freethinker* we reported that the Educational Institute of Scotland had recommended the expulsion of Mr. Douglas Gilchrist, a Cumbernauld (Dunbartonshire) teacher who had complained to the Press about the belt being "grossing misused" in Scottish Schools.

We now learn that the E.I.S. has decided that Mr. Gilchrist shall instead be "severely reprimanded".

In May we reported Mr. Gilchrist as saying that the Scottish Education Department's approved code of corporal punishment was "ignored daily", and that this was "particularly true of Roman Catholic schools where there seems to be an even greater incidence of corporal punishment than elsewhere."

We would have a little more respect for the E.I.S. if it advocated the expulsion of the belt and the strap from Scotland, rather than trying to muzzle those who expose these barbarities.

(*Daily Record*, 12 December; *Freethinker*, 6 May)

IRISH REFERENDUM

The electorate of the Republic of Ireland, so often described as "priest-ridden" (it is strange how that expression is never applied to the Protestants of the north and east of the island), have voted by a considerable majority in the recent referendum to abolish Article 44 of their Constitution which recognised the Catholic Church as having a "special position" in Ireland. Opposition to the change in Ireland was slight, but in Britain it was formally snarled at by that last redoubt of Victorian feudalism in Fleet Street, the "Way of the World Column" in the *Daily Telegraph*. Peter Simple evidently fears that this reform in Ireland will bring the Republic into the 'mainstream of modern life' which, in tones of dread, he describes as "the life of money worship, rationalist morality, ugliness, decadence and false, reductive science."

We do not imagine that this secularisation of Ireland's constitution will prove a panacea overnight, but with enemies such as this, it needs no further commendation from us, who, not worshipping money, have never had any

prayers answered on this score. We hope it will not be long before Britain follows Ireland's example and disestablishes the Churches of England and Scotland.

NINETY YEARS AGO

It is evident that some [Freethinkers] who have lost belief in God are afraid to speak too loud lest he should overhear them . . . To the Atheist all gods are fancies, mere delusions (not *illusions*), like the philosopher's stone, witchcraft, astrology, holy water, and miracles. I am as much entitled to ridicule the gods of Christianity (there are at least three of them and they couldn't well be made more ridiculous than they are) as any other Freethinker is entitled to ridicule the miracles at Lourdes; and when "taste" is dragged into the question, I simply reply that there is as much ill taste in the one case as in the other. All that this "taste" can mean is that no devout delusion should be ridiculed, which is itself one of the greatest pieces of absurdity ever perpetrated . . . As ridicule has been found the most potent weapon of religious enfranchisement, we are bound to use it against the wretched superstitions which cumber the path of progress. Intellectually, it is as absurd to give quarter as it is to expect it.

—G. W. Foote in *The Freethinker*, 31 December 1882.

FIFTY YEARS AGO

A portrait of the king and a crucifix are to be placed in every Italian school. Altar and throne are usually associated.*

—From *The Freethinker*, 31 December 1922.

*Mussolini had just come to power in Rome. (Ed. 1972.)

EPILOGUE

As readers are already aware, this issue will, alas, be the last weekly number of *The Freethinker*. From the beginning of 1973 the paper will be published monthly. *Readers can expect to receive the first monthly issue of The Freethinker on or about 15 January next.*

This week's number also marks the end of the present ("facetious") Editor's first year in office. It has been a most exhausting year, but also a very rewarding and worthwhile one.

This seems a good opportunity to thank the many people who have written articles, reviews and letters for this year's *Freethinker*. The paper has long depended upon these contributions—for which no payment is made—and their generosity, in terms of time and creative effort, is much appreciated. We should also like to express our gratitude to readers, some of them from the far corners of the world, who have kindly sent in press cuttings of freethought interest. These have often been of considerable service.

With the new monthly arrangement we shall have to reduce our theatre reviews very considerably. We should particularly like to thank our drama critics, Jim Herrick and Lindsey Harris for their services over the past months. (Lindsey Harris, by the way, is returning to Scotland in the new year to take up a post as Supervisor in a Children's Assessment Centre in Edinburgh. We wish her well.)

Although *The Freethinker* will now appear only once a month, each issue will be larger, and the annual subscription much cheaper. It is hoped to carry the traditional assortment of articles, reviews, news, comments, with occasional poems, cartoons and photographs, all washed down, as ever, with lashings of rootin', tootin', shootin', nasty, negative, old-fashioned rationalism!

"Nothing would be done at all if a man waited till he could do it so well that no one could find fault with it."

—Cardinal Newman (1801-1890)

WHERE ARE PAINE AND VOLTAIRE NOW?

WALTER SOUTHGATE

While looking through the many document in the Trade Union Labour Co-operative Democratic History Society's centre, I came across an interesting journal called *The News* for the year 1819. This year is notable for Peterloo and the corrupt government of Castlereagh and Sidmouth; for the widespread poverty and distress following the Napoleonic wars; for the speeches of Orator Hunt, and for the trials of Richard Carlile and others for publishing "blasphemous" literature.

The News was printed by the proprietor, T. A. Phipps, at 28 Brydges Street, Strand, and "no advertisements are inserted in the paper," considered, in those days, to be an asset. Each weekly issue, priced at 8½d., also carried the government duty stamp of 4d., which the reformers of the time considered to be a "tax on knowledge", as do many people today regarding the proposed admission fees to our national museums.

The paper itself has worn well, though the old type is so small as to be trying to the eyes. One wonders how our forebears avoided eye strain in the days of tallow candles and oil lanterns, and without N.H.S. spectacles!

Rotten boroughs and starvation wages

I skimmed the reportage of the parliamentary 'wind-bags' of both Houses of Parliament, and marvelled, with the advantage of hindsight, at their ignorance of the facts of life of the masses and the workings of the emerging industrial revolution around them. Here they were in the seats of power, many of them from rotten and corrupt boroughs, openly buying votes, making a grant of £10,000 a year to the Duke of York (already receiving £20,000 per annum) for doing the job his demented father George III was already being paid for; giving a callous reception to the petitions from the weavers of Coventry and Carlisle, who complained that many of them were starving, and those in work could not earn more than ten shillings a week, working 14 hours per day.

Here one can read that the price of brandy and rum was 3 shillings to 5 shillings a gallon; bread 1s. a quartern loaf; beef 5/6d. for 8 lb.; or that the House of Lords (including a few Bishops) by 12 votes to 32 rejected the Chimney Sweeps' Bill designed to abolish the employment of little workhouse orphan boys in dangerous and unhealthy work.

The out-of-work cotton weavers of Carlisle actually asked the government to expatriate them to the colonies, if nothing could be done for them at home. The House of Commons spokesman "deeply lamented the distresses, but that it most impolitic to interfere between workmen and their masters." Shades of Mr. Carr! Yet the government was spending many thousands of pounds every year exporting male and female convicts to the colonies, and characterised helping honest workmen to emigrate as "most impolitic."

What impressed me in reading about those times was the apparent callousness, brutality and ignorance people displayed in dealing with problems of human behaviour. Female convicts marked for transportation were brought from their various provincial prisons in heavy chains, with lacerated wounds, to the port of embarkation, and herded into convict ships like cattle, without protection from sailors and guard soldiers.

Their condition on arrival at Botany Bay was just as revolting, according to the disclosures of the Reverend Marsden, described in the debate raised by Mr. Bennet, who further described the overcrowding on these convict slave ships of six men to a crib measuring 6 ft. by 5½ ft.

At the Middlesex Sessions a boy of eight, James Sweatman, was indicted for stealing a linen garment from a clothes line. It was stated that this was a common habit of his, and on being questioned, he seemed wholly unconscious of any offence. He told a pitiful tale about his mother's death which was proved to be false. The boy's mother said that from a very early age he was devoted to stealing, saw nothing wrong in it, and she had laboured to repress the habit. The jury found the boy guilty, sentenced him to three months' imprisonment and to be well flogged while in prison. The verdict did not affect him and he walked out of court to the prison quite unconcerned. No doubt the judge and jury thought the Devil was in the boy and the whipping would effect a cure.

The Resurrection men were brought to Court for trafficking in dead bodies to the hospitals for anatomical experiments. From the Sutton Carshalton Churchyard it was disclosed in court that of 20 bodies buried in one portion of the churchyard it had since been discovered 16 of them had been stolen away.

There was the case of the Rector of St. Andrews, Holborn, who refused burial to a woman because she had been placed in the newly invented iron coffin, suitably padlocked, and in consequence the body lay unburied for many months as a result of this legal and clerical wrangle.

The News discussed the case of the "poor clergy" and discovered that the Incumbent of All Hallows Church in the City had asked for an increase in his salary of £500 a year and yet had engaged a curate to do his job and paid him £50 a year. The parson of St. Michael's, in the City, had never read the prayers in his parish church, yet received £500 a year and paid a curate £50 to do all his work. It was found that 25 out of 35 incumbencies, some running to £1,200 and £2,000 per annum, were occupied by pluralists employing underlings to do the work at salaries of not more than £80 p.a.

Gruesome details

Throughout the pages of the journal there are accounts of public executions, the reporters going into all the gruesome details of the scaffold, the prayers of the clergy, the victims' reactions, the drop, the cutting down of the body, the disposal of the same to the hospitals for dissection, and the immense crowds who assembled for such executions.

For robbery of a gold watch in Whitechapel a youth of 17 named Knight was executed at Newgate. (A lad of 11 was transported to Botany Bay for five years for robbery.) At Edinburgh County Hall the public executioner made a terrible mess of his job, the victim only suspended so that his toes touched the platform on the drop. A cry of "murder" went up from the watching crowd, who raided the scaffold, cut the prisoner down, and gave him medical attention. The military arrived and took over and the whole ceremony was gone through again, amidst the shouts of anger from the crowd. The second drop proved fatal. The public executioner was dismissed for incompetence.

It is interesting to note here that in the ten years between 1820 and 1830 the number of executions totalled 792. At the Kent Assizes in March 1819, 36 persons were sentenced to death, though only two were finally executed: James Morgan (age 39) for stealing sheep from a neighbouring farmer and William Bowra (age 19) for highway robbery with savage violence. The rest were transported to Australia.

Robert Dean, a half-wit, apparently, was hanged from the top of Horsemonger Lane Gaol and his execution attracted an immense crowd, we are told. Dean had got the idea of "this wicked world" and took the life of his

infant daughter as less sinful than the life of his sweetheart Sarah, which act he said he had intended originally to perform. He had spent most of his jail sentence seeking religion and praying and being visited by many clergy. He regretted, he said, that he was going to a place where there was no gnashing of teeth; he would love to take his beloved Sarah with him as she would now be exposed to a very wicked world. Before they put the noose round his neck he shouted to the crowd below, "Where is Voltaire now? . . . in Hell! Where is Tom Paine now? . . . in Hell, God have mercy upon them." The gaping multitude below suitably responded with "Amen" at the drop, and then went on their way carousing in the "locals."

A MIRACULOUS DICTIONARY

J. TROWER

The Rev. Dr. E. Cobham Brewer (1810-1897), who spent a lifetime on research of various types, was ordained in the Anglican Church at the age of 26 but turned to literature—mainly educational reference books. The one under discussion is his *Dictionary of Miracles*, published in London in 1897. Mostly Catholic miracles are dealt with and his authorities when dealing with that brand are usually popes, cardinals, archbishops, and suchlike; and there appears to be something to suit every conceivable taste.

For instance one that may suit a modest fisherman was when our old friend Saint Francis Xavier, while on a sea voyage, was overtaken by a storm which threatened to wreck the ship. He immediately calmed the sea with his crucifix but it accidentally dropped overboard. The next day when the saint went ashore a crab leaped out of the sea and went straight over to him carrying the crucifix devoutly, and in an upright direction between its claws. The crab returned immediately to the sea; Xavier was so thankful that he crossed his arms and fell down praying for half an hour. (Whether or not the prayer was to the crab is not clear.) Anyway, these facts were given by a cardinal in a speech before Pope Gregory XV on the canonisation of Xavier.

The stone and cement house in Nazareth in which Mary, Joseph and baby Jesus lived was transported overhead by angels to Fiume in Dalmatia; it remained there for three and a half years and was then shifted by the same method to Loreto in Italy. The present writer has made two pilgrimages to this holy village; it is an eye-opener—and certainly a purse-opener. It appears that the house lasted there for only eight months because the locality was then infested with brigands (of another variety). The angels then dropped it at a third place for four months when a repeat performance brought it to the present site of "violent winds and torrential rain." For protection an exceptionally strong wall was built around the house together with a lean-to supporting the building, but, according to one Father Riera, soon after the job was completed the Virgin pushed both wall and additions away. It seems that Mary reckoned it was a no-confidence motion on her ability to cope with such trivial things as gales and the like.

Jumping bones and angelic arms

Relics of Saint Briocus, who died in England, were requested by a father superior, and a couple of ribs, an arm and a vertebra were sent to him. As soon as he took these old bones into a cathedral they started jumping for joy at such an honour. When St. William, a one-armed

peasant died, his hand refused to be nailed down; it kept pushing through the coffin. An archbishop ordered it to be cut off and afterwards many miracles were performed by merely showing it to people. Elsewhere we are told that St. William was actually born with only one arm, but had received a second one from angels while attending his sheep. The day after the coffin was buried the heaven-sent arm was found raised above the ground. This arm was also put to good use; it concentrated on the cure of specific medical complaints although it was versatile enough to put out a fire which threatened a whole town. In 1852 Pope Pius IX pronounced these genuine miracles; also five years before, the Bishop of Gap had inspected this seven hundred-year-old arm (the one delivered by angels) and verified that the skin had the discolouration of great age.

We are also given thumb-nail sketches of a dozen saints who were not unduly worried after their heads were cut off by executioners. Some of them walked a mile or two with them either tucked under their arms or carried in their hands. One crossed a river; another, more sociable than the rest, mixed freely with the crowd. St. Hilarian carried his to a fountain and washed it thoroughly before taking it home to his mother. Saint Leo, Archbishop of Rouen, picked his head up and without any fuss carried it for more than a mile and buried it. Although these must have been trying times for all concerned it must be conceded that notwithstanding all the blood and confusion there is no hint of anybody losing his head.

Range of relics

A few of the countless relics claimed to be existence are: a finger of the Holy Ghost; two heads of John the Baptist; a phial of the sweat of St. Michael when he contended with Satan; some of the rays of the guiding star which appeared to the wise men of the East; a rib of the "word made flesh"; and a flame of the bush which Moses beheld burning (the Bishop of Metz claimed that he was in possession of this flame).

The number of Catholic saints at the time of publication of *A Dictionary of Miracles* would have been around thirty thousand—an average production rate of fifteen or sixteen per year. Then there were the countless near saints who did not quite make the grade through lack of quantity and/or quality of miracles; and with these, of course, Dr. Brewer was not concerned. He cites a few Muslim, Presbyterian and other miracles but they are not the same quality as those of the Vatican brand. The magicians or yogis and fakirs of India "acquire an apparent

power over the laws of nature which to the uninitiated seems miraculous. Probably there is not a single 'miracle of saints' in all this book which they would not be able to imitate . . ."

Those who are conversant with the writings of those talented magicians, the Maskelyns and associates, will recall the challenges to any Spiritualist or kindred religionist to put on any phenomenon he, she, or they desired and it would not only be duplicated by them but improved upon, not by supernatural means but by natural methods—and with the lights on.

REVIEWS

BOOK

CHRONICLES OF WASTED TIME Vol. 1 The Green Stick by Malcolm Muggeridge. Collins, £3.

Malcolm Muggeridge's rake's progress from atheist background to the Festival of Light ought to be an awful warning to all progressive parents, those whom the Hampstead Bookshop used to menace in the old days with the notice, "Progressive Parents—Please Keep Children on Lead." His father, H. T. Muggeridge was the first Labour councillor in Croydon, and subsequently Labour M.P. in the 1929 parliament; a self-confessed atheist in the days when this meant being ostracised by the respectable, an active street-corner socialist in the days when this meant being refused a partnership with his firm. He was an indefatigable do-gooder, and his endeavours in local and national politics quite certainly improved the quality of life if not of his contemporaries, then of their children. It is reasonable to suppose that in his few idle moments, he might have hoped that his son would follow in his footsteps. In this wish he was certainly disappointed. Far from espousing atheism, Malcolm Muggeridge appears to have had a naturally religious temperament (in the way that many of us have naturally agnostic temperaments): "Despite the agnosticism of my home and upbringing I cannot recall a time when the notion of Christ and Christianity was not enormously appealing to me . . . what appealed to me were the wild extravagances of faith." This admission contrasts curiously with his denunciations of modern credulity, self-deception, make-believe and wish-fulfilment, with which the book is liberally scattered. Evidently, what I believe is Truth; what you believe is wish fulfilment. From religion it was a relatively short step to making a fortune in the 'media', the renunciation of worldliness and materialism, and the Festival of Light.—Strictly in that order.

The book is brilliantly written, extremely funny, and quite merciless. Little Christian charity is evident in his vignettes of his friends and colleagues. No doubt this is why they are so entertaining. Starting with his mother, whom he obviously detested, Muggeridge ruthlessly and usually cruelly dissects the Webbs (his portrait of Beatrice deserves to be read alongside Leonard Woolf's equally devastating but juster one), Kingsley Martin, his journalistic colleagues in Moscow during the Thirties, and his in-laws. Beatrice Webb's sister, whose daughter Muggeridge married, was a notable eccentric, and appallingly outspoken in the grand Whig style. Totally lacking in self-consciousness, she did whatever she felt like, whenever she

felt like it, impervious to her surroundings. On one occasion she fell asleep on a tombstone in a country churchyard. "Nor was she in the least abashed when she came to, and found me standing there and staring at her." The vacillating liberalism of *The Guardian*, for which Muggeridge worked for three years, is sharply delineated. C. P. Scott is the villain of the piece: "His passion for freedom varied in direct ratio with the distance from Manchester of those demanding it." He was eventually succeeded as editor by W. P. Crozier, "a Nonconformist who had lost his faith but retained its scaffolding of self-denial." Crozier was a supporter of MacDonald's National Government, until Muggeridge persuaded the Scott family to reverse this soul-destroying editorial policy, and a tireless suppresser of all unpalatable news emanating from Soviet Russia.

Muggeridge's year in Moscow between 1932 and 1933, when the book ends, was obviously a searing experience, and one that may explain much of his later behaviour. All his reports home to *The Guardian* were drastically cut and sub-edited, so as not to shatter too many cosy liberal delusions at home at a time when all progressive persons (with a few notable exceptions such as Russell, though Muggeridge does not mention this) were prepared to swallow anything "however preposterous . . . villainous . . . obscurantist" in order to be able to go on believing in the essential goodness of the Soviet State. This, of course, is the essential nature of blind faith and why it is so dangerous. Muggeridge does not make this connexion.

One mystery remains: how can the savage and witty dissector of the Webbs bring himself to march under the banner of Mary Whitehouse today? Perhaps the next volume will explain it all.

MADELEINE SIMMS

PAMPHLET

LAWS AGAINST STRIKES by Otto Kahn-Freund and Bob Hepple. Fabian Society (Research Pamphlet No. 305), 85p.

The combination of strikes, galloping inflation and complete economic stagnation is hardly a happy one. Would legislation against strikes make any difference, or represent a move towards a solution? Messrs. Kahn-Freund and Hepple, both experts in international labour law, are quite sure that it would not. For them, the real bogey is the Industrial Relations Act of 1971. They argue that the Act infringes the freedom to strike, which is a fundamental human right recognised by law in France and Italy. They criticise the Act for the new principle that any person organising a strike who is not an agent of a registered trade union may be guilty of an "unfair industrial practice" if he induces other parties to break their contracts of employment. What this means is that leaders of unofficial strikes could be legally liable under the Act, though the case law established by the Law Lords' decision in the recent container dispute suggests that the unions will ultimately be held responsible for the actions of their shop stewards, not the stewards themselves.

At times, there seems to be some confusion in the argument, notably on the question of strikes and breach of contract. In French law, participation in a strike does not break the contract of employment, but merely suspends it. The authors concede that this principle, which they see as a basic guarantee of the right to strike, has "perhaps"

been conceded in section 147(2) of the new Act. Yet on their interpretation of the Act the authors think that the employer is able to dismiss his workers, with notice, if they strike. The point may perhaps be that only unofficial strikers may be liable to this penalty, but I would have liked more clarity here. Similarly, in their discussion of the law on picketing, the authors are critical of the very mild restriction imposed by the Act, namely that legal protection should be removed from picketing outside the worker's home. This they see as a subtle threat to the right, enshrined in the European Convention on Human Rights, to freedom of expression and communication. Other people, including myself, will see it as affording protection against economic coercion. To denounce this part of the Act on the grounds that it infringes freedom seems very selective, in view of the way in which the right of peaceful picketing given by the Trade Disputes Acts was grossly abused during the recent miners' strike.

The real strength of this pamphlet lies in its detailed analysis of the weaknesses and ambiguities of the Industrial Relations Act compared to continental legislation. This, incidentally, clashes with another point made by the authors, that too much of the Act consists of foreign strike law inappropriately imported into the different social conditions of Britain. For instance, one glaring anomaly in the British legislation is the extent of damages awardable against non-registered unions following an unlawful strike. It is clearly wrong that damages given against the union could be infinite, without regard to the gravity of the particular offence. And, as the authors rightly point out, much of the Act will place the courts in the invidious position of having to devise equitable case law in a field where their own particular expertise may not be relevant.

Where I would take issue with Kahn-Freund and Hepple is that their pamphlet is totally negative. To reiterate that the right to strike is fundamental is all very well, but does not get us much further to a solution which might prove acceptable in a democracy. The authors maintain that the effect of legislation in industrial relations must always, and necessarily, be limited; and still more strongly, they assert that those who exceed this limit, which they do not define, place themselves outside the democratic tradition.

Now all this may be good cheer-leading stuff, but is hardly constructive. And not only is the negative stance of the authors contradicted by some of their examples (in Sweden, stoppages of work and other "offensive" actions are prohibited during the term of a collective agreement, and most commentators have observed that this legal framework has helped to create an industrial climate in which strikes are less quickly resorted to). But, furthermore, what is quite obvious is that the authors do not take the strike problem seriously. Finally, no government can uphold the right to strike to the complete exclusion of all other rights, notably the right of the community to freedom from repeated, arbitrary disruption of essential services such as the railways.

PHILIP HINCHLIFF

THEATRE

SUMMERFOLK by Maxim Gorki. Unity Theatre.

A new translation of Gorki's *Summerfolk* is being staged at the Unity Theatre, and a cast of professionals has been assembled to tackle the production of this difficult piece which is set in Russia at the turn of the century.

Although the cast make a noble effort to portray the emotional undercurrents in a community of idle and frustrated summer villa tenants, the production falls short technically, with poor lighting and costuming, deficiencies which detract from the full enjoyment of the accomplished and energetic acting by this large cast. Basically I felt this play was too ambitious for the obvious financial limitations of the company. Such plays as require rich costuming and sets as an essential part of the production can really only be staged effectively by subsidised civic theatre companies.

However, *Summerfolk*, reminiscent of more than one of Chekov's works, puts the author Gorki on an equal footing with this other great Russian writer; both are experts in the art of commentary on the useless bored existence of the Russian upper classes before the Revolution. The acting is confident and maintains the drama throughout, with Anne Godley and David Stockton heading a strong cast who battle nobly against a number of technical hitches, which may iron themselves out after a few performances.

LINDSEY HARRIS.

LETTERS

World Government Again

In his attack on my world government beliefs (letters, 9 December) Pat Sloan tries to make our flesh creep by tales of the directors of international companies taking over the world (including Russia and China?). If this is true then obviously we need world government "in the open" to control the international companies. The national governments cannot do it because the international companies operate in more than one country and Mr. Sloan says they "wield more power than many national governments." Mr. Sloan has merely produced one more argument for world government; and it follows that by refusing to work for world government and attacking those who do the Marxists have helped the international companies in their nefarious designs.

However, Mr. Sloan will be glad to hear I have been taking an interest in the giant international corporations for a long time. In particular I have been making a study of the giant oil companies which are probably the most powerful capitalist corporations in existence. As proof of my interest in this matter I refer Mr. Sloan to my letter of 15 April where I quote G. W. Stocking's book *Middle East Oil* in the controversy over my Lenin article (if the memory is not too painful!). My studies indicate clearly that, far from advancing to the control of the world, the oil corporations are having difficulty in coping with the relatively weak governments of the Middle East. The November number of *Petroleum News Service* contains a gloomy prophecy that in ten years time OPEC will be able to become a "gigantic producers' cartel" with control over the oil of the Middle East.

Mr. Sloan's letter is so typical of the Marxist outlook: a book suggests that capitalists are doing dreadful things—and at once this is accepted and other possibilities are disregarded. We must not think for ourselves, we must just repeat the dear old dated thoughts of dear old dated Marx. Ideas newer than 1848, like world government, must not be talked about. Has Mr. Sloan really "studied what is going on" himself? I have really tried to understand Marxism (for example, by reading Lenin's *Imperialism*); has Pat Sloan ever tried to understand the world government position? When he gives genuine evidence of doing so it will be time for him to tell me what books to read.

Meanwhile I see Peter Cadogan is talking about "shallow empiricism" again. What's shallow about it? Empiricism has its part to play in thought. Better be empiricist than muddled.

I. S. Low.

Muslims, R.I. and Eurocentricity

Charles Byass (letters, 9 December) asks whether I still believe that there is such a thing as being a victim of R.I. and whether I heartily deplore R.I. as stated three and a half years ago in *The Freethinker*.

Yes, I think I do. Then are the children of Muslims to be given an equal right to be such victims, Mr. Byass asks. This presents

one with a question of choice. If no right to R.I. in schools exists for Muslim children then they will either be withdrawn with all the difficulties this can cause for the child; or they can stay and learn how much superior every Christian regards himself to every other faith-holder. The Muslim's indoctrination will not stop at R.I.; in history he will learn of the blessings which Christian, western Christian civilisation brought with gun, Bible and commerce. He will be given a Eurocentric view of the world and little or nothing will be said of the Muslim contribution to the Renaissance (among other things) by the preservation of the knowledge of Greek culture. In short, he will be ripe for conversion—not to secularism, but to Christianity—which will appear to achieve for him a closer identification with the western, whitish man. Alternatively, or even simultaneously, he may become ashamed of his Asian background and may even, temporarily, believe that he is inferior. If he strays into the secular-humanist movement he will be urged to read Winwood Reade which will confirm that racialism is at least as strong among these people as among Christians.

This then is why I feel that R.I. in schools for Muslims will protect them from greater evils, Christianity or secular racialism; and there is little to choose between the two. I hope that Charles Byass finds this answer adequate. GERALD SAMUEL.

Religious and Political Indoctrination

George D. Roger (letters, 16 December) seeks an assurance that my letter in the 2 December *Freethinker* was written in a personal capacity.

I wrote the letter on my own initiative; to that extent it was personal. I signed it as Secretary of the National Secular Society, and the other officers and Executive Committee members have not dissociated themselves from it; to that extent the letter was official.

We cannot do more than deplore attempts by parents to indoctrinate their children in religious or political beliefs. But we can, and do, protest against turning community institutions such as schools into part-time mosques and churches.

WILLIAM McILROY,

General Secretary, National Secular Society.

This correspondence is now closed. (Ed.)

Styles, Titles and Sexual Equality

I would like to suggest to readers of *The Freethinker* that, as a corollary of a belief and practice in egalitarianism between the sexes, and the erosion of the constricting conventions surrounding gender rôles, the forms of address and designations that indicate gender should also be abandoned where they have no direct relevance to sexual physiology or sexual relationships.

Courtesy titles such as Mr., Mrs. Miss, Sir and Madam are the obvious forms of address which indicate the sex or marital status (and little else) when in nearly all cases those characteristics are entirely irrelevant to the purposes of the communication. More relevant and logical would be the capacity of the person addressed, for example, Editor, Doctor, Secretary.

Regrettably there are no blanket epicene courtesy titles in use such as were introduced during the French and Russian revolutions, namely, "Citizen" and "Comrade" respectively; but no doubt the use of either of these in Britain today would have political overtones unacceptable to much of the population.

More generally: the use of the terms "person/people" can easily replace such designations as "man/woman", "lady/gentleman", where the sex is not truly relevant. Likewise with (unnecessary) feminisations such as "artiste" and "actress". Even long-standing distinctions such as "husband/wife", "king/queen" could in most cases be replaced just as well by "spouse" and "monarch" respectively.

Assumptions in gender rôle are also popularly made, such as "housewife" where the terms "housekeeper" or "shopper", depending on context, would be more meaningful and accurate.

There may well be a danger of becoming obsessional over "de-genderisation", but its intelligent practice would undoubtedly assist in our general liberation from the even worse obsession our society has with gender identification in areas unrelated to sex itself. IAN CAMPBELL HARRIS.

For some while we have rather fancied the idea of reviving the title "Citizen". We are obliged to Cn. Harris for raising this matter. (Ed.)

Theology and Cruelty to Animals

In the B.B.C. Radio 4 programme *Any Questions* on 1 December the panel was asked why cruelty to animals seemed less common in Britain than in the rest of Europe. Lord Soper said that the greater cruelty to animals (on the continent) existed among Roman Catholics, because the Catholic religion teaches that animals have no soul. (If I am not very much mistaken Lord Soper also said that he thought animals did have souls.)

This seems to be borne out by a passage in Bertrand Russell's *Unpopular Essays*. Russell wrote: "When the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals asked the Pope for his support, he refused it, on the grounds that human beings owe no duty to the lower animals, and that ill-treating animals is not sinful. This is because animals have no souls." R. STUART MONTAGUE.

The Editor comments:

There certainly seems to be some truth in this observation, though the issue is complicated by another factor, namely that city- and town-dwelling societies, which keep animals largely as pets, tend to be 'kinder' to them than peasant or agricultural communities, which rather regard animals as work machines or commercial investments for food or other products. Catholic countries, on the whole, fall into the latter category.

If Lord Soper does now believe that animals have souls he has started an interesting new heresy. Not a few freethinkers (including this editor) have been prompted to break with Christianity because it teaches that their pets, lacking souls, cannot join them in Heaven (or the other place). Further, we cannot but help notice that many 'humanists' manifestly prefer their cats to their fellow men (a sentiment with which we have some sympathy).

The Freethinker

If the silent majority could articulate its hunger and thirst for reality and truth, it would demand and have a daily *Freethinker* with a sufficiently large circulation to keep it going for ever.

In the present rather sad situation there is a grain of comfort in the fact that *The Freethinker* has to a very large extent completed the task for which it was founded. It was founded to defend the human rights of a small minority. In the course of time that small minority has become a large, if still inarticulate majority. People are no longer prosecuted or persecuted for professing atheism or humanism. Religion still generates waste of time and energy, but here in England no longer operates as a major cause of human misery. Priests can leave the Church and even bear witness against the Church without being treated as criminals or lunatics.

Finally there is some evidence that small journals have a better chance of survival than the more commercial type of publication that depends on Big Business. So there is ground for hope; no need for despair. PETER CROMMELIN.

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