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NEW MOVE TO END OATH-TAKING IN BRITISH COURTS

Oath-taking in courts of law may be abolished soon. Doubts about the wisdom of its continuance have been expressed in legal circles for some years and it is believed that the Church of England will not now oppose such a move. A spokesman said that "contemporary indifference to religion inevitably leads to oaths being casually sworn with consequently a diminished respect for the law". A consultative editor of *New Law Journal* said there is evidence that "juries regard as second rate evidence that is not supported by the traditional religious oath. . . . A secular declaration incorporating an undertaking to tell the truth under the pain of perjury proceedings is now favoured." The National Secular Society has sent a statement to the Home Office urging the abolition of oath-taking and its substitution by universal affirmation—a reform for which the organisation has campaigned for over a century.

The NSS declares that in the Middle Ages the taking of religious oaths may have been an effective deterrent against perjury, but in the 20th century this is no longer so. The ordinary criminal penalties of fines and imprisonment now carry far more weight with most people than do threats of hell-fire.

The general upsurge of scepticism in the 19th century resulted in the Evidence Amendments Acts (1869 and 1870) and Oaths Act (1888)—the latter giving freethinkers the right to admit unbelief without forfeiting the right to give evidence. But there have been many significant social changes since 1888, and the Oaths Act is no longer sufficient. In the interest of both convenience and justice, it is necessary to amend the present unsatisfactory situation—unsatisfactory even from the viewpoint of religionists, since the majority of those who take the oath do so casually or hypocritically, and without comprehension. As for the minority who refuse to take the oath whether on the ground of having no religious faith or because oath-taking is contrary to their religious beliefs, they may thereby invite prejudice, or at least fear that this is so.

Britain is no longer a Christian country in either

legal or social terms. Not only has there been a widespread growth of unbelief and indifference to the Christian faith, but immigration from Asia and Africa has meant that other world religions must also be catered for. Emphasising religious differences through the ritual of oath-taking tends to fortify existing racial prejudice.

Prejudice in Court

Although we now live in what a Church leader has described as "the post-Christian era", many non-believing witnesses are still reluctant to avail themselves of the right to affirm. Indeed, solicitors often advise non-believing witnesses and defendants to take the oath. Judges have been known to warn juries to be cautious of evidence not given on oath. Also, during a case in the 1960s the Chairman of London Sessions refused, illegally, to hear the evidence of a witness who, as a member of the secular humanist movement, sought to affirm. (This refusal later formed the basis of a successful appeal.) Although there has been a welcome decline recently in such high-handed behaviour on the Bench, the absence of unfavourable comment by judges and magistrates does not necessarily mean that they or juries are still not prejudiced against a witness who indicates that he has no religion. Universal affirmation would make it unnecessary for a witness to reveal his religious belief or unbelief. Regard for truth would not suffer; indeed, it would surely be strengthened.

Courts would doubtless be sympathetic to anyone who, as he recited the words of affirmation, held in his hand a copy of a religious book or an object of piety. It is unlikely, however, that many would feel the need to do so, since the form of affirmation does not undermine anyone's religious position.

Finally, the National Secular Society trusts that ending the custom of oath-taking in courts of law would soon be followed by its abolition also in Parliament, in making affidavits, and in all spheres of public life and national ceremonies.

Professor Hyman Levy, whose death was announced in the February issue of "The Freethinker", was a distinguished academic and a tireless worker for the freethought movement during the last 50 years. He was a former Director of the Rationalist Press Association and a member of the National Secular Society. In a centenary year message to the NSS in 1966 Professor Levy declared that in the hundred years that had elapsed since the Society's foundation "the method of experimental enquiry and adaptation of our thinking to the necessities of the physical world—a process so fully exemplified in scientific theory—have been thoroughly vindicated. Every scientific prediction, every exposure of scientific law, and every practical application provides evidence that metaphysical assumptions have no place in a rational explanation of natural processes."

When one sits down to write about a departed friend there is usually but one subject to mention: his profession, his hobby, his contribution in one particular field. Hyman Levy requires much more, so much more that probably no one is adequately equipped to do him justice. He has been described as a great mathematician, "a thinker, a writer and in a certain sense also a man of action". He was also a politician with a remarkably keen sense of the meaning of events, and a philosopher who loved to discuss the most abstruse problems. To his friends, his colleagues and above all to his students he was a great human being who could use his great sense of humour to great effect even against himself. He once made a remark which may have been his own epitaph on himself: "I was expelled from the Communist Party, I was expelled from the Labour Party—so I suppose I must have had some quality to manage such a double."

It was a quality the secular and humanist movements knew and delighted in for nearly 70 years, for he was still a boy, as he himself has described, when he gave up his parents' religion and began his search for rational beliefs. In these years he discovered many scientific truths which confirmed his opposition to all forms of religion. He spoke and wrote against all forms of unscientific thought which, he said, must be seen "as an anachronism that must presently be swept aside to make way for a new order of society, in which science and understanding can play its full part towards the creation of an abounding civilisation".

Hyman Levy was born in 1889 and educated in Edinburgh. He completed his university training just in time to spend the first world war at the

National Physical Laboratory, involved in the new subject of aerodynamic research. For him that was full of intriguing mathematical problems and it remained an abiding interest. His work was recognised by his appointment in 1920 as an assistant professor at the Imperial College where he spent the rest of his working life and where he went on playing a part after retirement. His students have made it clear that as a teacher he exhibited qualities of greatness, even if he had done nothing else. But that was not enough. Science, mathematical or any other branch, had to be seen in its relation to all other aspects of human existence. In his really great book, *Modern Science*, he discussed the place of science in history and in "the human struggle to achieve security and certainty in an ever-changing universe". In the course of that book, as in all his work, the need for political thought and action based on scientific knowledge and experiment, was constantly stressed. If man succeeded in doing this he might get beyond his present irrational position in which "he studies in detail intricate methods of increasing the span of life and he devotes his time to the design of instruments for its destruction".

A Fighter for Free Thought

Having given up the religion of his forefathers Levy was ready to enter into debate with anyone who tried to defend organised religion, who believed in the indoctrination of school children, or who supposed that a man chosen to be pope could be infallible in passing on the archaic ideas of one of man's ancient tribal gods. On the platform of secular and humanist groups he delighted audiences with his knowledge and wit. He was in great demand as a speaker and he treated every audience as a group who deserved the best, a prepared lecture with a definite message but shot through with spontaneous humour. He loved a good question for then he could bring his whole analytical power to it, drawing out any inherent false assumptions, indicating how many facets had to be considered and coming down, always, on a scientific interpretation. When he had a good story to tell he expected to enjoy it as much as his hearers and lead the laughter himself.

This indicated his great humanity. He did not speak against religious beliefs to persuade people to abandon something they might consider valid or from which they might draw comfort, but because his scientific mind could accept nothing that was not susceptible to proof. He might even have been hesitant about the label "Freethinker" for while he wanted thought to be free from all restraints,

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Are the Jews as ethnically distinct as the orthodox claim they are? "Marrying out" has been widely practised throughout the centuries and large number of Jews all over the world are physically and socially indistinguishable. Their prayers for the return of the Messiah are unlikely to be answered . . . if only because of the impossibility of establishing a candidate's descent from King David.

Most races and nations, especially whites, are much more mixed than some of them like to think; but Jews, as Israelites before them, never were ethnically distinct. To be a Jew is just like being a Freemason or a Spurs supporter, practising the faith, affiliating and identifying with the brotherhood, feeling oneself to be one of the group, and being accepted by it. Nothing more.

Abram was called a Hebrew—i.e. one from beyond, a stranger. He came from Ur, we are told, which accounts for elements of Sumerian mythology being taken over into that of Israel. For instance, Eden turns out to be a Sumerian word meaning the green, open land between towns or city-states. And there was the Sumerian Noah, Utu-napishtim, complete with Flood and Ark and Ararat.

Abram's time at Ur was probably the Isin-Larsa or Early Babylonian, with a mixed population there speaking a Semitic language. When he smashed his father's idols he was perhaps committing the most monstrous act of filial rebellion ever recorded. My sympathies are entirely with the outraged Terah. What the propagandised Old Testament misses is that people were not such morons as to worship the graven image *itself*; it represented, of course, an abstract, spiritual deity. Owing, wearing and carrying these images brought protection, put one in a group, and provided endless conversation, comparing favourite gods and their relative reward- ingness: religion was a proper, social, human activity. The less endowed could trivialise it, one supposes; for the more spiritual and intellectual, it could be a basis for aspirations towards some mystical union with the Whole, a universal unity. Better for many than our alienation, our cosmic loneliness, our feelings of having been flung into a madhouse at random and by accident. So I don't knock religion, though I would be a freethinker if anyone could be free.

The switch to austerity was probably a mistake, which is still with us—the depersonalised deity, the carving of whose likeness was taboo. It is an early example of religious masochism, taking pleasure away. Hegel speculates that the Nazarene later

tried to replace the master-slave relationship with father-son; but tradition won, and Christians still resented Jews and persecuted them for foisting upon them an alien and impossible god.

Abram, then, was not a Jew. He was of the mixed population of Ur, in Sumer. He took a wife of his fancy, their son Isaac took two, and his son Jacob (Israel) four. Fortunately, the implied geometric progression was discontinued at that point. Truth to tell, Israel (Jacob) did not marry the hand- maid and the housemaid. Men's Lib was unquestioned. God, weak on ethics, had accepted guidance from Abraham in the matter of Sodom and Gomorrah; but, left to himself, saw fit to reward Israel over the mess-of-pottage incident, in which Israel cheated both his blameless brother Esau (Edom) and his blind, dying father, Isaac. Such was the father of the Israelites, the sire of twelve sons and 13 tribes, none of the sons (like their immediate ancestors) yet being able to marry "in", even if they wanted to. The sons were equal, whichever side of the sheets begot, except for Joseph. There was always a favourite. Joseph got two tribes, one for each of his sons. Maybe none of them existed, please God.

Integration

Joseph's brothers, our venerable patriarchs, jealous of Daddy's pet, sold him into slavery to a passing Ishmaelite. (A bit early perhaps to speak of Ishmaelites, Ishmael himself being only their great-uncle.) They then, as you recall, blooded Joseph's famous coat with goat's blood and passed it off to Jacob as evidence of Joseph's death. So Israel reaped as he sowed, cruelly deceived in his turn by his own sons—a point not stressed, or even made, in Genesis. He is said to have been extremely upset.

Why did I first say "Abram" and then "Abraham"? If you understand the language, the longer name is a sort of promotion, a heavenly accolade, like Saul to Paul.

The Israelites are launched, then; and, as the generations unfold, they can marry in with less degree of incest, but they often marry out, exchanging members all the time with the general stock of population, and when they leave Egypt integrating the other slaves or mixed multitude, led by one Moses (an Egyptian, in every probability) who married a lady of Midian. Note the mixed *multi- tude* who join the club at this time.

They became a "stiff-necked" people, whose prophets called them so because they preferred taking life less seriously. They liked a roll in the hay wherever it could be found, and thought the old gods more fun, tending to gravitate to the

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More Irish Women Choose Abortion

An increasing number of women are coming to Britain from the Republic of Ireland in order to have their pregnancies terminated, according to a report in the *Irish Medical Journal*. It is believed that possibly 80 per cent of them are unmarried and that half are between the ages of 20 and 24. Indeed there may be many more, for a considerable number of those who come to this country for an abortion give British addresses rather than their address in Ireland. In 1968 only 64 women who had legal abortions in Britain gave addresses in the Republic of Ireland. Within five years the number had increased to 1,193 and it is estimated that possibly 2,000 Irish women came to Britain for that purpose.

The Roman Catholic Church, whose ban on contraception has been the cause of so many unwanted pregnancies, is now considering the introduction of a special advisory service. Catholics in England and Wales are already operating a scheme to help any expectant woman, married or unmarried, facing an unwanted pregnancy. But the condition that she allows the baby to be born is invariably applied.

Foreign women visiting Britain for abortion have provided some of the best stories for the anti-abortion lobby. Public objection to their coming has been based on dislike of exploitation. But neither newspapers encouraging this xenophobia nor Parliamentary opponents have suggested the setting up

of proper channels to help them. This would be far more useful than attempting to ban them if unscrupulous exploitation is the real concern.

Following Britain's Lead

During 1974, a considerable number have reached the British Pregnancy Advisory Service. In 1974, its non-profit-making service was extended to 3,500 European women as well as to 650 from Northern Ireland, 600 from the Irish Republic and 550 from Scotland. Of the Europeans, 3,400 were residents of France but this figure will drop during 1975 because of new French legislation. Already at the end of January 1975, BPAS had seen 120 fewer Frenchwomen than in January 1974. This pattern will be repeated nationally and in all probability the "foreign problem" will cure itself in the very near future.

Last year saw the first reduction in numbers of non-residents having abortions in England and it would not be surprising if there was a further fall of some 40,000 in 1975. For not only France has changed its law, but Austria too: and in West Germany new legislation is due. It is likely to be only the predominantly Roman Catholic countries, such as Italy, Spain and the Irish Republic, that will, as in 1974, send increasing numbers.

The BPAS has announced that 23 per cent of women who came to their abortion clinics during the second half of 1974 were Roman Catholics.

Saving the Land for the Living

The Cremation Society's Year Book and Directory of Crematoria provides a vast amount of information and statistics, with the meticulous care and attractive presentation for which all of that organisation's publications are deservedly praised. The Society celebrated its centenary last year, and the fact that there are now 216 crematoria operating in Britain and that approximately 60 per cent of disposals are by cremation is a tribute to the foresight of the founders of the cremation movement and to the dedication of its workers. They had to overcome the enormous prejudice of the clergy and other professions. But the true value of the Cremation Society's work is at last recognised in this era of population explosion and shortage of land for the living.

There is an interesting section on the Roman Catholic Church and cremation. The Church had forbidden the practice until twelve years ago, and prior to that time cremation was subjected to the vitriolic and ignorant abuse now reserved for contraception and voluntary euthanasia. The ban was lifted in 1963, but it was not until 1966 that a priest was permitted to conduct a ceremony in a crema-

torium. The recorded figures for Roman Catholic cremations in 1974 in Britain was 11,319.

Readers are advised how to proceed when arranging a secular funeral ceremony, in a section of the Year Book which is obviously based on a National Secular Society leaflet.

● **The Cremation Society's Year Book and Directory of Crematoria costs £2 (including postage) and is obtainable from The Cremation Society of Great Britain, Woodcut House, Ashford Road, Hollingbourne, Maidstone, Kent, ME17 1XH.**

Hyman Levy: Man of Action

especially those of superstition, he wanted thought to be scientific. But he wanted that scientific thought to be applied to mankind and to all its problems, "to bring more justice and more humanity to our social existence". When he was disappointed with man's advance he used the disappointment as a spur to new action, and remained mentally alert as age advanced. His departure leaves a great gap in the humanist movement.

Which New Testament? The Ending of the Gospel of Mark

G. A. WELLS

(Continued from the March issue)

Professor Farmer, commenting on the end of Mark, says:

Mark 16: 9-20 contains promises of Jesus to which the Church has never succeeded in accommodating itself, except by unconscious repression. Most Christians do not know what these verses teach. They are seldom if ever expounded from the pulpit and almost never appealed to in didactic circumstances. Christians have long since learned to live with these promises by paying them no attention and to regard all efforts to take them seriously as bizarre acts of unfaith on the part of ignorant or misguided sectarians. But . . . how were the problems created for the Church by these verses dealt with in the early Church? (pp. 65-6).

Such problems did arise, for Porphyry's attack on Christianity included the proposal that candidates for priesthood or higher office in the Church should all drink a deadly drug, and the man who came to no harm to be given precedence over the rest. "And if they are not bold enough to accept this sort of test", says Porphyry, "they ought to confess that they do not believe in the things Jesus said". Christian apologists replied, predictably, that Jesus' words are not meant to be taken literally. Nevertheless, some Christians did not want them allegorized, and prized the possession of the promised gifts so much that they disturbed the peace and order of the Church. To them, two answers were possible: either to insist that properly ordained bishops are the sole custodians of all apostolic gifts, and to stress that these include casting out demons and laying on hands, while saying little or nothing about picking up serpents; or, alternatively, to suppress the relevant verses by omitting them from copies of Mark. In this way, it is possible to see how the practice of ending Mark without them could have arisen, and why they were nevertheless restored in later manuscripts. This restoration will have occurred once the authority of the local bishop and of the centrally organized Church was so great that the verses no longer posed any threat to Church peace and order.

All this evidence does not settle whether these verses were written by Mark or added to his gospel. Most scholars believe the latter, on the ground that the Mark used by Matthew and Luke as a source for their own gospels obviously ended at 16:8; for up to that point their resurrection narratives are clearly an adaptation of Mark's,

whereas from this point they diverge completely. Farmer, however, studies the style and vocabulary of Mark 16:9-20 in order to see whether they are typically Marcan. He finds some evidence in favour and some against Marcan authorship. For instance, in verse 15 the risen Jesus instructs the disciples to "go into all the world and preach the gospel to the whole creation". Now it is one of Mark's peculiarities that, unlike the other three evangelists, he follows Paul in using "the gospel" in this absolute sense. At Mark 10:29, for instance, Jesus encourages his followers to sacrifice all for the sake of "the gospel". (Such a statement, by the way, is unlikely to have been made by a historical Jesus, but could well have been put into his mouth by Mark in order to provide a Jesuine ruling for a problem acute in the persecuted Christian community for which the evangelist wrote.) On the other hand, Mark 16:10 is typically Johannine in style, and others of these final Marcan verses show links with the resurrection stories of other gospels. Now both the resemblances to and the differences from genuine Marcan style in these final verses would be intelligible if they were composed by a later writer who consciously sought to imitate certain features of Mark's vocabulary and syntax. But Farmer is able to show that some of the typically Marcan syntactical features found in these final verses are of a kind that one writer would scarcely notice in another, and which he would therefore not consciously imitate.

Without committing himself to a final decision, Farmer thinks that both the resemblances to and differences from Marcan style will be explained if we suppose these final verses to be Mark's own adaptation of an already existing written story. On this view, the echoes of the fourth and of other gospels are due to the fact that the older material, utilized by Mark in composing 16:9-20, consisted of tradition akin to that preserved in the resurrection stories found in other gospels. That the evangelist is here adapting and appending pre-Markan material would also account for the clumsiness with which these verses 9-20 follow verse eight. The subject of the verb of eight is plural (the two women, who are said to flee in fear); but the verb in nine is singular, and the subject (not expressly stated) must be understood to be Jesus: "Having risen [he] appeared first to Mary Magdalene, from whom he had cast out seven demons." While, then, Jesus is now the (unstated) subject, Mary Magdalene, who has been explicitly named in verse one, and whose behaviour

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There has developed in recent years a deeper appreciation of oral history as a contribution to our knowledge of the lives of past generations. At the present time a project on the working classes of Barrow and Lancaster is being carried out at the University of Lancaster Centre for North-West Regional Studies, where the author of this article is a Research Fellow. Her work is sponsored by the Social Council Research Council.

The Edwardian working class were in the main either ignored or misunderstood by their wealthier contemporaries. Harold Laski wrote: "The Edwardian poor have attracted little attention in imaginative literature and play almost no part in commonly held images of Edwardian England. But to look at the domestic lives of the poor both urban and rural is to shadow our picture of upper class and middle class life with horror and dismay." And on those occasions when the middle and upper classes did look at the domestic lives of the poor it was rarely with either horror or dismay; much more usually their attitude was one of patronising criticism more than tinged with the Victorian belief, so well described by George Bernard Shaw, that the greatest crime was poverty.

Oral history is now being used in an attempt to find out something of the truth about the Edwardian working classes. It is a very simple idea: old people are asked to talk about their childhoods; some talk more spontaneously than others, all at some time need the help of careful but tactful questioning.

One is asked repeatedly whether or not a historian can rely on this oral evidence, the questioners apparently forgetting that until a decade or so ago verbal testimony was regarded as reliable enough to send men to the gallows and is still used, of course, to send people to prison. But, it is argued, does not the passing of time distort the truth, and of course an interviewer has to be constantly looking for bias in the respondents. On the whole, however, old people are surprisingly objective, looking at the past neither with rose-coloured spectacles nor with the jaundiced eye of the confirmed cynic. There are exceptions and there are difficulties in interviewing an old person who has created a picture of the past to fit in and accord with his own personal political or philosophical view of life, carefully suppressing any evidence which may prove his theory to be superficial, bigoted or just wrong. Particular difficulty has been found with old people with extreme political views whether of the Right or the Left,

and others with either strongly evangelical or atheistic views. These respondents need to be questioned in detail about the actualities of their lives which sometimes provide a dramatic counterpoint to their philosophical views. But the biased respondent is rare and most oral evidence can be accepted as a very reliable historical source; the consistency of evidence within a series of interviews with one respondent and the continual corroboration of evidence between respondents is very impressive.

Gradually the evidence is being pieced together to provide a picture of working-class life which was never recorded in diaries, letters, account books or even newspapers of the day which tended to be more preoccupied with the Relief of Ladysmith than with the relief of the poor; or with the death of some obscure scion of the aristocracy than with the victims of a typhoid or scarlet fever epidemic in their own town.

The great value of the accumulating evidence is that it provides a much more complex picture of the past than is gleaned from documents like, for example, government reports. The evidence demolishes widely accepted stereotypes, and possibly most interesting of all, it suggests that well into this century very distinct patterns of social life existed in different areas of the British Isles, even within one county like Lancashire.

Living on Credit

Many of the questions are about diet and the answers illustrate the complexity of the truth. A government report in 1904 stated quite categorically that the working classes lived on a diet of bread, tea, herrings, and cheap cuts of meats. Seeborn Rowntree writing about the poor in York in 1901 regretted their refusal to eat cheap but nourishing foods like vegetable broths and porridge, but the working classes of Barrow and Lancaster (the areas currently being researched) fit neither the official government picture nor that of Rowntree. Their diet was infinitely varied, and relied to a large extent on the vegetables so scorned by the poor of York. Working-class wives also specialised in the kind of dishes like stews, hot-pots, broths and soups which are direct descendants of the peasants' cooking which many historians believe to have been lost completely at the time of the Industrial Revolution; the historians could well be right about textile areas but could be very wrong about smaller industrial towns where married women did not go out to work and where traditional cooking skills were handed down from mother to daughter.

Oral evidence shows that every working class family relied for some of the necessities of life on

free sources; many things were just not paid for. Many of the very poorest families lived on perpetual credit. There were always outstanding debts to the corner shop, or the landlord, or the doctor, or the undertaker; others who scorned debts as proving they had no class, lived off the land, collecting shellfish, berries, firewood, nettles (for beer), mushrooms and more obscure plants like sandphire. Some families fished and used this harvest to improve their own diets; others sold the surpluses to provide a useful second income. Others had gardens and allotments in which they grew fruit and vegetables or kept poultry. Thrifty housewives got their husbands to bring home (legally and illegally) cotton from the mill which was converted into curtains, babies' napkins and towels; flour bags became pillow-cases and towels, sacks were turned into doormats and the backs of peg rugs, the pile of which was cut up from old clothes. These, too, were converted into children's clothes. The great skill of North Lancashire men and women in living off the land and making something out of nothing suggests that carefully constructed statistics of wages and prices do not in fact give a very accurate picture of working-class standards of living because there were so many unquantifiable elements contributing towards those standards.

Excessive Drinking

There were other significant factors too like the skill and thrift of the housewife and, very importantly, the drinking habits of the father. Many of us growing up since the second world war have looked back to the Victorian and Edwardian teetotallers and, depending on our own circumstances, have regarded them as either hypocrites, killjoys or bad jokes. Listening to endless accounts of families "kept low" because the father drank leads one to revise one's opinions. It becomes self-evident that men earning one pound a week could not afford to spend even two shillings a week on beer if their families were to be kept from want; as one old man remarked: "They couldn't be pouring beer down their own throats and be putting food in their children's bellies at the same time." Even after 70 or 80 years, some old people remember with sadness or bitterness drunken fathers who became maudlin, or worse still who beat up their wives. One is no longer surprised to meet elderly respondents who are violently hostile to drinking any alcohol.

Father's drinking habits could well be the factor which forced a family into virtual destitution, but even in families where both parents were models of thrift and abstemiousness the shadow of acute poverty was always near. Because of the ingenious ways families found of augmenting meagre incomes few people faced starvation (except in periods of unemployment when only the charity soup-

Freethinker Fund

There was a slight increase in donations sent to the Fund during March. We extend our thanks to the following contributors: Anonymous, £1; Anonymous, 34p; A. M. Ashton, 34p; R. Brownlee, £9.30; Mrs V. Brierley, £8; J. L. Broom, £1; C. Byass, £1; J. H. Charles, £2; Mrs J. B. Coward, £1.60; W. R. Grant, £1.10; Miss P. Graham, £1.60; W. J. Glennie, 60p; D. F. Heath, 60p; D. Harper, £5; F. Howard, £3; E. J. Hughes, £1; G. M. Jones, 50p; Mrs M. Mephram, 60p; F. J. Pidgeon, £1.60; F. Pearson, £2; N. E. Smith, 34p; N. Sinnott, 60p; B. M. Sicgan, £3; W. G. Twigg, 66p; N. Toon, 84p. Total £47.62.

kitchens ensured some kind of existence). But few working-class families afforded much more than the bare necessities of life; food, clothing and shelter. Holidays in this region were not times for day-trips to Blackpool, but for visits to the corner shop to ask for more credit. At Christmas time children who found an orange and apple in their stocking regarded themselves as fortunate indeed; visits to the theatre were rare because they were expensive; homes had no books except those given as prizes at Sunday School. And yet their material and cultural poverty did not seem to make the Edwardian working classes spiritless and dull. Without a doubt individuals were continually supported, comforted, cheered and helped by their family, their neighbours, their workmates and in many cases their church.

Before 1914 other organisations were less important in providing supportive roles. Because of the hostility of the employers in a town like Lancaster, there were no labourers in trade unions. The situation was rather different in a town like Barrow with its craft-dominated industries. Most craftsmen were in trade unions, but it was only a minority who regarded their union as anything more than a Friendly Society which provided strike and sick pay in time of trouble. Similarly, the vast majority of those who joined the Co-operative movement did so because it provided one of the few ways they had of saving money—the dividend.

It was the cataclysm of the first world war, and the depression of the 1920s, which shattered many traditional social patterns and modes of thought, and started the working-class people of the North West and elsewhere on the path to more active participation in trade union and political affairs.

Bound volumes of "The Freethinker", 1974, are now obtainable at £2.70 (plus 24p postage and packing) from G. W. Foote & Company, 698 Holloway Road, London N19.

Of all the personal tragedies which have resulted from religious fervour in recent times it is difficult to recall a more bizarre and horrifying case than that of Michael Taylor, against whom the jury at Leeds Crown Court brought in a special verdict of not guilty of murdering his wife because of insanity.

There was never any doubt that Taylor killed his wife. He tore out her eyes and tongue and then ran naked through the streets of Ossett, Yorkshire. Yet Michael Taylor had been a devoted husband and father whose marriage to his wife Christine was described as "one long courtship". That was until he encountered a local organisation known as the Christian Fellowship Group. The group met to pray and to discuss the Bible. One member who "spoke in tongues" said that she was possessed by "the holy spirit". The prosecuting counsel declared that "this young woman's influence may well have played some part in Michael Taylor's ultimate derangement". Her father said afterwards that his daughter was "a true Christian who is guided and covered by Christ".

The Christian Fellowship Group was not a collection of long-haired hippies who had become stoned on Jesus. It consisted largely of staid, middle-aged people of the type who are to be found in church and chapel every Sunday morning. And it was in the vestry of an Anglican church that a night-long exorcism took place shortly before the tragedy occurred.

It has been claimed that the Taylor tragedy occurred because the clergymen who performed the exorcism were not qualified to do so and that the ceremony should be carried out only after permission has been obtained from the bishop of the diocese. Acceptance of this argument could lead to further tragedies for if bishops give such permission to "qualified persons" it will simply bestow respectability on what is nothing more than medieval mumbo jumbo. It will encourage ignorant men and women to meddle in problems which only the best available medical and scientific knowledge can possibly solve. But expecting the Christian churches to reject completely their belief in demons and in Satanism is tantamount to asking the Band of Hope to subsidise a brewery. Satan and Jesus are the Siamese twins of Christian theology. They depend upon each other for their existence and the churches depend on both of them for theirs.

Although demonism did not begin with Christianity it has flourished in every land that has been blighted by the shadow of the Cross. Christian belief in demons resulted in the persecution of heretics, witch-burnings and attacks upon every advance in science and medicine. Women and children are no longer burnt as witches, theology is no longer "queen of the sciences" and it is doubtful if a land-owner could be frightened by threats of hell-fire

into leaving his property to the Church. But Christianity remains the fount of superstition and social harm. The New Testament Jesus, who replaced God the creator as the most important component of the holy trinity after the onslaught of Darwinism in the last century, was a demonist who believed that evil spirits were the cause of disease and other calamities. It is illogical to accept him without accepting the existence of demons and devils. Jesus had personal conflicts with them and one of the principal powers he conferred on his followers was the power to cast out devils.

Today, Jesus is the ideal not only of muddled and well-meaning people, but also of the neurotic, the ignorant and the emotionally insecure. Let us hope that there will be no more Michael Taylors. But there is little cause for optimism so long as Christianity and other forms of religious superstition continue to influence the lives and actions of human beings.

Solicitors acting for Michael Litchfield and Susan Kentish, authors of "Babies for Burning", have written to the editor and to Jean Anderson, whose review of the book was published in the January issue, alleging that the review is libellous of their clients. The matter is now in the hands of the editor's and Miss Anderson's legal advisers.

ABORTION ACT—OF GOD

Last month, *The Lancet* reported the hypothesis of Professor Charles Lowe and Dr Colin Roberts that a woman's body is generally able to detect a malformed foetus and to abort it spontaneously—often before the woman is even aware that she is pregnant. Their evidence suggests that more than three-quarters of all human pregnancies end in early spontaneous abortion, which appears to be nature's method of quality control.

The two researchers comment: "If Nature resorts to abortion to maintain genetic stability by discarding as many as three in every four conceptions, it will be difficult for anti-abortionists to oppose abortion on moral and ethical grounds". Difficult, yes—but we know how practised they are in the manipulation of evidence.

The President of the National Secular Society, whose presidential address at last year's AGM (reported in the July *Freethinker*) on this very subject concluded with a satirical prayer to the "Great Abortionist", denies having clairvoyant powers, but welcomes this statistical medical confirmation of her theory.

AND NOTES

SWITCHED OFF

Guru Maharaj Ji, public head of the Divine Light Mission, has been given the push—by his mother. She has accused him of adopting a non-spiritual way of life and removed him from the Mission. This development will undoubtedly cause consternation amongst his naïve supporters but it will not surprise those outsiders who have been keeping tabs on the DLM. Shri Mataji, who is referred to in the DLM as the Holy Mother, is widely believed to have been the real boss of the family enterprise since the death of her husband nine years ago. He was a religious leader and founder of the Divine Light Mission in 1949. When he died in 1966 his youngest son, then aged eight, stepped into the breach. The juvenile guru has been successfully promoted by his mother and brothers in many countries, including Britain and the United States.

Not long ago the Mother of Creation—as she has been referred to in one DLM publication—described her son as “. . . the storehouse of unlimited peace . . . more magnificent than the unfathomable ocean . . . the treasurehouse of unlimited happiness. . . . He restores peace to the hearts of the unhappy and troubled with his flow of unflinching love.” Guru Maharaj Ji is going to need all these qualities to pacify the Holy Mother; she is furious because her son, who has been preaching celibacy and abstinence, has himself resorted to the fleshpots. It was not difficult to advocate celibacy at the age of ten, but on attaining the ripe old age of 17 he discovered that the charms of an American girl were more pleasurable, if less profitable, than holding forth to audiences of open-mouthed simpletons. The guru and his lady friend were married last year and are now the parents of a baby daughter. But Shri Mataji did not approve of her new daughter-in-law and the divine peace of yore was shattered.

Although he has been toppled from his white throne it is unlikely that the redundant guru will have to claim social security benefits. He has been presented with several mansions, over 50 cars, a cabin cruiser and jewellery by his devotees. And because the DLM is a religious movement it has been exempted from taxes on its vast income.

A Divine Light Mission spokesman declared that the British followers are remaining loyal to “the Lord of the Universe” and regarded him as their spiritual leader, whatever his mother may say. But they may find that she has a legal advantage as it was she who nominated the Mission’s trustees when it registered as a charity.

And of course this is International Women’s Year.

INVITATION DECLINED

Mr (as the envelope put it) Brigid Brophy was surprised to receive an invitation to a choral service at St Paul’s on 13 May, together with a solicitation to support “The Sons of the Clergy—the oldest Clergy Charity”. Support can be given either by buying a ticket (£6 a head) for an after-service dinner at the Merchant Taylors’ Hall or by becoming a Steward, which costs you £21. Stewards have the right to “take part in the procession” in the Cathedral, along with the Archbishop of Canterbury and the Lord Mayor of London, both of whom will be present “in state”. As the Government is not yet paying public lending right to authors, Brigid Brophy has neither £21 nor time to spare, but feels it’s an opportunity lost. Processing through St Paul’s, she might have handed out copies of Barbara Smoker’s resolution for the British Humanist Association’s AGM, calling for beautiful churches to be taken into public ownership. And her presence in person, if not positively “in state”, might have brushed up the C of E’s evidently slipping hagiography with a reminder that Saint Brigid wasn’t, actually, a man.

ANNIVERSARY

The March issue of *Rationale*, a journal which renders excellent service to humanists in the Southern counties, is a special edition to celebrate the first decade of publication. It was launched in March 1965 and few of those who were associated with it at that time dared to hope that *Rationale* would be thriving ten years later.

Although its first concern was to be a voice for the Southampton Humanist Society, *Rationale* was never a parish magazine. It included news from other groups and areas, and during the years a wide range of articles and reviews on a selection of subjects have appeared in its columns. Robin Odell, better known as co-author of *A Humanist Glossary*, was largely responsible for initiating the venture in 1965, and Peter Kane is the present editor. Its existence depends on the voluntary work of friends and supporters. *Rationale* is published six times a year and, despite financial stringencies, a new duplicator has been purchased.

Freethinker readers will join in congratulating all concerned with the publication of *Rationale*, and wish the journal many happy and successful returns of March. Copies of the tenth anniversary issue are obtainable from Peter Kane who requests that a 6p stamp is sent. No doubt some of our readers will wish to send a birthday present in addition.

● Peter Kane, 36 Canton Street, Bedford Place, Southampton, SO1 2DH.

HELL AND THE VICTORIANS by Geoffrey Rowell.
Clarendon Press, £4.85.

Nineteenth-century Christianity was not the pale, effete creature that it is today. Death, judgment, heaven and hell were not then aspects of Christian theology about which divines felt somewhat reticent, as they do now. On the contrary, these traditional preoccupations of Christian eschatology were regarded as the major element of Christian teaching, and accordingly the nature of the future life received much attention in religious debate. Yet despite the lurid hell-fire preaching which abounded in Victorian society, a gradual mitigation of this doctrine took place as the century wore on: so much so that Gladstone, in 1896, was alarmed that the modern fashion was now to tone down the powers of God and undermine the "strictness and severity of the laws of righteousness". This portion of divine truth was vital, in his view, and "the danger of losing it ought at all costs to be averted".

A major theme of Mr Rowell's rather turgid book is to trace the changes in the doctrine of hell during the nineteenth century. For the dousing of the fiery furnaces it is clear that secularism must take a large share of the credit; the moral stand taken by John Stuart Mill in 1865 was typical: "I will call no being good, who is not what I mean when I apply that epithet to my fellow creatures; and if such a being can sentence me to hell for not so calling him, to hell I will go."

The more liberal climate of opinion on crime and punishment fostered by the ideas of Jeremy Bentham and the utilitarians, who stressed deterrence and rehabilitation rather than punishment as such, also weakened the defenders of hell; whilst the growth of belief in a personal, loving god in the nineteenth century reflected the secular humanitarianism of the day, and made the vengeful fire-breathing deity of old increasingly implausible.

Yet this transformation was not easy, nor did it occur without real fears and doubts among the Christians. One of the more attractive features of the Victorian era was, after all, its moral seriousness; and whilst belief in a fiery hell for the wicked was doubtless an odd way of expressing that seriousness, there were nonetheless grave reservations that the attack by liberal Christians on eternal punishment would burrow into the foundations of the faith itself. One fascinating episode was the lawsuit brought against the Reverend H. B. Wilson in 1862 for passages in an article in *Essays and Reviews* for 1860. Wilson's heresy was to assert that men's fate after death depended not on their particular religious belief but rather on the quality

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of their life on earth. And his views on the reality of eternal punishment, although judiciously vague, were sufficiently out of line as to cause a serious religious scandal. The Court of Arches reluctantly found that Wilson's ideas were not ultimately compatible with the doctrinal rigours of the Athanasian Creed: "They that have done good shall go into life everlasting; and they that have done evil into everlasting fire." Wilson was, accordingly, suspended from his living for a year. Yet even this harsh verdict did not still religious wrath against Wilson. His appeal was upheld by the Privy Council, in 1864, which thought it no great offence for a clergyman to "hope . . . that even the ultimate pardon of the wicked . . . may be consistent with the will of almighty God". The success of the appeal evoked fury from Church of England conservatives. Eleven thousand clergy signed a ringing declaration that scripture unequivocally affirmed that the punishment of the wicked, along with the life of the virtuous, would be eternal. For without hell, it was argued, the traditional authority of the Church and the Bible would be weakened and theological language itself eroded. The immensity of Christ's sacrifice held its significance precisely because the horror of the fate of unredeemed men was also immense.

Yet even the staunch traditionalists began quietly, during the course of the nineteenth century, to mitigate the severity of the hell to which a large, or major, part of the human race would inexorably be consigned. The chief pain of hell was now not the flames and tortures inflicted by the devils, but the loss of the beatific vision of God. Hell was not a place: it was the state of mind of those who consciously rejected God, a "rack where, self-wrung, selfstrung, sheathe- and shelterless, thoughts against thoughts in groans grind", as the superb Jesuit poet Gerard Manley Hopkins put it. In the more enlightened doctrinal writings, the crudities of the old Calvinist hell were glossed over; but it was also realised that the doctrine did in fact lie at the heart of the central religious notions of human freedom and responsibility, man's recognition of good and evil, and the awful implications of his choice. It was increasingly emphasised, despite the shifting of the locus of debate from the retributive to the loving god, that man had, as it were, a right to hell (however defined) for this saved him from being compelled to be good, from a compulsory elevation to heaven and the abandonment of the moral life.

REVIEWS

The entire debate holds, I think, especial interest for those secularists who, like myself, think that religion does offer valuable insight into the nature of man. For what it showed was an awareness, not shared by today's divines, of the central problems of ethics, the consequences of human decisions and actions. Not for nothing has religious mythology, though unattractively presented, often drawn to our notice the terrible as well as the noble side of man.

PHILIP HINCHLIFF

CRIME, RAPE AND GIN: Reflections on Contemporary Attitudes to Violence, Pornography and Addiction by Bernard Crick. Elek/Pemberton, £1.95.

Bernard Crick, one of our livelier professional political thinkers—he is Professor of Politics at Birbeck College, University of London—presented these “secular sermons” (how tenaciously some humanists cling to the terminology of the religion they spurn) as the British Humanist Association's 1973 Voltaire Lectures. I have read them twice, with a mounting sense of dissatisfaction. Crick is on the side of the angels: he is agin both sin and Mrs Whitehouse. Why, then, is his “blast of angry common sense” so dispiriting a polemic?

Partly, I think, because he has deliberately sought the middle ground which will enable him to cry “a plague on both your houses” to permissives and anti-permissives alike. To do so, he is forced to caricature each as a bunch of more or less ludicrous Aunt Sallies against whom he can go windmill tilting; and his verbal Rosinante is a somewhat shambling beast, so that the effect is frequently that of a steam-hammer belabouring a nut.

The lectures do, however, examine a crucial question for democratic society: “are there any general criteria for the limits of tolerance?” Like many others before him, Professor Crick sees the logical flaw in J. S. Mill's famous distinction between “self-regarding” actions and those which affect others; since we are all social beings, even purely selfish and self-directed activities do impinge on society precisely because they *are* selfish. Professor Crick's yardstick for justifying social intervention is the presence of positive evidence that the activity in question inhibits socialibility. Violence, pornography and drug addiction each stand arraigned under this principle.

Violence obviously curtails or prevents the solution of problems through mutual debate and the application of reason. Pornography—variously

defined by Professor Crick, but broadly equated by him with the perverted incitement for purposes of commercial gain of primarily masturbatory activity (anyone for Wankers' Lib?)—diminishes the spontaneous enjoyment of “normal bisexual relations” (*sic*). Drug taking limits one's range of effective choices in an arbitrary, unpredictable and—in the case of hard drug addicts—irreversible manner.

But this is not to say that the Professor is totally unpermissive about any of them. He believes, with Hannah Arendt, that in specific circumstances, where the objective is a limited and clearly defined one, violence can be justified as a political weapon. And—as a result of his reading and thinking in preparation for these lectures—he has come round to a pro-Wootton view in support of the limited legalisation of pot, so as to draw a beneficial legal and social distinction between “soft” and “hard” drugs.

Although he does have lucid flashes—such as his shrewd perception of the Jekyll-and-Hyde personality of that famous *Times* duo Ronald Butt and Bunald Rott—it is with regard to pornography that Crick is at his most turgid and muddled. (He quaintly believes that its appeal is primarily to the mentally sick, although one suspects that his practical Camden Town landlady of the 1950s would have a hearty guffaw at a lot of it.) Being, by his own confession, “a bit of an Ancient Roman”, he can't bring himself to identify the huggery and butter scene cut from *Last Tango in Paris* as a vital freedom issue: though he dismisses the *Longford Report* as “a great mess”. Like many other worthy citizens, Professor Crick seems to feel that there should be no holds barred for the sexuality of consenting adults in private, but that “public sexuality” and its depiction should be kept off the streets.

While even the most libertarian among us could probably live with a well-drafted law which limited itself to this objective, that is most certainly not what we have got now—or are likely to have, if any of the recently canvassed “reforms” such as Robert Carr's unlamented Cinematograph and Indecent Displays Bill were enacted. Indeed, spurred on by the vociferous Festival-of-Lighters, Holbrooks, Longfords, Muggeridges and Whitehouses, the Director of Public Prosecutions is intensifying his efforts to circumvent the safeguards of trial before a jury who may hear evidence of artistic merit or public good under the 1959 Obscene Publications Act and is now harrying booksellers and newsagents under alternative provisions, many of which only require the vaguer test of “indecency” for purveying such mass-circulation magazines as *Club International*, *Men Only* and *Forum*. Here is an interference with free expression and the public's right to purchase what it wishes to read that one would have thought Professor Crick and

his like would be quick to condemn. But no: apart from disliking "conspiracy to corrupt public morals" Professor Crick seems to think the present law is about right. I would suggest that he—and the public opinion which he wrongly considers to be "discriminating" on this subject—would do well to scrutinise the law's nature and *modus operandi* more closely: especially as he admits that he is "very uncertain what he means by perversion or normality", and adds "what a sea of subjectivity".

Pace Professor Crick, I believe that all censorship—whatever its ostensible object—is an essentially political act; and, this being so, his sneers at Tony Smythe's introduction to the NCCL pamphlet *Against Censorship* seem singularly misplaced.

While I agree with Professor Crick that we are fools and cowards if we refrain from passing moral judgements and that it is contemptibly shallow "liberalism" to tolerate the intolerable for fear of being dubbed "authoritarian", I would remind him that it was the patron saint of the Voltaire lectures himself who is said to have proclaimed: "I disapprove of what you say but will defend to the death your right to say it."

As Sir Isaiah Berlin has pointed out, there are two concepts of liberty—there is "freedom to" as well as "freedom from"; and both kinds of freedom are being steadily chipped away in contemporary Britain by the zealots and bigots of permissiveness and of anti-permissiveness. Professor Crick professes to agree in abhorring this process. But when he writes "if the law on obscenity were as incredibly vague and as potentially oppressive as the good Lord Longford would innocently wish it to be, I still do not honestly think that our basic liberties would be in danger", I part company with him and echo the Iron Duke: if you believe that, you'd believe anything!

ANTONY GREY

THE ENGLISH CIVIL WAR by Maurice Ashley.
Thames & Hudson, £3.50.

With about 190 pages and 177 illustrations the text is restricted; but Maurice Ashley tells the complicated story with mastery of its main pattern and its details. Where I feel dissatisfied is in his treatment of the broader aspects, especially in the first chapter on Long-Term Causes. He discusses whether there was an economic crisis and deals with the vexed question of the rising gentry, but finds no answers there. He dismisses the question of the class-war. He does however admit that there was a financial crisis in the governmental system and that the struggle between the puritans and the Established church contributed to the clash. Then he decides that the great event which inaugurated the modern world "came about accidentally and by surprise".

Such a conclusion seems to me to show the very worst aspects of contemporary history-writing

which is unnerved by the mass of detail and takes a mechanistic pragmatic approach, deciding complicated matters by a counting of heads. Probably it is true, or at least nearly true, that "no member of the Commons in 1640 thought in terms of overthrowing the monarchy or even of reducing its rights, but merely of reforming it by persuading it to assuage grievances caused by a revival of feudal rights". Such a statement is frivolous if it thinks that it settles the problem of causes. The point is what happened when the Commons tried to bring about a reform of the state system. The deep gulf between the existing system and the *potential* elements in the situation then revealed itself. One can indeed get a glimpse of that potential by noting the way in which the advanced mercantile representatives, from Raleigh on, kept looking across the North Sea to Holland and envying its freedom from the restrictions that were holding England back in the struggle for trade that led into the foundation of the empire.

By ignoring the deep potentials in a situation one ignores the central dynamic at work and reduces the whole thing to a dead arithmetic of positions and motives as they appear before the furious catalyst of struggle arrives. Indeed in a national situation of deep cleavage and violent conflict we can best judge of the potential element, which feels utterly baffled and driven under in the existing system, by what comes out of the struggle. Where only a few persons are concerned, accidents can wreck or divert the potentials involved in a conflict; where many millions are involved on a national scale, accidents cancel out, the extreme oscillations to Left or Right die down, and we come to rest on the point where the best balance is obtainable.

The Restoration with its ending of the Courts of Wards and all the other parts of the feudal apparatus represented in fact that point of balance after 20 years' violent conflict. But it was a balance that could not have been obtained in 1640 by any amount of argument, compromise or negotiation. Only someone looking in abstractly from outside, with no sense of the full human situation at the time, could imagine that. The clash had to come and work itself out. There had to be the advent of the various forward-looking movements such as the Levellers and the Diggers, who went far ahead of any stable base at the time. What happened during the clash is what tells us about the depth and force of the social tensions underlying the 1640 situation. Only after the tensions had exploded and had their effects, could there come the large-scale, though temporary, equilibrium of the Restoration, which by breaking the feudal state made possible the complex social and economic movements leading into the industrial revolution and capitalism. Mr Ashley doesn't like the word *bourgeoisie*, but it cannot be left out.

JACK LINDSAY

OBITUARIES

WILLIAM HAMLING, MP

William Hamling, Labour Member of Parliament for Woolwich West and a well-known figure in freethought circles, died suddenly in London last month at the age of 62. He recently underwent a period of treatment in hospital following a collapse at the House of Commons. Mr Hamling had been active in the Labour Party since 1927 and was the unsuccessful candidate in several constituencies before being elected at Woolwich. He was parliamentary private secretary to the Prime Minister at the time of his death.

William Hamling was a popular figure in his own party and at Westminster. He was one of the most helpful and obliging MPs and gave his unstinting support to campaigns for social reform. He was a dedicated opponent of censorship and served as chairman of the Defence of Literature and the Arts Society. From an interview published in *The Freethinker*, August 1967, the strain that he and many MPs continually worked under was evident. One of his failings was that he did not know where to draw the line and limit the amount of work which he undertook.

One of the warmest tributes paid to Mr Hamling came from the Prime Minister who described him as "one of the best constituency members of the postwar generation".

Why I am not a Jew

banners of say Ishtar or Marduk. The Lord visited plagues upon them, such as Jeremiah and Isaiah—and the people were afflicted with grievous, appalling bores, who over a thousand years harangued them to keep the commandments and stay in the fold, though without much luck. Instead of keeping the prophets under sedation, the Israelites put up with them, just in case; until, in the days of Belshagger (as the schoolkids insightfully call him) twelve tribes defected *en masse*. In such circumstances, one can hardly doubt that there were heavy defections, too, from the thirteenth tribe, Judah (Yehuda, Jude, Jew). However, this one tribe kept going and returned from the Babylonian captivity. Exchanges continued, but women were received inwards more than men. The dietary laws were discouraging, but males had the further disincentive of needing to submit also to circumcision. Peter and Paul, not Jesus, would see to these things and provide an easier alternative than the old gods.

Only when Judah survives alone are we correct in speaking of "the Jews". Isolated and deserted in a Jehovah-mocking world, they would have closed ranks. Becoming more zealous and longing for

GEOFFREY HAMMOND

Geoffrey Hammond, who has died tragically at the age of 37, was an artist who specialised in maritime subjects and in landscapes. His works were exhibited in London and elsewhere, earning much praise from viewers and critics. He participated in a number of radio programmes and in 1971, together with his wife Julie van Duren the sculptor, was the subject of a Southern Television documentary. Geoffrey Hammond was a pioneer of the conservation movement and he played a leading role in the campaign to protect areas of Kent which are particularly associated with Charles Dickens.

Mr Hammond's death followed a boating mishap on the Thames. He was the son-in-law of Lily and Mark van Duren who serve on the Executive Committee of the National Secular Society. The funeral took place at the Medway Crematorium, Chatnam, when an address was given by Dr Colin Smith.

vindication, they started the Messiah cult. A Christ, or Messiah, was to visit them, straight from Jehovah, and tell the world they were right.

Rabbi Yeshua (Joshua) of Nazareth—Jesus, no less—does not seem to be reported in the Gospels as claiming to be this person, but often calls himself the "Son of Man", an odd piece of terminology to think about. Of course, he denounced the priests and the other rabbis (Pharisees), and spoke with conviction and authority against earlier teachings, especially against the exclusion of sinners. His well-known philosophy was bound to outrage both the Judean establishment and the Roman overlords. His followers decided that he had been the Messiah, and Judah split on the issue. Christians have long forgotten that they are Messianists, and can spend a lifetime of devotion without hearing about it.

Jews continue to pray every day for the coming of the Messiah, but it is hard to visualise a candidate they would accept, especially with the necessary descent from King David being so impossible now to establish.

They continued exchanging with Gentiles wherever they went, just as they always had. The stereotype Jewish features today are simply Mediterranean, and would be normal in Syria, Greece, Italy or Spain. In 1933, 25 per cent of the so-called Jews in Berlin were married to so-called Gentiles, and 33 per cent in Vienna. Hence the enormous majority of "Jews" are facially indistinguishable from others where they have lived for a few generations. "Jews" in quotes, because, as most of them are either non-practising or twice-a-year people, on what basis does the term apply? Ethnically they can hardly be a constantly diluted entity that never was.

Through the twelve renegade tribes, every single modern Arab is probably descended from Israel!

Veteran and "New Girl" Speak at NSS Dinner

A hundred members and friends attended the annual dinner of the National Secular Society in London on 22 March. Barbara Smoker, president of the Society, welcomed the guests who came from many parts of the country.

Michael Duane proposed a toast to Dora Russell who was guest of honour on this occasion. He said that she had come from a home where loving parents believed that children should be given freedom early. Dora Russell had helped to shape the 20th century and had been at the heart of those forces working for the emancipation of women, nuclear disarmament, the extension of democracy and new ideas in education.

Dora Russell said that she was very moved by the welcome that had been accorded her. She was pleased that so many people were working to make life more worthwhile. As an early advocate of birth control she felt it was a good thing if only that it enabled people who did not want to cultivate relationships with their children not to have children. Human relationships, first with the mother and then with the teacher, were very important to every child. It is been said that a children-centred society is cultureless, but in fact it is the industrial society that is so. Dora Russell emphasised the great importance of caring. And she was glad that it is being recognised that we have a greater kinship with animals than had been thought previously.

In proposing a toast to the National Secular Society, Phyllis Graham, a Carmelite nun for 20 years and author of *The Jesus Hoax*, warned the audience that this was her first public speech, "and I'm sure you will appreciate that it's a long, long way from a Carmelite cell to an atheists' dinner-party. The NSS is now 109 years old and still fighting fit in the war against superstition . . . Its motto could well be 'published and be damned' if it were not already sure of its portion with the unbelievers.

"There are some unbelievers who suggest that there is now no necessity for a militant, anti-religious movement in Britain. I would say there most definitely is . . . The forces of anti-knowledge are as rampant as ever. In addition to the monumental opposition of the Roman Catholic church, there is a host of non-Christian superstitions and a most appalling spread of fundamentalism both here and in the United States. Of course the climate of opinion has changed for the better, but as *The Free-thinker* put it in the January issue, 'let us welcome the decline of religion in a spirit of realism'".

G. N. Deodhekar was unable to be present, and at very short notice Jim Herrick responded with a brief, witty and forthright speech.

LETTERS

WASTED EFFORT

My attention has been drawn to the item "Sideways to Secularism" ("News and Notes", March), and whilst agreeing generally with the National Secular views on Disestablishment I would like to point out that all the years of NSS sledgehammer confrontations with the established churches have achieved next to nothing. So perhaps a change of approach is indicated.

Furthermore, any organisation is the sum of its members—by influencing, gently, some church members, we may gradually bring about change.

JULIA PELLING

VOLUNTARY EUTHANASIA: DEFINITELY SO

Following my article in the February issue of *The Free-thinker*, Barbara Smoker (Letters, March), expresses some apprehension that insistence on voluntary euthanasia being restricted to adults who had elected to take part might "discourage the medical profession from its present widespread humane practice of euthanasia un-sanctified by law".

It must be borne in mind that voluntary euthanasia per se cannot be otherwise than applicable to those adults who elect to avail themselves of a legal option either as beneficiaries or administrators. Legalised voluntary euthanasia would be a permissive Act as an addition to (sometimes replacing but not necessarily displacing) the present limited practice of passive, sedative or active secretive euthanasia. Certainly I do not "envisage a punitive element in the denial of an easy death to those who had failed to take the necessary steps to claim it while they had the opportunity". There is no reason to believe that doctors will in any degree become less considerate to their patients; on the contrary, as voluntary euthanasia becomes accepted practice the climate of opinion, both lay and medical, will become more and more favourable to the quality of life that is tolerable rather than to mere lingering existence in terminal cases.

The other point which Barbara Smoker makes is the plight of infants born with discernible physical defects. This is a most disturbing social problem, and many of us believe that such babies should be effectively "stillborn" and operative procedures which so often perpetuate deformity should not be undertaken. This I have frequently advocated elsewhere and will not now seek space to do so. However, please allow me to point out that this is an entirely different problem and quite distinct from voluntary euthanasia. It is a matter of applied or practical *eugenics* (in contradistinction from selective breeding). It is better not to risk confusing the issue by using the same term. Eugenics is a good beginning—euthanasia is a good end.

If we have a birthright it is surely the right to a good start in life. This is outside the control of the individual concerned and therefore needs to be humanely managed, as far as is practical, by all responsible for the babe's involuntary arrival in this world. We that are adult have a fundamental right of personal liberty which embodies the right to die on our own terms. Life has its beginning and its end; at, and between, these events should be real and humane understanding.

CHARLES WILSHAW

CATHOLICISM AND COMMUNISM

F. A. Ridley's article ("Catholicism and Communism", March) raises some interesting questions but he did not mention the Christian-Marxist dialogue which has

continued for many years under the stimulus of the Second Vatican Council and the ecumenical movement.

A bibliography of the extensive literature on this subject—which includes a number of Catholic “authorities” on Marx in addition to Calvez—was compiled in 1968 by D. C. Strange and consists of 27 pages. In his introduction to a series of studies on Marxism published in 1969, the Jesuit, Frederick Adelman, remarks that “Pope John XXIII extended a warm hand to many Marxist representatives and is still a favourite among them”. And in his seminal work, “Dialectical Materialism” another Jesuit, Gustav Wetter, concludes that of all historical forms of Christianity it proves to be “Catholicism which exhibits the largest number of formal similarities with Bolshevism”. Berdyaev describes the Soviet philosophers as “having much in common with Catholic theologians”, whilst Robert Speaight in his biography of Teilhard de Chardin says that Teilhard believed that the Christian and Marxist ways must eventually come together “because each spring from an impulse of faith”.

L. R. PAGE

PUBLICATIONS

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National Secular Society. Details of membership and inquiries regarding bequests and secular funeral services may be obtained from the General Secretary, 698 Holloway Road, London N19 3NL (telephone: 01-272 1266). Cheques, etc., should be made payable to the NSS.

Freethought books and pamphlets (new). Send for list to G. W. Foote & Company, 698 Holloway Road, London N19 3NL.

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.

Humanist Counselling Service, 13 Prince of Wales Terrace, London W8 5PG; telephone 01-937 2341 (for confidential advice on your personal problems—whatever they are).

Humanist Holidays. Hon. Secretary: Mrs M. Mepham, 29 Fairview Road, Sutton, Surrey; telephone 01-642 8796. Details of holidays at Isle of Man (9-23 August) sent on request.

London Secular Group (outdoor meetings). Thursdays, 12.30-2 p.m. at Tower Hill; Sundays, 3-7 p.m. at Marble Arch. ("The Freethinker" and other literature on sale.)

Which New Testament? The Ending of the Gospel of Mark

forms the substance of the intervening verses, nevertheless has her identity established (as the person who had been cured from a severe affliction) in a way which would be appropriate only if her mention here followed a long silence about her.

It is, then, a complicated story. But it reinforces the truth that the gospels as we know them today are the product of a lengthy process of adaptation of earlier material, at the nature of which we can only guess. Not a very secure basis for documents deemed of such importance.

Brentwood Humanist Society. Old House Arts Centre, Main Road, Brentwood. Thursday, 24 April, 8 p.m. David Bradford: "Square Holes for Square Pegs".

Brighton and Hove Humanist Group. Brunswick Hotel, 11 Brunswick Square, Hove, Sunday, 4 May, 5.30 p.m. Annual General Meeting.

Croydon Humanist Society. Central Library, Katharine Street, Croydon, Wednesday, 21 May, 8 p.m. D. S. Elliott: "Sex Education for Croydon Children".

Independent Adoption Society. Gregory Hall, Thomas Coram Foundation, 40 Brunswick Square, London, WC1, Saturday, 26 April, 2.45 p.m. Guest speaker: David Clark, the Society's Legal Adviser.

London Young Humanists. 13 Prince of Wales Terrace, London, W8, Sunday, 20 April, 7.30 p.m. Anthony Gibson: "Food Prices and the Common Market".

Nottingham and Notts Humanist Group. University Adult Centre, 14 Shakespeare Street, Nottingham, Friday, 9 May, 7.30 p.m. Discussion: "Is There a Model for the BHA?"

Southampton Humanist Society. Friends Meeting House, Ordnance Road, Southampton, Friday, 2 May, 8 p.m. Annual General Meeting.

South Place Ethical Society. Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London, WC1, Sunday morning meetings, 11 a.m. 20 April, Richard Clements: "Humanism and the Art of Biography". 27 April, W. H. Liddell: "The Englishness of England". Tuesday evening meetings, 7 p.m. 22 April, Harry Agerbak: "Problems of the Fairy Tale Country, Denmark". 29 April, Kristofer Gasback: "Finland, Small Country in a Hard World".

Waltham Forest Humanist Group. Wood Street Library, Forest Road, London E17, Tuesday, 29 April, 7.45 p.m. Ken Hoy: "Epping Forest Threats and Pressures".

West Glamorgan Humanist Group. Friends Meeting House (Annexe), Swansea. Friday, 25 April, 7.30 p.m. Barbara Smoker: "Are We Living on Christian Capital?"

Worthing Humanist Group. Burlington Hotel, Marine Parade, Worthing, Sunday, 18 May, 5.30 p.m. Annual General Meeting.

THE FREETHINKER

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