

The FREETHINKER

Founded 1881

Secular Humanist Monthly

Vol. 97, No. 2

FEBRUARY 1977

12p

ROME AND CANTERBURY PLAN DESPERATION COALITION

Rome could be head of a united Church if recent proposals are accepted. A statement by the Anglican-Roman Catholic International Commission on "Authority in the Church" says that it would be "appropriate" for the Pope to exercise his primacy in any future union between the two Churches. Barbara Smoker, President of the National Secular Society has commented in a press release: "There is nothing surprising in the acknowledgement of the fact that Christian unity can only mean unity under the Pope. A statement to this effect had to come sooner or later. The really surprising thing has been the extent to which Rome has moved in the past 15 years to meet its 'separated brethren'—not only sacrificing its 'permanent' liturgy, but also playing down many of its most fundamental doctrines (even including papal infallibility) in response to the crisis of worldwide Christian decline."

This Commission originated in a Preparatory Commission which emerged from the Second Vatican Council. Agreed Statements on eucharist doctrine (1971) and the ministry and ordination (1973) have already paved the way for a narrowing of the gap between Rome and Canterbury. Authority was bound to be a most contentious area. The original sixteenth century breach was after all concerned with Papal authority. The deepest Anglican-Catholic divide has always focused upon Catholics' emphasis of the primacy of the Bishop of Rome and Anglicans' conciliar approach, where all bishops participate in decisions. Indeed, at its broader level the contrast between the interpretation of the authority of Scripture by individual conscience or by clerical pronouncement lay at the heart of the Reformation.

The word *koinonia*, with its vague meaning of community or fellowship, is sprinkled liberally around the Agreed Statement, in an attempt to

move towards consensus, and doubtless giving endless possibility for future theological wrangles. But such consensus is likely to be difficult, particularly in view of the reservations Anglicans will hold concerning papal infallibility.

Barbara Smoker's statement continued: "For Catholicism, however, the sticking-point is survival of the papacy whether infallible or not. The papacy itself is more important to Catholicism than any dogma: for Catholicism is, ultimately, its political identity; and that rests on the papacy.

"The National Secular Society is determined to alert public opinion to the importance of ensuring that, when the Church of England is finally reconciled with Rome, it is divested of the historical privileges of Establishment, both fiscal and political. And the final reconciliation may not be far ahead: the Archbishop of Canterbury is to pay an official visit to the Pope this coming April, and it is no secret that further negotiation towards Christian Unity is its main purpose.

Shared Doom

"The chief matters remaining for negotiation are contraception, compulsory sacerdotal celibacy and the remnants of infallibility whether papal or collegiate. On the Protestant side the question of the Pope's holding his authority by divine right is likely to be something of a stumbling block. So are the two Marian doctrines of the Immaculate Conception and the Assumption, for which the Roman Church has too unequivocally claimed infallibility. But popes are pastmasters at face-saving formulae appealing to the individual conscience; although the Vatican will doubtless stretch the remaining difficulties to the utmost as bargaining counters, now that the first prize of authority is in their hands, nothing is likely to stand in the way of their

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Inauguration Day—New Perspectives from BHA President

The inauguration of James Hemming as the new President of the British Humanist Association took place at a well-attended reception in the BHA meeting room on Thursday January 20. By a coincidence, which was pointed out by the Chairman, Derek Marcus, this was not the only inauguration taking place that day—a “similar” event was taking place in the United States. Dr James Hemming is an educational psychologist well-known as a broadcaster, public speaker and writer. It was pointed out that as sixth BHA President he followed in a most distinguished line. Derek Marcus said how pleased he was to note the presence of the retiring President, Harold Blackham, whose life-long service to the Humanist movement was applauded. James Hemming announced that he felt the excitement and optimism of Humanism was not always getting across, especially to the young, and then proceeded to offer some new perspectives, with characteristic verve and good humour.

His address opened: “It seems to me that Humanism is entering a new phase. This for two reasons. First, Humanism is becoming the representative outlook of the modern world, whether or not it is combined with a religious orientation, and regardless of how comparatively small the body of organised Humanists may be. Secondly, the acute stage in the struggle between religious and scientific explanation of the nature of things is largely over. Evolution as the origin of human existence is now almost universally accepted, the idea of an intervening God is on its way out, and the source of human wickedness is commonly thought of as arising from maldevelopment and loveless relationships rather than from the Devil.

“For both these reasons we have to reconsider how Humanism appears to the world. What does a non-Humanist catch of the Humanist perspective? To what extent are we stuck in our habitual stances? To what extent are we rethinking our position? These questions are all the more important because I find around me more lostness, depression, doom and despair than ever before in my lifetime. Can we offer a picture of the Universe, and man’s future in it, that frankly faces the realities of our situation and yet is still hopeful?”

Dr Hemming then considered chance and its role in evolution. Far from making life cold and mechanical chance could be for Humanists an exciting idea. The odds against our individual existence or the existence of planet earth are enormous. Yet here we are, and the appropriate question is not

“What is the meaning of life?” or “What is it all for?” but “What are we going to do with the prize we happened to win?”

In considering the hypothesis of an omnipotent Creator, he said that, although our understanding of the origin of life is incomplete, we know enough to see that energy, chance and environmental selection can produce the creative process. “Energy keeps the game going, chance produces variety, and environmental forces do the selection. Energy, it turns out, is the source of all things, including, of course, matter. It is the *sine qua non* of evolution. We are ourselves specialised systems of solar energy. It is because the universe is all composed of energy that it is so inherently creative. Energy proliferates and interacts in every possible way open to it.”

This led to the crucial and essentially optimistic aspect of his talk: “Our current understanding of the dynamics of the creative process undermines the traditional God hypothesis, but we have to be careful that it does not also undermine human confidence and human significance. I am concerned that it often does so, but I do not see why it should. The contemporary position is that as systems of potentially creative energy man and the universe are one. That is unequivocally true, and in no way alarming. Quite a stirring thought in fact which the young, I find, respond to as a challenge. Yet it does not seem to be getting through as part of the Humanist attitude.”

Given that energy is seen as the basis of existence, yet there is no knowledge of its origin, it might be expected that pantheism would be a commonly held position: God seen as energy + X. But this would involve a conscious design prior to man, and for this there is no evidence. “This brings us to another challenging aspect of the Humanist position—that conscious planning and design only came onto the scene with the arrival of man. That, too, is a self-enhancing idea, raising human responsibility to its full stature.” Indeed, Dr Hemming felt that “the very ideas of ‘beginning’ and ‘end’ may be illusions, grafted onto our minds by the fact that, for us, things do have beginnings and ends.”

Age of Experience

Turning to the mind, our instrument for apprehending the world, he stressed the importance of experience. “Curiously, although it is experience that makes life significant and exciting, and although experience is the great, formative influence on personality, psychologists have, for the most part, ignored the study of experience. But now the

time has come to give experience the status in human affairs that it deserves." Experience ranges from the profoundest depression to the highest ecstasy, and quality of experience could become a value in itself. "This new interest in experience is all of a piece with the modern absorption with the quality of life. This is about life as itself rich and rewarding. It seems that we are at the beginning of what might be called the Age of Experience when life is not mainly about surviving, nor mainly about 'getting on' but mainly about the search for quality in life, which will include the contribution of work but which will not be dominated by it."

The human brain, it was pointed out, has a remarkable ability to synthesize experience and this is being given much greater emphasis in modern brain research. Behaviour may, in fact, be related to how successfully the brain has been nourished by experience. We may, for example, regard ruthless, or socially inadequate, people as those whose frontal lobes have not been properly educated; and the narrow-minded as people whose right hemisphere is functioning only at a rudimentary level.

An area of experience to which Humanists might perhaps pay greater attention was what has been called "inner space", suggested Dr Hemming. "This includes profound relational and aesthetic experience, the leaps of intuitional thinking, the world of imagination, and the sort of experience that accrues from meditation, particularly a deep sense of self and of the universal. What Maslow called 'peak-experiences' of all kinds come in here. The world of acute consciousness and what are usually called 'higher' functions is one that modern man seems intent upon exploring."

Inescapable Responsibility

Man with increasing know-how is given increasing choice and "this is the root of human responsibility. Man is now inescapably responsible for his future." In this area of choice the valid direction must be for quality of life and the moral position that no-one should be de-barred from it by the conditions of life imposed upon him. This brings in purpose, and on this topic Professor Bernard Lovell was quoted: "The simple belief in automatic material progress by means of scientific discovery is a tragic myth of our time."

Humanism can enter into the need for new perspectives, which could be common humanistic perspectives—"of men co-operating with one another and the energy of the universe in the service of the enhancement of life." The picture of man as alien and alone in the universe is not appropriate here, for the relationship between man and the universe is symbiotic: "The universe is there in all its immensity and with all its potential forces, for us to understand and to use . . . We can rape and destroy the planet or we can transform it into a rich and beautiful habitat for the whole of mankind. And,

whichever we do, we shall do by the only means at our disposal—by using the forces and potentialities of the universe itself, including our own energy and creativity . . . The universe is not our enemy; it is our womb and habitat."

A final point made was that we cannot adequately explain the "image of beauty that shines from what we call reality" and that Humanists should not be nervous of including "the spiritual range of experience in their perspective." This does not need any concept of the supernatural. "Nature has more facets than she was formerly credited with. Beauty is one of the bonds which should help man feel at home in the universe."

Hopeful Future

Dr James Hemming ended by asking: "In face of all this, how should people respond?" and answering: "It seems to me with open-mindedness and open-heartedness; with searching, not certainty; with being involved, not cut-off; with delighting in, not being indifferent to; with life-affirmation, not life-negation. With something like that as our basis, and the existence of one another for friendships, love, stimulation, comfort, and support, I feel we can face the present with determination and the future with hope, in spite of the forces of anti-life that are powerful around us. In the past, the human spirit has proved unquenchable in spite of every kind of disaster. I do not see why we have to suppose that things will prove otherwise this time. But we do need a world consensus of attitudes and values to help us through. In this talk I have been touching on just one or two aspects of a possible consensus."

Rome and Canterbury

receiving the prodigal Anglican son back into the fold within the next few years."

It is important to remember that these Ecumenical moves are related to the steady erosion within the Catholic Church of its traditional principles. This erosion was highlighted in the quarrel between Monsignor Marcel Lefebvre and the Pope, and was aptly expressed in the title of an earlier article by Barbara Smoker "The Pope is Now a Protestant" (*The Freethinker*, October 1976). A further measure of this is the admission by the Agreed Statement that many Roman Catholic scholars today do not support all the claims that have formerly been made for the See of Rome in references to St Peter in the New Testament. So have they been wrong all along, or is it convenient now to argue whatever way best gives the Vatican a fighting chance of holding on to some authority at all? "Fortunately for humanity", as Barbara Smoker concluded her statement, "it is their shared doom, not their strength, that is bringing the Christian churches together."

The Blind Eye of Mary Whitehouse

JAMES M. ALEXANDER

That well-known Victorian music-hall song, "If you want to know the time, ask a policeman" did not, as is now popularly supposed, refer to the friendly and helpful attitude of "our wonderful police". Contrariwise, it was an allusion to a scandal known to every Cockney at the time, involving the wholesale stealing and distribution of watches among members of the Metropolitan Police. Since those halcyon days, corruption, like most else, has become more sophisticated and moved somewhat up the ranks, thus in the process rather more difficult to detect. Until the arrival of Commissioner Robert Mark at Scotland Yard there had been years of denial, complacency or vague, unsatisfactory internal "investigations" by fellow officers. The recent trial and conviction of a number of long-serving senior officers of the Obscene Publications Squad is a case in point.

All the evidence presented in Court during the trial recently of several Scotland Yard detectives indicates that far from being a temporary aberration on the part of a few police officers, it was a carefully organised conspiracy extending over many years. In the dock were men up to and including the rank of Detective Chief Inspector. All had been promoted and many had received several commendations for their activities. There are many reasons for thinking that by no means all those taking bribes were charged. Some were no doubt among the several hundred "allowed to resign" to prevent prosecution during the recent past. Furthermore, these protectors of real pornography were unwittingly aided by the antics of Mary Whitehouse, Lord Longford and the Festival of Light brigade. The screaming against legitimate films, educational books and publications like *Oz* and *Gay News* provided a diversive smokescreen for the Porn Squad's protection racket.

Every supporter of her Law and Order campaign will accept Mrs Whitehouse's protestations of amazement and dismay at the Old Bailey revelations. We all are aware of her long-standing complete confidence in, and support for, the police against the wicked left plotters' attempts to sow the seeds of moral decay and destroy this country by denigrating the forces of law and order. One can only suppose it is a failure of memory on her part or pressure of the Lord's work against blasphemy that prevented her investigating why Soho pornshops were allowed to continue year after year. All the more surprising as she and others had repeatedly been given information on the complicity of Scotland

Yard officers that was common knowledge since the early 'sixties. Let it be remembered that the Old Bailey jury returned a unanimous verdict against five of the CID officers of guilty of "conspiring between July 1964 and October 1973 to accept bribes." What were Mary and her little lambs doing during these ten years? Writing to the press, badgering the BBC and ITV regarding television programmes, as well as fussing about sex education programmes like the film *Growing up*. On the second showing of that film at Conway Hall, the reverend gentleman leading the hysterical protest was invited (by myself among others) to come with us to Scotland Yard to protest against police protection of real pornography. This he declined to do, vaguely adding that they were concerned with the Soho shops too, and were "looking into it." This, itself in 1971.

How Pornography Flourished

In fact, the large-scale "smut-book" operation goes back further. When I was involved in the retail book trade, from 1959 onwards, it was common knowledge that a centralised distribution organisation existed in Soho. There were continuous invitations, touted around West End cafes, for people to "sit in the chair". This meant acting as a front by running a shop as the supposed owner, much the same as, before the Gaming Act legalising betting shops, unemployed or pensioners would be given a few shillings to "stand in" for the street corner bookmaker when it was his turn to be arrested. By using these people who pleaded ignorance and were "very sorry, sir" only nominal fines were imposed, magistrates hoodwinked, and the myth of our incorruptible police perpetuated. The shop continued under new management with a fresh "chairman" installed until it was time to raid (usually by the uniformed branch) that shop once again. At the same time there was continual pressure on booksellers throughout central London to handle pornography, with the implication that the police had been "squared". Much of this was revealed in court, together with the information that the police code-word of an impending raid was, with a twisted sense of humour, "W. H. Smith"—the well-known booksellers! Receipt of this information enabled most of the stock to be removed to safety, leaving only a token amount to be seized.

What is even more revealing of their contempt not only for the laws they were employed to uphold but towards civilians who are always being exhorted to "help the police", was the selling back of the seized books to the real owners of the chain of porn shops. This took place at Holborn police

station where it was stored following confiscation—and in some cases after ordered by the magistrates to be destroyed and presumably taken to Holborn for that purpose.

The method according to the evidence, was for the man behind the porn syndicate to visit Holborn police station suitably disguised as a senior CID officer, inspect the seized stock in the basement and proceed to buy it back at an agreed figure—usually half the selling price. This, naturally, was to prevent young impressionable police officers from being corrupted through contact with polluting pornography. All good citizens will be comforted knowing that the morals of our police are so well protected. It is also good to know that certain one-night hotels in the neighbourhood are regularly visited by the CID, presumably to ensure the fire regulations are being observed. Meanwhile Scotland Yard had no knowledge of a crime syndicate. They did not know the name of the man controlling these shops. This is rather strange, as it was available in almost any West End bar or teashop. Indeed, almost any schoolchild in the area could have told them and also that Commander Drury, chief of the Flying Squad was a personal friend of this man. All this information was widely circulated for years before any action was taken. Allegations in the press more than ten years back could have been followed up, but weren't. Why were Mary Whitehouse and her friends not busying themselves investigating these matters?

There are tales well known in Fleet Street, of policemen from the suburbs indulging in a little free-lance activity in their spare time by keeping a watching eye on Soho. Unaware of protection from the top, they would attempt individual blackmail of the pornshops by "flashing" their warrant-card and threatening prosecution unless payment was made. In one case, the "squad" dealt with possible competition by "planting" goods on one officer, threatening him with a charge of shoplifting. Steps were then taken to see that he was given the worst possible beat on the outer fringe of the metropolis.

How Prohibition Aided Crime

The results of puritanical pressure groups misdirecting their activities against harmless though—to the neurotic and bigotted killjoy—emotive pursuits of hard-won personal freedoms and civil liberties have often exacerbated the evils they pretend to abhor. A classic case was the crime and corruption directly attributable to the activities of the Prohibition lobby in the United States. These criminal lunatics, callously indifferent to the slum conditions and poverty then abounding—a large factor in alcoholism—were the main cause of the development of local gangs into nation-wide crime syndicates, and the rise to power of the Mafia as a result of the Volstead Prohibition Act.

The Significance of Silence and Inaction

The responsibility of the "Clean Up Britain" lobby, with their noticeable inaction despite repeated evidence of protection of vice rings through police bribery, is significant. It is so obvious that their very sincerity must be questioned. For it was not only *The News of the World* and *Sunday People* that conducted exposures, but sober journals like *The Times* and *The Guardian* that investigated and produced facts. The real danger to freedom and democracy arise not from "Leftist permissiveness" but by reactionary pressure groups. Their fanaticism is used by evil men in positions of authority and trust to enrich themselves. By ignoring facts and turning a blind eye to what can be clearly seen the campaigners against obscenity perpetuate the very things they claim to oppose.

The indignant reactionary Christian puritans all loudly applauded Detective-Sergeant Grant Smith in 1972 when he and others arrested the anti-apartheid demonstrators against the South African Rugby team, but were strangely silent when years later the same Grant Smith confessed to perjury and planting drugs on one of those he arrested. In court he stated, like others have done, that he committed these crimes as the only way to gain promotion in the CID.

There have been campaigns against obscenity on television, and in reputable bookshops, but not in Soho; and there were objections at Conway Hall to an innocuous sex education film, but not at Scotland Yard against protection of the wealthy vice rings. This is the true blasphemy that Mary Whitehouse, the Festival of Light, *et al* have encouraged. Rather more belief in the genuineness of similar campaigners would be engendered by a little concern and action in this direction rather than the latest publicity-seeking stunt of invoking obsolete blasphemy laws against the homosexual journal *Gay News*.

Seven out of ten Roman Catholics in France believe that priests should be allowed to marry according to a major opinion poll carried out by the Catholic weekly, "The Pilgrim". The poll shows a considerable change in public opinion on this question in recent years. In 1963, only 55 per cent of those questioned were in favour of priests marrying. The proportion has increased to 70 per cent. Men and women were equal in their opinions, but younger people were more in favour of the reform. Although the population of France has increased, there has been a slump in the number of priests ordained. There were 1,679 ordinations in 1900; the figure for 1975 was 161.

William Benyon's Abortion (Amendment) Bill

JANE ROE

Yet again the Abortion Act of 1967 is under attack and due for another airing in the House of Commons on February 25. The anti-abortion lobby will not give up. William Benyon, MP, who gained fifth place in the Private Members Ballot, is using the opportunity to bring an Abortion (Amendment) Bill before the House. Jane Roe, Information Officer for the Birth Control Trust, gives some details and implications of Mr Benyon's Bill.

This year brings another Abortion (Amendment) Bill introduced by William Benyon, Conservative MP for Buckingham, who says he intends to eradicate the abuses of the Act. So far the Lane Committee from 1971-74, James White's Bill in 1975 and then the Select Committee on Abortion in 1976 have kept the abortion debate alive because of pressure from the highly organised anti-abortion lobby, using "abuses" as their parliamentary excuse.

The Bill comes up for Second Reading on 25 February and the full details will not be published until shortly before then, but Mr Benyon has said that his Bill is based on the recommendations of the Select Committee on Abortion published last July. Although these may seem at first to be mild recommendations, which might be mistakenly thought of as reasonable by most humane people, they are all part of Mr Benyon's "softly, softly" approach.

His aim at the Second Reading will undoubtedly be to obtain maximum support, leaving it to the Standing Committee which follows to put in more harmful amendments. The absence at first of a major threat to the grounds for abortion means it is unlikely that the Bill will be defeated at Second Reading as most MPs will not see anything harmful in Mr Benyon's Bill.

Yet, instead of preventing abuses in the private sector, the Bill will merely make it more difficult for women to get abortions. If abuses exist—and the anti-abortion lobby is convinced they do—legislation of the minor sort suggested by the Select Committee is not what is needed to get rid of them. Better NHS abortion facilities, combined with wider advertising of the service would cut out all problems.

Briefly, it is believed that the Bill's proposals will include the following points. Abortions should be banned after 20 weeks of pregnancy unless the woman would suffer grave permanent physical or mental injury or the child would be born with a serious disability. The two doctors authorising an

abortion should not be connected with each other, and at least one of them should have been registered for five years. A woman's GP should be notified. Pregnancy advisory bureaux and referral agencies which charge fees should be licensed and prohibited from sending women to clinics in which they had a financial interest. There should be statutory regulations controlling clinics and bureaux and police should be able to inspect their records. Parents of girls under 16 should generally be present when abortion advice is given. The opportunity of remaining anonymous should be given to complainants or witnesses in abortion complaint cases.

On the surface, these points seem innocuous, although they could seriously hinder the charitable abortion services. But the greater danger is the gradual erosion of the availability of free, early abortions by restricting the 1967 Abortion Act unnecessarily.

Even the Select Committee, made up of declared opponents of abortion since February 1976, admitted that something had to be done about the regional inequalities of the availability of NHS abortions. In their Second Report, published in December 1976, they recommended the setting up of units in local hospitals where facilities were so poor that women who were entitled to an abortion under the Abortion Act either could not obtain it or were forced to pay for it. Once women knew they could obtain a free, safe, early abortion in an NHS hospital, the abuses would fall away. Some women could still choose to pay for anonymity in a private clinic, if they wished.

Beginning in 1975 and continuing in 1976 there has been a steady fall in the number of abortions for women resident in this country. It is expected that the 1976 figures will be the lowest for the last five years. The NHS free family planning service is beginning to make an impact. Abortions on foreign women have dropped by nearly half and touting at airports and hijacking of foreign patients are scandals of the past.

Abuses in the private sector are better checked by the Department of Health and Social Security which has set up its own administrative and statutory controls, including a ban on termination of pregnancy after the twentieth week except at specially approved places. Pregnancy advice and referral agencies have been inspected and a register prepared of those which meet DHSS requirements. An undertaking not to accept patients from unlisted agencies will be a condition of approval for places of treatment. The Chief Medical Officer may now

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An Atheist Answer to a Christian Challenge

BARBARA SMOKER

The religious journalist Fred Milson, whose regular contributions to "The Guardian" will be familiar to many "Freethinker" readers, also writes a weekly feature for the "Church of England Newspaper". His contribution to their issue of January 14 was entitled "A Bad Case of Atheism . . ." After briefly reviewing various Christmas television programmes, Mr Milson went on: "But, oddly enough, what sticks in my mind is a Christmas episode shown . . . in the run-up to the festive season. On December 22 a lady from the National Secular Society appeared on 'Nationwide'." That lady was Barbara Smoker, President of the NSS, and in this article she counters Fred Milson's comments.

My brief television appearance really seems to have preyed on Mr Milson's mind, for he goes on to devote several more column-inches to it. "She was reasonably relaxed", he says, "but during the interview she let it slip that one of the reasons why she did not believe in Christmas was that many of the symbols of the season pre-dated Christianity."

Let it slip?! It was more a matter of determinedly bringing it in before the interviewer proceeded to his next trivial question. However, we must let Fred Milson pursue his argument in his own way.

"My reaction to this gem of logical disquisition", he sneers, "was immediate. 'Good heavens', I thought, 'surely she can do better than that. Unconsciously she dishonours God by not making out a better case for unbelief. She is selling God's opposition short!'"

Later in the article he asks: "Am I wrong to be saddened by the poor case put up by some unbelievers? Is it only pride that makes me feel that I could make out a better and more cogent case? I hope and think not . . . I myself live in hope, not certainty, and frequently have to endure the discipline of darkness."

"But atheists owe it to themselves and to the rest of us—and, paradoxically, I would say, to God—to put forward the best case they can."

Might one just interject here that, until recent times, anyone putting forward atheistic arguments risked imprisonment, torture, and an untimely death; and, even today, opportunities of doing so in the general communication media are all but non-existent.

Fred Milson's concluding paragraph could hardly be more predictable: "The unbelief of some seems to be directly related to the fact that they have never grasped what exactly are the basic Christian claims." As ever, the fact that most commit-

ted atheists in this country have been through the mill of religious indoctrination, that they have probably taken it far more seriously than the average Christian, and that only after sedulous theological study have they rejected it, is unscrupulously ignored. In my case, a devout childhood home and twelve years of intense convent education were followed by a further decade in the Roman Catholic faith, on a reading diet largely composed of theological and devotional works. If, as Fred Milson suggests, "the basic Christian claims" can elude one's grasp after all that, then the divine channels of revelation must be muddy indeed!

I wrote a reply to Mr Milson's earlier point, as follows, and sent it to the *Church of England Newspaper* for their issue on January 28, in which it appeared under the heading "National Secular Society Replies".

"Allow me to introduce myself. I am the 'lady from the National Secular Society' on whom Fred Milson based his article 'A Bad Case of Atheism . . .' (January 14).

"Referring to my pre-Xmas television interview on BBC's *Nationwide*, Mr Milson complained (ironically enough) that I did not take the opportunity to make out the best possible case for disbelief in a personal god. But the question that the TV interviewer had put to me was simply how would I, an atheist, be spending the Xmas holiday; not how did I justify my atheism. And my reply was that I would be enjoying the holiday in the same fashion as most Christians—that is, enjoying it as a pagan festival, at a family get-together, with special food and drink (including that pagan symbol of sun-worship, the flaming round plum-pudding), with a young tree brought into the house and decorated with lights (originally to encourage the sun in its weakest hour), with holly, ivy, and mistletoe (all pagan symbols), and with games, entertainment, and the exchange of gifts.

Seasonal Pagan Survivals

"That reply is certainly open to the criticism of incompleteness, not because it fails to answer an entirely different question but because (partly for lack of programme time to expound on it, partly owing to a certain reluctance to upset simple minds at the festive season) I omitted from my catalogue of seasonal pagan survivals the legend of the birth of a sky-god on Earth, in a cave/stable, of a virgin mother, at midnight on the 24th December, heralded by a star from the east (Sirius) and visited by the three stars (known in parts of Europe as the Three Kings) of Orion's Belt; and the annual pagan celebration of this legend with carols and cribs.

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OBSTACLE RACE

The Abortion Obstacle Game is a new short film made by the British Pregnancy Advisory Bureau, which was recently given its first showing. The film shows clearly how chance can play a large part in a woman's possibility of obtaining an abortion, once she has made the decision to do so. It is based on a research paper by Francois Lafitte, Professor of Social Policy and Administration at Birmingham University and Chairman of the BPAS, called *The Abortion Hurdle Race*, which showed how National Health Service doctors place hurdles in the way of women who desire to terminate their pregnancy.

In the game, which the film depicts, four women sit round the board and pick a card which tells them the circumstances with which they begin the race to the winning post—an NHS abortion in twelve weeks, the safest period for termination of pregnancy. The game proceeds, the race is on; but only one will succeed in overcoming all the obstacles. Statistics show that only one in four of the starters has a chance of obtaining an abortion within the NHS, a second might succeed through the services of some organisation outside the NHS, such as the BPAS, a third might succeed but only after the twelfth week, thus increasing health risks, and the fourth might completely fail even though abortion is clearly her wish.

There are many obstacles making the odds so variable. The area in which a woman lives is an important factor, since statistics show that some areas have a much worse record than others in providing this service (to live in Birmingham, for example, would substantially reduce your chances in the game). The response of the GP who is first seen can make a great difference, since an unsympathetic reaction could cause serious delay. Also the reaction of a consultant is likely to vary enormously. These obstacles come over forcefully in this ingeniously produced film.

The style of the film is hard-hitting and its sharp contrast to sober statistics and academic arguments should enable it to reach a wide audience. The film is available for loan and it is hoped that it will be shown to health educators, Community Health Councils and voluntary groups. Another earlier BPAS film, *A Question of Understanding*, is also available. A more personal, biographical approach is used here, and the film follows the story of a young unmarried woman and an older married woman already with a family of four children, who have both chosen to seek an abortion. The two films would together provide excellent material for discussion and lead to the inescapable conclusion that increased education about contraception is still needed and that the existing Abortion Law (1967) needs to be carried out with greater consistency and effectiveness.

NEWS

There are, however, new moves afoot to amend the Abortion Bill in a way that, while on the surface appearing to be concerned mainly with abuses, could certainly reduce the Bill's effectiveness. The anti-abortion lobby has not given up. After the untruths of *Babies are for Burning*, the attempts at amendment by James White, and Select Committees whose bias was self-evident, now comes the Abortion (Amendment) Bill alas to be presented in February by William Benyon, MP. (See p.22.) The Abortion Law Reform Association and National Abortion Campaign are both publicising the need to oppose the Bill. The inequities and obstacles of the existing situation should be re-emphasised at a Tribunal organised by the NAC, at which international speakers will give evidence. (February 29.)

A letter, clearly stating your opposition to the Abortion (Amendment) Bill of William Benyon sent to your MP or to David Ennals, Minister of State for Health and Social Services, is a straightforward and effective way of letting our legislators know that the loud squawks of the anti-abortion lobby are not representative of people's views.

PRESIDENT'S HONEYMOON

Mr Jimmy Carter has finally been sworn in as thirty-ninth President of the United States. The new President disturbed Washington protocol at his inauguration at the end of January by allowing invitations on a first come, first served basis. If this were not enough, he has sent tailors into a panic by threatening to don a pair of jeans occasionally in the White House. Together with congressional rifts over his cabinet appointments and fretful speculation about his plans to inject life in US economy, the pundits now predict that Carter's will be the shortest "Presidential honeymoon" on record.

Freethinkers ought to pay particular attention to the first days in office of the first Southern President in over a hundred years. As Governor of Georgia, his stand on civil rights can best be described as timidly liberal. He favoured segregated schools and did not once come out in active support of any civil rights demonstration. The controversy over the segregation of his own Baptist Church in Plains, Georgia, during the Presidential campaign has resulted in blacks now being permitted to worship there. Unequivocal black membership, however, is still an ideal not a reality.

Then there is the whole question of legalised

AND NOTES

abortion—only a recent addition to the US Statute books. While he was still a Presidential contender, the gun-toting Ronald Reagan threatened to use his powers as commander-in-chief to reverse any abortion law on the grounds that practitioners would be getting away with murder. Carter's rebuttal was that, although he did not morally hold with abortion, as President, he would be bound to uphold the law of the land.

Carter's appeal has been largely that he is both morally upright and intellectually acute. Although he has shown no signs of being moralistic, an account of his "religious experience" in the countryside, after initially being defeated in his first attempt to become Governor of Georgia, has been given. Echoing George Washington a bit, he told a press conference he would never tell the American people a lie. As though to make good this brief, he admitted in a famous interview for *Playboy* magazine that he has been known to secretly lust after other women. In the days leading up to his confirmation as President, Carter was trying to convince one and all that he had not always thought of the presidency as a vocation. Such unabashed a confession of faith may be reassuring to a country still smarting from Richard Nixon's two terms. At the same time, it is hoped that the American electorate do not live to eat the words, "in Carter we trust".

NATIONAL SECULAR SOCIETY

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ANNUAL REPORT

The Annual Report for the National Secular Society, June 1975 to December 1976, is now available. Because of a change of time of the NSS Annual General Meeting the report covers a period of nearly 18 months. Among the society's activities covered in the report are public meetings such as that concerning "Religious Opposition to Sexual Freedom" and the considerable publicity obtained in the media, for instance the President's statement on Jens Thorsen's film on the sex-life of Jesus, which was quoted on BBC Radio 4 and in *The Times*. Social events, including a theatre visit to a "converted" Church and the Annual Dinner, are also recalled. Copies of the report are available upon request from the NSS, 702 Holloway Road, N19 3NL.

Freethinker Fund

The Fund has got off to a flying start this year. Readers responded generously to the appeal for financial assistance to meet the monthly deficit. During the period 17 December 1976 until 21 January 1977 a total of £164.25 was donated. Our thanks to all who helped to achieve this splendid sum.

G. A. Airey, £1; J. Allison, £4; W. Armstrong, £1; Anonymous, £5; Anonymous, £2; W. Atherton, £1; W. G. Baguley, £1.25; E. Barnes, £1; H. Bayford, 25p; F. Bert, £10; I. Bertin, £3.25; W. J. Bickle, £1; S. Birkin, £1.25; R. D. Birrell, £1; J. A. Blackmore, £1; J. L. Broom, £5; P. Brown, £2; J. W. Buck, £1.25; J. G. Burdon, 50p; A. Chambre, £1; H. Clements, 75p; P. Crommelin, £5; Denver Society of Freethinkers, 50p; W. Donovan, £1; Mrs Follett, £2; A. Foster, £3; J. E. Futter, 50p; J. Galliano, £1.25; Miss P. Graham, £8.25; E. Greaves, £5; J. D. Groom, £1; Mrs Muriel Groome, £3.75; L. Hanger, 75p; Mrs N. Henson, £5; E. Hewett, £2; H. Holgate, 50p; D. Hopkins, £1; E. J. Hughes, £2; D. Humphries, 25p; M. D. Jeeps, 75p; S. E. Johnson, £8; J. M. Joseph, £5; A. Kendall, 25p; J. Knight, £1; Mrs M. Knight, £5; P. M. Lea, £5; E. Lews, 10p; E. Litten, £1.25; I. S. Low, £1; H. Lyons-Davis, £2; J. McCorrisken, 50p; A. V. Montague, £3; J. W. Mooney, £1; C. Morey, £1.65; I. S. Murray, 25p; H. Nash, £1; P. S. Neilson, £1.75; Professor Newman, £3; M. O'Brien, 25p; Mrs K. Pariente, £5; P. J. Payne, 25p; F. Pearson, £8; R. Peterson, £3; J. C. Rapley, £10; Miss M. Roebuck, 50p; M. Russell, 75p; P. Sanger, 50p; Mrs M. Scott, 50p; W. M. Shuttleworth, £8; N. Sinnot, £1.25; N. E. Smith, 75p; W. Southgate, £2; W. G. Stirling, £1; R. Stubbs, 75p; D. G. Taylor, £3; M. Van Duren, 50p; A. Vogel, £1; C. Wilshaw, £2.25; D. Wood, £3; D. Wright, 75p; J. S. Wright, £2.25; J. Yeowell, 25p. Total: £164.25.

BOOKS

SLAVERY AND THE CATHOLIC CHURCH by John Francis Maxwell. Barry Rose, £2.50.

"I am amazed", wrote Andre Gide in *The Coiners*, "at the coils of falsehood in which devout persons take delight." Students of Roman Catholic doctrinal history marvel even more at the brilliant casuistical sophistry with which some Catholic apologists seek to uphold dogmas which offend against humanity's instinctive goodness as well as against reason and common sense.

Fr Maxwell is no such apologist, but a Catholic priest who sets out to "promote the truth in Christian charity" about the history of the Church's teaching on human slavery (which was only "officially corrected", and the institution of slavery declared "infamous" in all circumstances, by the Second Vatican Council in 1965). He writes: "If Adolf Hitler had decided to enquire from the Catholic authorities, between 1933 and 1945, whether the institution of slavery in labour camps for condemned criminals was morally legitimate, and whether it was morally right to enslave foreign non-Christian prisoners in just warfare and use them to work in German factories, there is regrettably little doubt that he would have received the reply that there was a 'probable opinion' in the affirmative. In Catholic countries the abolition of slavery has been due mainly to humanist influences. In 1945 the political philosopher Luigi Sturzo noted that the changes or corrections in ethical judgments concerning slavery, among so many Christian thinkers, did not precede but followed the social fact of its legal abolition."

For over 1400 years—from the sixth century AD until just over a decade ago—the institution of genuine slavery, whereby one human being is legally owned by another, and is forced to work for the exclusive benefit of his owner in return for food, clothing and shelter, and may be bought, sold, donated or exchanged, was not merely tolerated but was commonly approved of in the Western Latin Church. Fr Maxwell presents his case with a wealth of supporting documentation, some of which is quite horrifying as having emanated from a body purporting to be the earthly representative of the God of Love.

Why did this false teaching continue for so long to be commonly approved of and promoted as true in the Church? Fr Maxwell's answers to this question are instructive. First, the overriding influence of the principle of continuity of doctrine: "Popes, Bishops, canonists and moralists in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries could not easily accept that a moral doctrine which had been commonly taught for over 1400 years could possibly be mistaken." (The fact that it was, interpolates Fr Maxwell con-

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solingly, in no way impugns the infallibility of the Church, "for in no case were the criteria met for a statement of the magisterium on slavery to be infallible.")

Secondly, the influence of theological censorship: "For the last 400 years there has been a lack of freedom of theological expression and publication." The consequence of this disciplinary rejection of eighteenth-century humanism was that "any teaching of Catholic moralists concerning human rights was delayed for a further 150 years after the Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen of the French Revolution." Thirdly, the uncritical adoption by the Church of the principles of Roman civil law concerning the legal titles of slave ownership and "their subsequent approval and almost canonisation as equivalent to principles of reason and justice." Fourthly, "the long-continued misunderstanding of the meaning of the natural moral law." Fifthly, the failure of Catholic moralists to pay sufficient attention to the inevitably harmful social consequences of slavery as against the intentions and motives of slave owners: for slavery "infantilises" people by depriving them of free will and adequate understanding. It is then easy to stigmatise them as "inferior" and unfit for freedom. (Shades of Southern Africa.)

Sixthly, a casuistical distinction drawn by Catholic moralists since the seventeenth century between wrongful chattel-slavery and a "justifiable" form of slavery by which the Christian slave master merely owns the "right of use" over his slaves. Seventhly, a "lack of appreciation by Popes and Councils and Bishops from the fourth century to the twentieth century that the circumstances of the institution of slavery had changed since the time of the Apostles and would continue to change." (This strongly suggests that there may well have been an equivalent lack of appreciation by these worthies of any social changes since the time of the Apostles.) While the Apostles "were forced to tolerate the institution of slavery because any formal moral prohibition of slave-owning would have been regarded by the Imperial authorities as subversive and would have prompted further persecution of Christians", the Church achieved a dominant position in the Empire by 380 AD, when it could have brought about the emancipation of slaves but didn't; nor did it in the Middle Ages nor at the time of the French Revolution—and when the American Civil War came in the 1860s some Southern Catholics were still asserting that Negroes were naturally an inferior race.

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Eighthly, "the long continuance, at least until the time of the Galileo controversy, of a tendency towards strict fundamentalism in the interpretation of Holy Scripture." The belief that Genesis 9, 25-27 (Noah's curse of Ham) meant that God had cursed the Negro race apparently survived until 1873! Ninthly (as Fr Maxwell rather charmingly puts it), "the use of charismatic gifts by the Catholic laity has normally not been accepted as a means of putting right social injustices and providing a remedy for unjust pharisaism and legalism." While the Quakers, from the early eighteenth century, exercised an increasing and ultimately enormous influence against slavery, "the graces received by most of the eighteenth and nineteenth century Catholic laity from the traditional Latin prayer and liturgy were apparently insufficient to awaken their consciences." Finally, there was no mechanism in the Catholic Church, until 1965, for collective reappraisal of traditional moral teaching.

If the above factors combined to pervert the Church's conscience about slavery, how about their effects on some other burning contemporary issues? It is significant that the casuistical apologists have recently been busy in the *Clergy Review* and elsewhere endeavouring to smoothe the jagged edges of the notorious "Declaration on Certain Questions Concerning Sexual Ethics." A distinction is being drawn between *moral principles*, with which the Declaration is said to be primarily concerned, and *application to individual cases*, which should apparently be compassionate and flexible but not morally condoning. Pastoral practice may thus on occasion depart from moral theology—though this is held to be most difficult in the "Nordic culture", which tends to be more literal-minded in these matters and tiresomely expects the Church to mean what it says (even if it doesn't always say what it means). It is no wonder that another contributor to the *Clergy Review* found that the Roman Church's teaching on sex was discredited, having nothing to offer young people (or anyone else) but condemnation.

The overworked doctrine of original sin—which has been used by the Church to justify the subjection of women and the use of torture as well as slavery—can no doubt account to some believers' satisfaction for the woeful blemishes in the history of Catholic social policy which are detailed in Fr Maxwell's book. His publishers, with a nice sense of humour, quote on the dust jacket these lofty sentiments from Pope John XXIII's first encyclical

letter (*Ad Petri Cathedram*, 1959): "The ultimate cause of all the evils which beset individuals, peoples and nations, and bring disorder and confusion into so many minds, is ignorance of the truth, an ignorance only too often aggravated by contempt and studied negligence. From this cause spring all kinds of errors which, creeping into the hearts of men and into the social structure, exercise a subversive influence, to the great danger both of individuals and of society as a whole."

All of us can say "Amen" to that.

ANTONY GREY

BEARDSLEY AND HIS WORLD by Brigid Brophy.
Thames and Hudson, £3.50.

Those familiar with the monumental struggle to achieve public lending right in the United Kingdom must wonder how Brigid Brophy and Maureen Duffy ever find time to devote to their own books. British authors owe them an immense debt. It is a debt that readers of the *Freethinker*, founded by the brilliant though now largely forgotten writer, G. W. Foote, should gladly acknowledge. I hope that readers of Brigid Brophy's *Beardsley and His World* will bear this fact—and the economics of contemporary book-publishing—in mind if they are a little disappointed by the book.

This disappointment would probably not have arisen if Miss Brophy had not some years ago written the imaginative *Black and White: A Portrait of Aubrey Beardsley* (published by Jonathan Cape in 1968), which could have been seen as the forerunner of a really exhaustive study. With the famous art firm of Thames and Hudson as publishers, a comprehensive and brilliantly reproduced range of the Beardsley *oeuvre* might also have been anticipated.

Let me say at once that the volume would make a valuable addition to any library, for the author offers the rich display of epigrams and psychological insight, and the publishers the attractive packaging, we have come to expect of them. Any subsequent observations should be read in the light of this overall admiration, even if the author may feel it is, as she describes (in *Black and White*) public attitudes to Beardsley himself, "a grudging admiration". This isn't so, for while I have never felt that Beardsley could do better than he did, I don't have this feeling about the author and publishers under review.

Beardsley was born in Brighton in 1872 and died of tuberculosis in Menton in 1898. He showed precocity in music, had some pretensions, but in my view little achievement, in literature, but it is as a visual artist that he is remembered. As a child influenced by the illustrations of Kate Greenaway, he made £30 decorating menus and guest cards for a lady of fashion. His professional debut was however

as a writer in *Tit-bits*, but it was clear to all his friends that his real talent was as an artist. He began his career, which achieved rapid success, as a disciple of Burne-Jones and the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, but later broke away. Miss Brophy ingeniously depicts the shadow of the Brighton Pavilion, with its "eclectic exoticism", on his subsequent work. Watteau, Blake, Toulouse-Lautrec and the masters of Japanese woodcuts have been identified by sundry critics as other influences. I would also see him in the English comedy-of-manners cartoon tradition stretching from Rowlandson through du Maurier to May. Like Ibsen he specialised in "effeminate men and male women". I agree with the *Black and White* judgment that there was in much of his work the "polymorphous perversity" of children, but not that "he must be . . . the most intensely and electrically erotic artist in the world." This claim isn't repeated in *Beardsley and His World*, but is replaced by another of equal dubiety: "astounding anticipation of both surrealism and psychoanalysis."

I tend to share the widespread ambivalence to Beardsley's work. Going round the great Victoria and Albert Museum exhibition in 1966, I was alternately depressed by *pastiches* heavy with rococo detail and elated by *caprices* with brilliant economy of outline. My favourite pictures are those of the Roman empress Messalina, with overtones, as Miss Brophy points out, of termagant English landladies. As a "literary" artist, Beardsley is a master of symbolism, especially sexual symbolism, but I'm not at all sure this makes him a truly erotic artist—or that the meagre volume of his really first rate work justifies his reputation for genius. In *The Eighteen Nineties*, Holbrook Jackson seems to share the same ambivalence. On the one page he hails Beardsley's advent as "the most extraordinary event in English art since the appearance of William Blake" and dismisses him as "a prisoner for ever in those Eighteen Nineties of which he was so inevitable an expression . . . so limited that his art would have been untrue had it been either imitable or universal". Though he has probably exerted some influence on modern posters, at the end of the Day of Judgement I'm not sure that he will emerge as other than one of the founders of *art nouveau*, "too clever by half" as an illustrator (whose illustrations rarely "illustrated") but with a brilliant eye for composition and, at his best, a sparkingly liquid pen.

A similar ambivalence, and considerable notoriety, attends Beardsley as a man, in both his time and ours. He was a pillar (if that isn't too stable a word) of the Decadence, and his image was and is decadent. Of course the "Decadence" is used in a very precise cultural sense. Another pillar, Arthur Symons, describes it thus: "It has all the qualities that mark the end of great periods, the qualities that we find in the Greek, the Latin, decadence; an

intense self-consciousness, a restless curiosity in research, an over-subtilising refinement upon refinement, a spiritual and moral perversity . . . really a new and beautiful and interesting disease."

Many people will find all this a little overpowering. They may not care that Oscar Wilde slept impartially with barons and barrow-boys, or paraded down Bond Street in purple velvet and green carnation, but are irritated that he made such an exhibition of it. Beardsley and Wilde were both members of the literary and artistic gay set of the time, and were associated through illustration of *Salomé* and perhaps more intimate contacts. When the Marquess of Queensberry balloon went up, Beardsley's career was also disrupted and fellow-contributors scandalously demanded his banishment from *The Yellow Book*. Privately Beardsley described Wilde and Lord Alfred Douglas as "really very dreadful people." Probably they were if you had business dealings with them, but so too was Beardsley, who was glad enough to use them in their halcyon days. Even as a child he had an obsession with becoming "a great man some day"; he carried a portfolio of drawings with him in search of patrons wherever he went; his letters are full of his own triumphs, however minor; he constantly lived beyond his means and wailed about the inconvenience of moonlight flits; as his health deteriorated he turned Catholic, and on his deathbed he asked for all his obscene drawings to be destroyed. It would take very great genius indeed to make such priggishness tolerable. Miss Brophy does her best with this unsympathetic material. She plausibly pleads as justification for egocentricity his death in life as a consumptive, though her picture of his mother as an utterly selfish dragon is less convincing.

Sexually Beardsley was even more ambivalent. There was hints of an incestuous relationship with his sister Mabel; though if there were, one would think of the line in the celebrated limerick: "Who did what and with which and to whom?" Both of them were transvestites, and she probably had an affair with Heather Firbank. Miss Brophy's final judgment is: Aubrey's "sexual tastes . . . were probably for the most part heterosexual, perhaps tinged with transvestism." There seems however to be more evidence for the transvestism than for the heterosexuality. For reasons never made clear to me, most sexological texts are careful to distinguish between transvestism, transexualism and passive homosexuality in men. There really seems little to choose among them, though transvestites may be given more to acting than actuality.

At the beginning of this review I spoke of the economics of contemporary book-publishing. This, I presume, dictated the length of the text, which is regrettably short. Miss Brophy has a special gift for condensing ideas, though I could have wished her limited space was devoted less to topographical detective work, which could be taken for granted.

and more to artistic analysis and a general picture of Beardsley's times. But my disappointment is chiefly centred on the illustrations. There are too many houses and too few drawings. For publishers noted for art books, the layout is unimpressive (though cover, jacket and title-page are excellent) and the reproduction of photographs and wash drawings is generally poor. The caption to one photograph refers to ceremonies on a noticeboard which I find illegible. Most surprising of all, in view of the liberalisation of recent years, the handful of obscene drawings in *Black and White* are omitted from the chaste pages of the current volume. I suppose the publishers were thinking of school libraries—which I hope will be purchasers on a grand scale.

DAVID TRIBE

EXHIBITION

A TONIC TO THE NATION. Victoria and Albert Museum. Until 3rd April.

Everyone's experience of an exhibition must differ, but perhaps this will be more true of this exhibition of the Festival of Britain, at the Victoria and Albert Museum, than most. Visitors will be divided between those who have clear memories of the excitement of the Festival and those who have no memories of it at all. Reactions will vary accordingly, and my comments are those of someone with no memories of the Festival at all. The questions of what it was that makes people speak of the event with such enthusiastic memories and what is the particular relevance of recalling the event now are both fascinating.

The exhibition is fairly small and consists of models, plans, drawings and bric-a-brac. It is arranged with the intention of giving information about the planning and background to the Festival, of recreating some of the Festival's atmosphere and the flavour of the 'fifties and of posing some historical reflections about the event. The background information was interestingly presented: how the idea of commemorating the 1851 Great (Crystal Palace) Exhibition had been mooted even before the end of the war, how it was envisaged as a great post-war boost to morale and industry and a colourful contrast to a period of austerity. The main body of the exhibition did not for me give a strong sense of the brilliance and excitement that drew 8 million people to the Festival. The Sky-lon, of which there was a large model and which was evidently a highlight, looked a rather puny metallic cigar soaring pointlessly nowhere. A large architectural model of the main South Bank centre of the Festival gave some idea of the scope and variety of the buildings, but I gained little idea of what it can have looked or felt like to walk round.

The corner devoted to the Battersea Funfair site came closest to giving me the feel of the fun that must have been generated. An enormous number of small items from the 'fifties from a ration book to Karstoff dresses, and a wide number of special Festival objects including Festival mugs, ash-trays, books of matches and pieces of soap did not add up to a picture of a very impressive event.

There is something rather incestuous about an exhibition about an exhibition celebrating the centenary of an exhibition, and rather like a series of images in facing mirrors, the effect is one of diminishing solidity. The three exhibitions show a great contrast between the certitudes of 1851, the determined gaiety of 1951 and the surviving trinkets of 1977. The Festival had its own built in impermanence, like the souvenir soap, and its welter of special trivia could have been ready-made for future nostalgia. The part of the past which we examine and exhibit as history seems to come closer and closer: will there be a 1987 Exhibition, at a temporary annexe being used as a substitute for the closed down V and A, of 1977—the year of the beaver and the Jubilee? It is a measure of the rapidity of society's change that the minutiae of yesterday becomes so quickly a historical treasure-trove. Equally it should not be forgotten that the human capacity to enjoy nostalgia for a fantasy of a beautiful past just eluded is not new; it recedes indefinitely from the Edwardian summer, to the Virgilian pastoral, to the paradise where "Adam delved and Eve span" and "who was then the gentleman?"

The concept of an exhibition of the Festival of Britain at this point in our slow historical decline reaches towards irony and paradox. Such hope was there. A poster for the Lansbury architectural section of the Festival shows a hand holding the cleanly printed phrase "New Homes Rise From London's Ruins", but many of the blocks of homes built in the 'fifties would now be thought human and aesthetic barbarities. Before visiting the Exhibition I even imagined that the title "A Tonic for the Nation" was intended to apply to 1977—obviously a misapprehension since the small exhibition would be barely a tiny vitamin pill. A Low cartoon displays an unexpected irony for those reflecting on the rapidity of change. Herbert Morrison and Gerald Barry, two leading Festival organisers, are seen pilloried by a group of roundheads and the date is 1651. On the pillory is written "These sinners rode on a switch-back on Sunday" and one of them is saying "There's one consolation 'The Sunday Observance Laws of today can't last more than three hundred years'."

One of the most positive effects of the Festival was its patronage of the arts, and a model of Henry Moore's "Reclining Figure" and a poster for the first performance of Benjamin Britten's "Billy Bud" recall substantial creative achievements. Concerning the more enduring effects of the Festival, I found very interesting a comment in the informa-

OBITUARIES

MISS J. BEDFORD

Janet Bedford has died tragically at her home in Esher, Surrey, aged 28. She had no religious beliefs and directed that there should not be a religious service at her funeral. There was a secular committal ceremony at Randalls Park Crematorium, Leatherhead.

PROFESSOR R. A. D. FORREST

Robin A. D. Forrest who died on New Year's Day in the Royal Cornwall Hospital, Truro, was a lifelong atheist, honorary secretary of Falmouth Humanist Group and a member of the National Secular Society. He was aged 83.

Professor Forrest was educated at Peterhead Academy and Aberdeen University. He was in the Colonial Civil Service and served as Postmaster General, Chief Magistrate and Secretary for Chinese Affairs in Hong Kong. When the Japanese invaded he escaped with his family to Australia.

On returning to Britain after the last war, Professor Forrest was appointed lecturer in Oriental Languages and African Affairs at London University. He retired in 1953.

Professor Forrest contributed articles to journals of major language societies in France, Germany, the United States and the Far East. His book *The Chinese Language*, published 30 years ago, is essential reading for students of the language. He also contributed to the columns of Humanist journals; his article, *Two Christian Fallacies Examined*, appeared in our January issue.

There was a secular committal ceremony at Truro Crematorium.

MISS G. JONES

Gwladys Jones, who died recently in a London hospital at the age of 63, had a strict religious upbringing in her native Wales. In later years she became a member of the National Secular Society and a *Freethinker* reader, remembering both of them in her Will.

There was a secular committal ceremony at Golders Green Crematorium.

PROFESSOR G. D. PARIKH

Professor G. D. Parikh, a former rector of Bombay University and a prominent leader of the Humanist movement in India, has died of a heart attack. He was aged 60.

Professor Parikh was widely recognised as an extremely able speaker and exponent of radical humanist ideas in India. He was a close associate of the revolutionary philosopher, M. N. Roy, a member of the Indian Radical Humanist Association and of the Indian Secular Society. He was also an Honorary Associate of the Rationalist Press Association.

tive leaflet on sale that the Festival marked the beginning of a new, brighter, lighter Britain with a greater emphasis on the young. The value of the exhibition, so quickly dismantled, was doubted even close to the time. An article by Marghanita Laski "You Remember the Festival?" from the *Observer*, 6 July 1952, is on display. She reflects that no-one would possibly have questioned the 1851 Great Exhibition as "only a fragile bubble of hope" whereas with the Festival of Britain "we knew already that far from marking a rung on the ladder of progress, this might be the furthest pinnacle we could reach." However varied might be people's reaction to the V and A exhibition no-one, I should think, could fail to find it thought-provoking.

JIM HERRICK

The general secretary of the National Secular Society, W. McIlroy, who has so successfully carried out this task for 13 years, is leaving London, and therefore his job, for family reasons. The vacancy created by his departure will not be easy to fill but it is thought that there is a chance of finding someone suitable from among "Freethinker" readers and those familiar with the Secularist movement. If you are interested and think you might be capable of filling the post (or if you know anyone who might) please contact the NSS. (The job primarily entails publicity and campaigning and the arrangement of functions.)

DAVID TRIBE

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The wonderful machines which, in the hands of just and foreseeing men, would have been used to minimize repulsive labour and to give pleasure, or in other words added life to the human race, have been so used on the contrary that they have driven all men into mere frantic haste and hurry, thereby destroying pleasure—that is, life—on all hands: they have, instead of lightening the labour of the workmen, intensified it, and thereby added more weariness yet to the burden which the poor have to carry.—Excerpt from a lecture given by William Morris to the Leicester Secular Society in 1884.

LETTERS

As a Spiritualist, may I reply to some of Barbara Smoker's remarks in her presidential address? She attributes Spiritualists' opposition to exorcism, as practised by the Rev Trevor Dearing, to professional jealousy—a cheap sneer revealing total ignorance of our position.

Dearing's approach is based on cursing and ours on blessing. He probably adheres to the type of theology that asserts that the dead are safely tucked away either in heaven or in hell, and therefore any wandering spirit must be a devil, rather than a human soul whose errors in this life (perhaps a fixed belief that he could not survive death) have caused him difficulties in adjustment to the next. Thus the Dearing attitude to a discarnate being is to scream, "Get thee behind me, Satan", whereas ours is to say, "God bless you, friend. Can I help you?"

Moreover, while such temporarily "lost souls" seem frequently to haunt places, whether they, or any other sort of spirit actually "possess" human beings is quite another question. Whatever the truth, prayers so worded as to calm and reassure a mentally sick person should be of use, and certainly cannot harm, but we are at least as aware as Miss Smoker of the dangers of Mr Dearing's hysterical procedures.

Naturally we heartily welcome the excellent work now being done by some Christian clergy, particularly those connected with the Churches' Fellowship for Psychical and Spiritual Studies. Their "exorcisms", like ours, aim to show an earthbound spirit that he can leave the scenes of his earthly life for regions appropriate to his present state.

RUTH ROSS

I enjoyed the article by Mr George Jaeger. ("Why I Left the Church" in "The Freethinker", January 1977.)

As an ex-Roman Catholic priest, I feel a strong spiritual affinity with clergymen of any denomination who feel it necessary to "leave the Church" in order to achieve freedom of thought and integrity of mind. For a Roman Catholic priest there is one supremely effective way of leaving the Church and that is to get married. A priest might commit a thousand "mortal sins" without coming into conflict with ecclesiastical authority. But if a priest dares to get himself married he at once becomes an outcast. He excommunicates himself. Yet he goes on living, and finds that life can become quite pleasant through the cultivation of a purely secular humanism.

The time may come when there will be no more living by false pretences. Until that time arrives it is a privilege to contribute anything, however small, to the one and only journal that dares to call itself "The Freethinker" and has never once in all its life deviated from its purpose.

PETER CROMMELIN

I greatly enjoyed R. J. Condon's article "The Old Lady" but agree with Bernard Shaw that if Bradlaugh did not take out his watch and challenge the Almighty to strike him dead in five minutes, he ought to have done. The idea that Bradlaugh was far too pious a man to commit such a blasphemy tickled Shaw's sense of the ridiculous. As he points out in his preface to "Back to Methuselah": "The challenge attributed to Bradlaugh was a scientific experiment of a quite simple, straightforward and proper kind, to ascertain whether the expression of atheistic opinions really did involve any personal risk." GBS goes on to describe how, at a bachelor party in 1878, he, "shar-

ing Bradlaugh's views as to the absurdity of the belief in these violent interferences with the order of nature by a short-tempered and thin-skinned Deity" took out his watch.

Shaw continues: "The effect was electrical. Neither sceptics nor devotees were prepared to abide the result of the experiment. In vain did I urge the pious to trust in the accuracy of their Deity's aim with a thunderbolt. In vain did I appeal to the sceptics to accept the logical outcome of their scepticism: it soon appeared that when thunderbolts were in question, there were no sceptics. Our host, seeing that his guests would vanish precipitately if the impious challenge were uttered, leaving him with a solitary infidel under sentence of extermination in five minutes, interposed and forbade the experiment." Would posterity have been deprived of this century's greatest playwright if he had not?

JOHN L. BROOM

Atheist Answer

"In case some of your readers are less well-informed than Fred Milson on the historical origins of 'Christmas' (*alias* Yuletide, *Natalis Solis Invicti*, *Brumalia*, etc, etc), perhaps I should explain here that the traditional Christmas carols are simply new versions of seasonal pagan folk-songs, sung to the same tunes and, in many cases, with the words only very slightly altered. As for the model 'crib', this originated in ancient Egypt, where the supposed birthplace of the sun was called *Ap-ta* (the upper Earth). Since *apta* also happened to be the word both for a baby's crib and for an animal's manger, the rebirth of the sun at the winter solstice was represented by the figure of a newborn baby, Horus, laid in a manger, with a statue of the virgin-mother-goddess Isis on one side and a statue of Osiris on the other, and in the background the two domesticated animals from the constellation Auriga—Taurus the Bull and the Ass of Typhon. So 'cribs', identical with those seen in Christian churches today, became an annual feature in the streets and temples of Egypt, centuries before the alleged lifetime of Jesus.

"However, I do agree with Mr Milson that none of this, of itself, provides an adequate reason for rejecting Christian doctrines. I have never suggested it does. Had the television interviewer asked me why I do not believe in a personal god, and had there been more than a minute or two available in which to reply, then I could have given a dozen good reasons. But perhaps one of them will suffice here.

"No thinking person can visit the chronic wards of a children's hospital, or even watch television films of predator animals, and, without mental contortions, go on believing in a god who is both omnipotent and beneficent. Supposing it were possible for 'spirits' to exist apart from physical organisms, and supposing a supreme spirit did create and sustain the universe, he (or she or it?) might either be loving and incompetent, or sadistic and almighty;

but certainly, on all the evidence, could not possibly be both loving and almighty."

[Barbara Smoker wishes to acknowledge her indebtedness to R. J. Condon's *Our Pagan Christmas* for some of the facts given in the above statement—and *Freethinker* readers may like to know that copies of this well-produced little NSS publication are still available from our office, at the incredibly low price of 27p, post free.]

Abortion Amendment Bill

disclose confidential information to the General Medical Council to enable allegations of serious professional misconduct to be investigated.

Time should be allowed for these and other controls to take effect before deciding whether law enforcement is necessary, or whether the real "abuses" do not relate to a reluctance in some areas to implement the existing law effectively.

Letters clarifying your reasons for objecting to the Bill could be sent to your MP, House of Commons, Westminster, London SW1.

A new Humanist group has been formed in Bristol, and "Freethinker" readers are assured of a friendly welcome at discussion meetings which are held on the second Sunday of each month. There is no membership subscription. The Hon Secretary of the new group is Douglas Barnes, 18 Shaftsbury Avenue, Montpelier, Bristol.

The Radio 4 programme "If you think You've got Problems", which broadcasts recorded studio counselling sessions, was due to go out on Sunday, January 23, 1977 at 6.15 pm. The topic for that week's programme had been printed in the "Radio Times", "Three women, all of whom are lesbians, discuss the problems they have experienced . . ." At 6.15, however, anyone hoping for the enlightened and sympathetic comments which the programme usually offers would have been disappointed. The announcer stated "In place of the advertised programme . . ." and it has been reported that the programme was scrapped since it was not thought "appropriate" for Sunday broadcasting.

EVENTS

BBC Television. BBC2, Wednesday, 23 February. A play about Annie Besant in "The Velvet Glove" series.

Brighton and Hove Humanist Group. Imperial Hotel, Hove. Sunday, 6 February, 5.30 pm. Professor Sir Hermann Bondi: "A Personal View of Humanism".

Belfast Humanist Group. Meetings on the second Thursday of the month, 8 pm. 8a Grand Parade Castlereagh. Secretary: Wendy Wheeler, 30 Cloyne Crescent, Monkstown, Co Antrim, telephone Whiteabbey 66752.

Harrow Humanist Group. The Library, Gayton Road, Harrow. Wednesday, 9 February, 8 pm. Professor Sir Hermann Bondi: "Why is it Dark at Night?"

Humanist Holidays. Easter at Southsea and Summer Holiday at Ross-on-Wye (small hotel and camping site). No single rooms at either centre. Details: Mrs M. Mepham, 29 Fairview Road, Sutton, Surrey, telephone (01) 642 8796.

Lewisham Humanist Group. Unitarian Meeting House, 41 Bromley Road, Catford, London SE6. Thursday, 24 February, 7.45 pm. Barbara Smoker: "The Relevance of Atheism".

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

London Young Humanists. 13 Prince of Wales Terrace, London W8. Sunday, 6 February, 7.30 pm. Jim Herrick: "Some Cults from the East". Sunday, 20 February, 7.30 pm. Professor Bernard Crick: "The Political Ethics of George Orwell".

Merseyside Humanist Group. Lecture Room, 46 Hamilton Square, Birkenhead. Meeting held on the third Wednesday of the month, 7.45 pm.

Muswell Hill Humanist Group. 46 Windermere Road, London N10. Thursday, 17 February, 8 pm. A discussion on the work of Intergroup.

Worthing Humanist Group. Burlington Hotel, Marine Parade, Worthing. Sunday, 27 February, 5.30 pm. Brian Richardson: "The Work of the National Council for Civil Liberties".

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UK ISSN 0016-0687

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

"The Freethinker" was founded in 1881 by G. W. Foote and is published mid-monthly. Material submitted (including Letters and Announcements) must reach this office by the 20th of the preceding month.

SPECIAL POSTAL SUBSCRIPTION RATES

Inland and Overseas: Twelve months: £1.75 Six months: 90p
U.S.A. and Canada: Twelve months: \$4.50 Six months: \$2.25

Please make cheques, etc., payable to G. W. Foote & Company. (Foreign subscriptions by cheque or International Money Order)

"The Freethinker" can also be ordered through any newsagent.