

The FREETHINKER

Founded 1881

Secular Humanist Monthly

Vol. 97, No. 6

JUNE 1977

12p

MP ATTACKS USE OF ANTIQUE BLASPHEMY LAWS

Barbara Smoker opened a meeting organised by the National Secular Society at London's Conway Hall on 27 May by reminding the audience that the Society's warnings about the blasphemy laws had previously been ignored or ridiculed. "But", added the NSS President, "in five weeks' time, Denis Lemon, the Editor of 'Gay News', will appear at the Old Bailey on a charge of blasphemous libel. The prosecution, initiated by Mrs Mary Whitehouse, came a few weeks after references to the blasphemy laws had been made by the Archbishop of Canterbury and the Home Secretary. As long as such laws remain, Christian zealots will use them in promoting their religious superstition and defending its statutory privileges".

Brian Sedgemore, MP (Labour, Luton West), said that when the history of the world comes to be read it will be seen that many strange things have been done in the name of God.

"That the editor of *Gay News* should be put at risk of imprisonment in the last quarter of the twentieth century for blasphemous libel in a land that presumptuously calls itself the sanctuary of freedom will be seen by most as bizarre, by some as offensive, by myself as insulting to reason, and by God, should he exist, as traitorous and treacherous . . .

"When I think of blasphemy I think of ignoble cowards; I think of the Reverend Ian Paisley and the blood of Northern Ireland; I think of Tory Archbishops, Tory judges, and Home Secretaries—red, blue and yellow. I think of all these and I despair for freedom.

"Is it too much to ask that a society that takes Darwin and evolution, Freud and psychology, Einstein and science easily in its stride should free its citizens from the fear of blasphemous prosecution? Blasphemy, after all, has its origins as a crime in the now defunct concept of God, the being in the

sky. Just as the theologians have moved on, so should the law-makers."

The speaker, recalling his Anglican background, added: "When I was a believer, a choir boy and a communicant in the Anglican Church, nobody told me that I was singing and praying in order to stifle freedom of expression and lock people up. Nobody told me that it was the authoritarian ideals of Mary Whitehouse for which we were striving . . .

"The crime of blasphemy has nothing to do with offending man's spiritual feelings, nothing to do with breaches of the peace, actual or potential, and nothing to do with morals or religion. It is purely a device for assuaging the feelings of a Church that grew out of the sexual peccadillos of a Monarch who was contemptuous of marriage and family life . . .

"Mrs Whitehouse was given permission by the High Court on 9 December 1976 to bring prosecutions against *Gay News*, its editor and publisher. On 20 December 1976 she was given permission to take the prosecution straight to the Central Criminal Court. It matters not that the poem which has given rise to the prosecution has no literary, historical, or as far as I can see, other value. It matters not that the poem is not in good taste."

Illiberal Backlash

Mr Sedgemore warned that the *Gay News* prosecution cannot be seen in isolation: "It is part of the illiberal, authoritarian mood of our age. It is the backlash of the insecure in the 1970s to the anarchic fervour of the 1960s. It is the Establishment's irrelevant response to its own moral feebleness. At a time of economic slump, when people want to be uplifted morally and materially, the Establishment can only offer repression. We may see more of it before the decade is out—criminal libel, blasphemy, sedition—particularly if this action against *Gay News* is successful."

Edward Blishen, the novelist and critic, referred to the ludicrous attempt to use unrepealed, antiquated laws, which are out of touch with cultural and social reality. "In relation to the general spirit of society, it makes no more sense to fall back upon the blasphemy laws than it would do to revert to hanging men for stealing sheep."

"Nor has any man the right to claim that his conviction is one the law must peculiarly protect. If whatever a man has to say can be held likely to cause a breach of the peace, that is another matter. If there are limits to freedom of speech, they may lie in considerations simply of the need to prevent any group of us from being goaded to the point of riot and public disorder. Beyond that, to use the law to prevent or punish the publication of any view whatever is manifestly absurd."

Those who attempt to invoke out-dated laws such as the blasphemy ones "are attempting to halt the free exploration of belief and the open expression of ideas by putting back every kind of clock, and by appeal to the dead forms of a narrow past. The very term they appeal to, this term 'blasphemy', is no longer a term in which we are reasonably able to discuss the limits of free speech. Translate it, as etymologically it may be translated, as 'evil speaking', and one sees how perfectly medieval it is, as a term."

Edward Blishen pointed out that blasphemy was only possible as a crime relating to the Christian faith. He asked: "What legal meaning does one attach to the term 'blasphemy' in a religiously patchwork society? Is it a term we can allow ourselves to take seriously, given that to do so may open up issues of definition that no society in which dozens of forms of belief and non-belief exist side by side would wish to have opened up?"

Christian Origins in Blasphemy

Nicolas Walter, Editor of *New Humanist*, said that blasphemy and Christianity were intimately linked. The origins of Christianity lay in the trial of a blasphemer against the Jewish laws. A monotheistic religion which worships a single beneficent deity had to find a solution to the problem of the evident evils of the world—which could be seen as blasphemous and redemptable. A poly-theistic religion need not concern itself with blasphemy since everything could be seen as divine.

Christians for these reasons had always been extremely uptight about blasphemy and anxious to stop it. Yet, the Bible itself contained many passages which could be considered blasphemous, obscene or indecent. (Examples were given.)

The history of blasphemy cases was fascinating and Nicolas Walter looked at some past cases such as those of Paine, Carlile, Shelley and Holyoake. The famous issue of *The Freethinker* for Christmas 1882, which was prosecuted for blasphemy, was shown.

Although a blasphemy prosecution was taking place against *Gay News* it was significant that a number of works of modern literature which could be considered blasphemous were not also prosecuted.

No one could have predicted that the NSS would be organising such a meeting in 1977, to campaign against the use of blasphemy laws. Edward Blishen voiced the secular humanist view with great clarity in saying: "To attempt again to overshadow human discussion with these outworn laws is to threaten, indeed, the tolerances and freedoms that have been the fruit of long struggle by men and women given remarkably little to the speaking of evil."

Passionate Humanism

H. J. Blackham, who has devoted a lifetime to humanist aims, has retired from London to the country "to write a few books". At times he has been serving on as many as 16 committees, he is a past President of the British Humanist Association, and is widely respected as a writer on questions of humanism and morality. He recently recalled aspects of his life on two occasions.

At South Place Ethical Society in a Sunday morning lecture, he spoke of "Fifty Years as a Humanist". His early connections had been with Stanton Coit and the Ethical Movement, though he was not specifically drawn to the Ethical Church. Among many amusing anecdotes, relating to the larger-than-life temperament of Stanton Coit, he mentioned how Bernard Shaw had seen Stanton Coit dancing at a social function and had commented "That's not dancing, that's ethical movement."

In the 'thirties he had worked with Hypatia Bradlaugh Bonner and the World Union of Freethinkers. The Union was broken by the war, and a conference in 1946 on humanism with the World Union of Freethinkers showed that it was too late to pick up the pieces. Then he became closely involved with the foundation of the International Humanist and Ethical Union in the 'fifties.

In emphasising what was essential to humanism in his view, H. J. Blackham said that it should be 100 per cent rationalist in its definition of knowledge, 100 per cent ethical in its encouragement of moral autonomy and personal responsibility, and 100 per cent political—in the widest sense—in its concern for freedom, toleration and the open society. It should especially be 100 per cent passionate in man's attachment to others and to life.

Mr Blackham agreed to say a few words at the National Secular Society Annual Dinner, where he had been a guest of honour in the past. He said he was returning to the country, and recalled working on a farm as a youth. "If you have once worked

(Continued on back page)

Not everyone finds it easy to experience the full joy of sexual relations. George Jaeger, who in a previous article in "The Freethinker" described his reasons for leaving the church, here discusses how religion can cast a blight on full sexual expression. He refers to a number of writers who have given an analysis of the relation between religion and neurotic attitudes to sex and proposes a free, positive attitude to sexuality.

When I was in Canada some years ago, an acquaintance of mine who was not feeling very well went to a doctor for a physical check-up. The doctor asked him to strip, and after testing his lungs and other parts of his anatomy, pointed to his penis and said, "Ever have any trouble with this?" My acquaintance replied, in effect, "You must be joking. It's given me nothing but trouble all my life!"

This is a funny story, of course, but it illustrates the point I wish to make. Many of us are so ill-educated or so maladjusted to sex, that instead of connotating delight, or something essential to our development as mature human beings, sex in one or all of its forms appears as trouble, or a source of temptation.

My own experience, which no doubt tallies with that of millions of others, is that sex has been since puberty, a life-long anxiety. Who or what is to blame for this? The culprit in my case as in that of countless others, is religion. For us the permissive society does not exist. We are far too inhibited by our early conditioning to achieve anything like spontaneity of sexual expression, even in words.

A long time ago Philip Wylie wrote: "Western man's religions, (and hence his culture), are rooted in sex management and sustained by inculcated sex fears." Religion is "... 'a discipline of shame and guilt as the social means toward enforcing sex patterns designed not for the sake of sex, or to enhance its expression, but merely to exalt egos by a lustful identification with an arbitrary 'god', a varied set of 'righteousness'."

I can claim to know a good deal about religion, as readers of *The Freethinker* will be aware. My reasons for joining the Church in the first place were many, but there is no question that guilt about one's sexual feelings was of considerable importance. A person who is mixed up about sex can fall an easy prey to the solution offered by the Christian religion, i.e. acceptance and forgiveness for the repentant sinner.

Although I am now a Humanist, my religious training is so deeply ingrained that I am still not without anxieties about sex. According to Havelock Ellis, the problem can only be solved by a suitable marriage. However, if the permissive society were a fact, other solutions to the problem of sex fulfilment would be freely available—not only to the rich and fortunate, as at present, not only to the careless and to the flagrantly criminal, but to all.

Perhaps the appearance of nudity on the stage, the opening of sex shops, the free showing of sex films and the connivance of society in allowing the spread of pornographic literature is seen as permissiveness. In my view that is simply evidence that society approves of making money by any and all means, even if individuals are destroyed in the process. Some basic anxieties may be relieved, but it is a far cry from that to true fulfilment as a fully human person.

To return to our main theme, which is anxiety, guilt (allied to furtiveness) and non-fulfilment in a so-called "permissive society".

There have been many writers in this century who have tried to bring sanity into the situation. Some point to religion as the villain of the piece. There are others (e.g. Marx), who single out money as the culprit. In a class by himself stands Wilhelm Reich, pointing to our general culture mores and to politics as have imposed a compulsory sex-morality that is damaging to human personality.

Neurosis and Religion

Norman Brown, in *Life against Death*, sees man as a neurotic animal whose religions are both cause and evidence of his neurosis. Civilised man, he writes, has an ever-increasing sense of guilt. He quotes the saying of Blake, "We are to be faithful to the principle of delight", and argues against our sullen repression of the body. He would have us accept ourselves fully as sexual beings, and says that we must try to make the "unconscious" conscious.

In *Psycho-analysis Observed*, John Wren-Lewis has an essay entitled "Love's Coming of Age". In it he describes religion as "the universal neurosis" and as that which robs man of his self-confidence. It used to be thought that Copernicus had dethroned man by proving that the earth, far from being the centre of the universe, was merely a minor planet revolving round the sun. But Wren-Lewis shows that man was reduced to a miserable sinner by the Church long before Copernicus and had already accepted the idea of his worthlessness. Religion is in fact sadistic, delighting in robbing

(Continued on page 94)

A Heretical Pilgrimage to Walsingham and Lourdes

NICHOLAS REED

Walsingham and Lourdes both have shrines venerated for their supposed healing qualities. The one, in England, was once renowned throughout Christendom, but is no longer a regular place of pilgrimage. The other, in France, is a by-word for religious and commercial exploitation of sickness and hope. Nicholas Reed here describes his impression of the two places and comments on the comparisons between them.

It has been interesting, in the course of holidays in Norfolk and France, to make detours to see both Lourdes, and Walsingham—"England's Little Nazareth". The first is of course still flourishing; the other is now just a small village. Yet England's shrine has a better foundation story; a noble lady in the village dreamt she was told to build a church which would be an exact imitation of the house in which Mary was living when the Annunciation took place. (It seems remarkable that the house built at Walsingham was a typical Saxon dwelling house with no trace of Eastern influences.) There were two possible sites for it in the appropriate field, and the builders laid the foundations in one of them. When they came back the following day the foundations had miraculously moved to the other place, and it was here that the shrine was completed. The legend was presumably based on a change of plan completed so suddenly that it was said to have happened "overnight". Through the next 500 years Walsingham's importance increased, much boosted by royal visits, and became one of the four great shrines of Christendom: outdoing the shrine of Thomas à Becket at Canterbury, it was ranked alongside Jerusalem, Rome and St James of Compostella in Spain. As a result of this fame, Henry VIII razed it to the ground.

Lourdes, on the other hand, has become increasingly more popular among Catholics. Everything started in 1858, through the visions of a peasant girl aged 14 called Bernadette Soubirous. She came from a poor family which, in a housing shortage, was finally forced to live in a disused prison, cold, damp and insanitary. She herself also suffered from asthma, and it is hardly surprising that the starving girl, visiting a rocky defile near the river, experienced 18 visions in all of the Virgin Mary. Her health was broken by her early life; four years later tuberculosis struck, and she died at 35 from bone cancer.

The Virgin Mary, though she talked fluently in the Lourdes dialect, did not unfortunately have

much to say, and told Bernadette straightaway that she wasn't to look for happiness in this life, but in that to come. Later on, Mary called for penitence and invited Bernadette to drink the water at the Grotto, and also eat the grass there. (Perhaps this can be explained if the Virgin habitually eats grass—though Catholic guidebooks translate "herbe" delicately as "herb" or "vegetation".) She ended up by saying she was the Immaculate Conception. Along with the large white rosary which she sported, this of course proves that Catholicism is the true religion, and all other Christians are heretics.

At Lourdes, one's first impression is of the hordes of pilgrims and traffic. Next one comes across a procession of invalids being drawn along in identical carriages with blue canopies, resembling Edwardian perambulators; though sometimes one could see, for instance, a blind mongol boy walking with his parents. Invalids do not outnumber other visitors, yet there were 67,500 such invalids visiting Lourdes last year. What then are the results? The Vatican claims there have been 62 "miraculous" cures since 1858, and that is out of about two million of the sick who have visited Lourdes in that time. This is roughly one in every 33,000, and could approximate to the number of people who recover inexplicably from diseases, such as cancer, which their doctors had described as incurable. And such spontaneous remissions are a well-known and by no means incredible phenomenon. We shall only be able to explain them when we can explain the cause of cancer, though in the meantime the Catholics will do their best to use such occurrences as an argument for opposing voluntary euthanasia.

England too can claim "miraculous" cures; in the shrine at Walsingham are numerous small plaques commemorating cures or semi-cures, recorded by sufferers or their relatives, and attributed to Mary. (Lourdes actually has about 20 crutches hung up above the grotto itself.) Being dedicated to Mary, the Walsingham shrine also has many of her statues, and one statue is not just the usual gory Jesus with blood dripping from his wounds, but Mary looking pensive, with a sword stuck full into her, and blood dripping down again. I shouldn't like to share the dreams of any impressionable children who see this.

Yet not even in worshipping Mary can the high Anglicans and the Catholics unite: the Catholic shrine at Walsingham is situated a mile from the Anglican one. The Anglican shrine was restored in the 1930s; the Catholic is a fourteenth century chapel which was bought and restored in the 1890s by a Catholic convert. And even though there is not the slightest evidence for an apparition of Mary

WORLDWIDE

there—let alone some special healing waters—there too they have their processions of the sick. Indeed their resident priest, doubtless with Lourdes in mind, says "I dream of the day when we shall have special buildings designed for the accommodation of the sick, and with special staff devoted to their needs."

At Lourdes there is now not the original spring, but 20 separate faucets where you press a button to obtain the holy water—not quite as good as the Hellenistic age, which invented a coin-in-the-slot holy water dispenser. The water though is nothing special; it tastes just like tap-water. (And given that the 20 faucets are continually gushing with water, one begins to wonder . . .) Next to the drinking fountains ranks of candles are piled up, of every price and size. The largest, already burning, are set up in special stands, and can be up to six feet high and six inches in diameter.

One striking parallel between Lourdes and Walsingham is the way they both attribute miraculous healing powers to a local spring. This, of course, is a very primitive concept, and reminds one of nothing so much as the worship of springs in pagan Greece and Rome. There too one finds dedications of thanks for health supposedly given by the local deity. It may be this miraculous element which makes the official churches wary of supporting such shrines overtly. Although the annual Anglican pilgrimage to Walsingham has been led by bishops, the Church of England is still cautious. However, the Catholic Archbishop Hume was the principal officiator at the Catholic ceremonies in Walsingham last year.

Yet at Lourdes, there are constant rumours that the Vatican is going to announce its disapproval of some aspect of the proceedings. We surely cannot assume they are worried that some of the "miraculous" cures may later be disproved. The corpses are not going to be exhumed now—nor would they tell us anything if they were. It is presumably more the commercialism in Lourdes which disturbs the Pope: the gross exploitation visible in the hundreds of tourist shops selling the most appalling rubbish as sacred curios. While for Anglicans, the danger must lie in being tarred with the brush of Popery if we elevate the virgin Mary to such a height.

Therein lies the irony: the Catholic church which prizes motherhood to the extent of forcing it on girls unwillingly pregnant, thus oppressing women almost as dreadfully as the Muslim faith, at the same time venerates two shrines started by women. What a good example of Catholic double-think.

Yet perhaps Lourdes is not an unmitigated disaster. Thousands of people are brought from all round the world, and no doubt have a fabulous holiday—paid for at vast expense. Given the appalling illnesses from which many of them suffer, there is perhaps something to be said for the existence of Lourdes as a holiday resort.

NEW ZEALAND

Abortion on demand has been rejected and rape has been excluded as a ground for abortion in a recent report in New Zealand. The report has been published as a result of three years deliberation by the Royal Commission on Contraceptives, Sterilisation and Abortion.

The report has, however, been seen as a compromise by many involved in the abortion debate in New Zealand. Abortion could be allowed up to 20 weeks if the woman has the approval of a special panel. Serious danger to the life or physical or mental health of the mother and the likelihood of the child being born handicapped would be grounds for abortion.

AUSTRALIA

A young woman has admitted in court that she lied to her family while "under duress" from the president of a Hare Krishna Temple. In Melbourne Magistrates Court, Carol Ann Belot agreed that the president of the temple had made her send a telegram to her mother and brother saying that she was going to leave the movement and had deliberately lied to obtain her air fare. It was suggested in court that Krishna consciousness justified lies told to people who did not believe in the god Krishna.

The case involved charges of kidnapping against Carol Belot's family. She had apparently intended to donate land, inherited from her father, to the International Society for Krishna Consciousness. The defendants were accused of holding her a prisoner for two weeks. None of the charges was upheld and the magistrate described the case as "pathetic".

SPAIN

A British Airways jumbo jet narrowly avoided two near collisions within ten minutes, while flying over Spain a month ago. Some criticism of the Spanish air traffic control equipment has been reported. A controller in Barcelona is said to have commented: "The fact that there has not been a mid-air collision is because God does not want it."

CHARLES WILSHAW

THE RIGHT TO DIE

25p plus 10p postage

● A new hospice has been opened at Lourdes to house the many sick who visit the Marian shrine annually. The hospice stands across the river from the grotto where the Blessed Virgin appeared to Bernadette Soubirous in 1858.

Change of NSS General Secretary

Bill McIlroy, the General Secretary of the National Secular Society is to retire in June 1977. He has been General Secretary from 1963 to 1977, with a break from 1970-72. He has also been Editor of "The Freethinker" during the years 1970-71 and 1975-76. His successor will be Jim Herrick.

Barbara Smoker writes: Bill McIlroy's 13 years in the NSS office constitute a period of modest renewal of the Society. More than half of it was spent in partnership with David Tribe as President, and most of the second half in partnership with myself. And only I know how fortunate I have been to have his expertise at my disposal.

When Bill first became Secretary, it was a time of difficult transition, with television rapidly taking over as the main medium of propaganda, not only from the public meeting and open-air oratory, but also largely from the printed word. Showing a natural flair for the public relations side of the job, Bill exploited this new situation to the Society's advantage, at the same time moving away from a narrow concentration on the menace of the Church of Rome. His early life in the fundamentalist Protestant environment of Northern Ireland left him with no illusion that Catholicism was the sole enemy of rationalism and social progress, and he has pulled no punches in attacking religious oppression of every variety.

Now that he is leaving our employ (though not, of course, leaving the Society), our good fortune persists, for his successor as Secretary is to be Jim Herrick, who took over editorship of *The Freethinker* six months ago. After working for eight years as a school teacher, Jim went to work in the office of the British Humanist Association 15 months ago, and became their Assistant Secretary. My one regret, indeed, about his new appointment is that the gain of the NSS will be the loss of the BHA, in which I am also actively committed. But he will hold the key position in the NSS, which should give his abilities full scope. At the same time, he will continue to edit *The Freethinker*. I wish him a long and successful tenure in both capacities.

David Tribe writes:

While I have known for some time that Bill McIlroy planned an early retirement from the editorship of the *Freethinker* and secretaryship of the National Secular Society, I was still stunned when the moment arrived. For some unexplained reason it is always assumed that NSS officers fight ceaselessly to attain and then retain office, as if there were no more honoured sinecures in the land. Unfortunately, there has never been any profusion of suitable candidates, and the situation has deteriorated since the golden days of secularism in the nineteenth

century. Without in any way disparaging the heroes and martyrs of yesteryear one should recognise that the removal of overt persecution of freethinkers brought new organisational problems to the movement. It undoubtedly reduced *esprit de corps*, society membership and journal circulations. While subjected to the same backbiting as in the past, leaders came to receive nothing like the same encouragement. Eventually they received no encouragement at all, and it might have seemed that only the biblical injunction about putting one's hand to the plough kept them going, were not the work itself its own abiding reward. I can now reveal that twice while I was NSS president I had to talk fast to persuade Bill to withdraw his resignation from the secretaryship, and that I delayed my own resignation until such time as he was happy things would carry on smoothly in my absence (as indeed they have). I'm sure Barbara Smoker has talked equally fast to persuade him on this occasion, but finally personal and family considerations became overwhelming.

Insight into Bigotry

Bill was born and brought up in the Bible Belt of Northern Ireland, where he was not simply washed, but half-drowned, in the Blood of the Lamb. It was a period that left its scars, but it did bring the benefit of turning him, reactively, into a freethinker and a radical (after a flirtation with Marxism). It also gave him insight, which is fast becoming rare, into important aspects of religion: that it promotes bigotry today as in the past; that it is still closely associated with reactionary political and social views; that Protestant Fundamentalism is as unpleasant as Catholic Ultramontaniam, though it may be less powerful in a world context. Bill gained another advantage he doesn't recognise: he didn't receive extended formal education. This sacred cow has bred so rapidly and herded so indiscriminately that even those it tries to jostle off the road are inclined to reverence it. His wife Margaret—who has been in every way a magnificent support—and I had to work on him for some time to induce him to undertake the editorship of the *Freethinker*, by emphasising that linguistic niceties can be (and in Bill's case were) picked up readily enough, but essential qualities of verbal facility, incisiveness of judgment and commonsense cannot be conveyed (and may even be killed) by formal education. The early secularist leaders got by very nicely without it, and nothing but popular mythology has changed since.

Anyone who knew Bill as a conversationalist, raconteur and speaker at conferences should have recognised his potential to become the highly successful editor he turned out to be. From Ireland he brought, and used where necessary, a fine line

in waspish invective—which remains an essential part of journalism, however the fainthearted may decry it as “coarse”, “crude” or “violent”. He was probably the first, and still the best, journalist to expose fringe sects like the Children of God, at a time when they were generally regarded as harmless eccentrics; and his acid pen has helped to neutralise nonbiodegradable detergents like Mary Whitehouse.

Firm Grasp of Purpose

To his job as secretary of the NSS he brought other valuable qualities and experience. He and I worked extremely closely over many years, during which he remained a paragon of conscientiousness, dependability and discretion, always putting the cause of freethought above other considerations. Unfortunately, not every freethinker shared this attitude, and there were occasions when we had to spend much time in consultation on organisational matters. It is important for the president of a national body not to engage personally in behind-the-scenes lobbying and to show absolute impartiality in the chair; but he can do this with greater equanimity when the general secretary has something of the experience of a Communist Party secretary. In the last analysis, a firm grasp of the nature and purpose of an organisation and the economic and ideological realities surrounding it are more important than details of office management. It is equally important to sum up the potentialities and personalities of members and treat them individually. His years in the GPO gave Bill facility, where needed, in writing the put-down Civil Service reply to troublesome correspondents; but everyone in real need knew how seriously he took his “pastoral” responsibilities. Indeed, throughout the history of the movement those who have fought most strenuously against treating freethought as a religion have best understood to what extent it functions as a religious surrogate.

In times of transition the devil always looks after his own, and the NSS has proved singularly successful in finding an apostolic succession of dedicated officers. Moreover, while there is a sense in which no one is replaceable, there is another sense in which no one is irreplaceable. Jim Herrick has a hard act to follow, but as an experienced theatre critic he is rooted in the tradition that the show must go on. He has the assurance of many wellwishers viewing in the wings, and none more encouragingly than Bill McIlroy.

Publicity has been given to the launching of a new book by Mary Whitehouse, called “Whatever Happened to Sex?” Certainly no-one is likely to be able to forget while her pen is busy. The book naturally contains examples and quotations and Mrs Whitehouse has expressed concern lest the book get into the hands of “the wrong sort of people”.

BILL McILROY

General Secretary, National Secular Society,
1963-70, 1972-77

Editor, *The Freethinker*, 1970-71, 1975-76

FAREWELL PARTY

and

WELCOME

to his successor

JIM HERRICK

In the downstairs bar of

THE WESTMINSTER ARMS
Storey's Gate, London SW1

(off Parliament Square, next to Westminster
Central Hall)

Friday, 1 July 1977, 8 pm

Arranged by the NSS, 702 Holloway Road
London N19 'Phone 01-272 1266

Who is on our side? Every schoolmaster, even though he know it not; every library; every book that is not filled with fable and bound in fraud: for every book written with honest purpose, aye, though it be against us, may light a spark of thought that shall burn and blaze in the future.

Who is on our side? The bold were on our side long ago. Dungeons held them, faggots and fire stifled and scorched them, penal enactments crushed them, yet the bold went on. And there is life in their deadness, not the sham immortality, but the true, as Bruno's spirit goes through the world, alive as 280 years ago.

Who is on our side? Our work is not only negation, not only mocking, not only hewing; mock, sword, mace, these are all weapons in our fight; but we would rather not fight, but grow; we would rather not fight, but march; we would rather not fight, but work our hope out in life; but when we strive to do our duty well, on every side foes swarm hidden, forging lies like stilettos to stab us unawares.

Charles Bradlaugh

Address to National Secular Society, 1880

NATIONAL SECULAR SOCIETY

**MEMBERSHIP ENQUIRIES to the General Secretary,
702 Holloway Road, London N19 3NL**

LORD'S PRAYER

The debate about religious education has continued at inordinate length in the House of Lords. It is clear that for the occasional voice in favour of change towards a secular approach to RE, there are many more voices anxious for a change back towards a stronger Christian and moralistic content. It is noticeable that many of their Lordships seemed to be relying on information supplied by the Order of Christian Unity, well-known for its determined hope to put the clock back to hard-line Religious Instruction.

On 18 May 1977, Lord Blake rose to call attention to the lack of an adequate Christian content in religious education in Local Education Authority schools. He was making three proposals. Firstly, to set up an independent inquiry into religious education in the maintained schools and the place of Christianity within it. Secondly, to urge that religious education be part of any core curriculum. Thirdly, to ask the Department of Education and Science to issue a circular to all local education authorities declaring the centrality of Christianity in religious education.

Lord Blake admitted that "only 10 per cent of the population were committed and practising members of one of the Christian Churches. On the other hand it seems also to be true that 80 to 90 per cent identify themselves as Christians in however vague or shadowy a manner." This shadowy Christianity is so vague that many people would be hard put to know what he was talking about.

He was greatly concerned that the Christian content of RE was being crowded out by the study of other faiths or "in the atrocious jargon of modern educationalists, it is being crowded out by what are being called 'stances for living'—a very misleading metaphor if it comes from cricket or golf. Why not creeds or beliefs?"

A central argument in discussing RE recently has been that we live in a pluralistic society, with many creeds and faiths. This means that it is necessary to learn about world religions other than Christianity. This argument was repeatedly refuted in the debate. Partly because it was expecting too much of children; "... we cannot expect children to digest and rationalise a fearful mixture of comparative religions, humanism, atheism, stances for living, political ethics as well as Christianity. Just one of these disciplines requires a well developed conceptual mental capability." (Viscount Alanbrooke).

Other arguments used to counter the need for wider content in RE for a pluralistic society was that majorities have rights as well as minorities, and the immigrant groups in this country wish to learn about our Christian heritage. At an extreme of this position was the Earl of Longford, who expressively commented on the phrase "a pluralistic society"—"Fiddlesticks".

NEWS

An alternative view was put by Lord Brockway, who said, "To say in our present multi-racial society that one kind of religion must be taught, that that must be the instruction, that it must be a reflection only of Christian content—that is a denial of the kind of society towards which we are moving. "Lord Brockway however stressed the importance of teaching ethics not associated with any particular religion. This could be "the most exciting subject in the whole of our curriculum. Think of our own English leaders in ethics—More, Bacon, Winstanley, Paine, Godwin, Shelley, Morris."

Lord Ritchie-Calder spoke as a humanist: "This is a secular State; I repeat that it is a secular State, and this is because, as we have heard, people are contracting out of the religious education system which is permitted or laid down by the 1944 Act. That Act is an anachronism in which, as has been repeatedly said, the only two subjects imposed by law are religion and physical education. I would remind your Lordships—and I do not think it is possible to contradict it—that in 1944 that was a political deal to mollify the denominational schools and indeed the organised religious bodies."

Lord Platt expressed a similar view. He wanted some consideration of which facts about Christianity should be taught, and what parts of the Bible—"there are parts which compete with pornography in unsuitability for teaching to small children." He wanted to discard collective worship and discard sectarian schools, but would teach Christian morality and ethics with fervour and enthusiasm.

For the Government, Lord Donaldson commented that there was no intention of fiddling about with the clauses of the 1944 Act. He thought that an inquiry was not practical or timely.

Lord Ritchie-Calder had stressed that humanists are not attacking religion. This may often be true, but it should be very clear that the expansion in education of some kinds of religion professed by the Lords would surely not be favoured. For example, (a relatively moderate one): "It is for the teachers to till the spiritual soil; it is for the clergy to sow the seed and for the teachers and parents to nurture it." (Lord Elton).

"... Therefore parents should be encouraged to read Bible stories to their children, in the same way as they read fairy stories." (Baroness Vickers—House of Lords Debate)

S AND NOTES

FANATICAL SECT

The atrocious extremities to which religious fanaticism can be pushed is seen in a recent report from Brazil. Eight children were hurled into the sea in a mass human sacrifice by members of a religious sect in north-eastern Brazil, according to police reports. The sect calls itself the Universal Assembly of the Saints and its leader, nicknamed Matota, describes himself as Pastor and Elect of God.

Matota said that God had spoken to him in ordering the killings. His followers were convinced that those who were not of God must be killed. One couple watched their own children die. When children struggled back to the shore they were thrown back again until they disappeared, according to one report. History is littered with records of atrocities committed in the name of a deity. Do we live in a more civilised age?

CHRISTIAN CON TRICK

"A large part of the Ten Commandments could be described as Jehovah's ego-trip, while the useful injunctions on killing, stealing and lying have been almost completely ignored by Christian zealots", said the General Secretary of the National Secular Society, when he addressed Leytonstone Methodist Church Open Group, London, last month.

Mr McLroy continued: "Christian claims to moral leadership are a colossal confidence trick. But Christians carry off the trick with such skill and aplomb that even people who are not a bit religious are taken in by it. Christians blow their own trumpet and promote their superstitious beliefs with an appeal to human gullibility and a cynical disregard for truth and accuracy that puts them on a footing with advertisers of detergents and dog-food . . ."

"The rise of Christianity was followed by the Dark Ages, 700 years of religious wars, violence, greed, exploitation and aggression. The greatest villains of all were the popes, archbishops and bishops, leaders of the Christian Church. However much modern Christians may try to excuse their predecessors and to distort history, the record of Christian misdeeds cannot be eradicated.

"There has scarcely been an occasion in history when Christianity has given leadership to a movement to improve life in this world. In most cases the churches have collaborated with reactionary and repressive elements and have been a barrier to social

progress. Traditionally, the churches have opposed social reforms until the eleventh hour, and when it became no longer possible to prevent them, they jumped in on the winning side and claimed the credit.

"Methodists enjoy an undeserved reputation as a reformist body in the nineteenth century. In fact, they were often more reactionary and authoritarian than the Established Church."

Freethinker Fund

There was a marked decline in contributions to the Fund during the last month, with only £51.48 contributed during the period 22 April until 20 May. Expenses increase almost daily, and despite the generosity of our printers, who keep prices at the lowest possible level, and of our unpaid contributors, the deficit increases at a worrying rate.

Thanks are expressed to J. Ancliffe, £1.25; F. Bradford, £1.10; C. Brunel, £1.25; W. Chapman, 25p; Mrs Cheeseman, 25p; S. Clowes, £4; R. J. Dale, 75p; F. Davies, £3.25; R. C. Edmunds, £1; T. H. Ellison, £6.25; F. C. Evans, 50p; B. Farlow, £3.25; D. C. Greene, £3.25; R. Hale, £1.50; D. Harper, £3.60; S. Hillier, £1; E. C. Hughes, £1.03; E. J. Hughes, £1; Mrs Irwin, £10; H. Lyon-Davis, £1; W. Matters, £2.25; C. Marcus, £1; D. Massam, 75p; S. H. Rice, £1; E. Wakefield, £1.

Correction: A donation of £6.86 in the name of H. Bayford (April issue) should have been credited to Mrs Eckersley.

OBITUARY

HAMID DALWAI

The death is reported of Hamid Dalwai, Vice-President of the Indian Secular Society. He was only 46 and was known as a writer and full-time social worker on behalf of the Indian Secular Society. The President of the Society, Professor A. B. Shah attended a non-religious cremation.

THE FREETHINKER

Volume 96 (Bound) 1976

It maintains its standards better than almost any other paper—New Humanist

I really cannot tell you what a tonic it was opening these pages.

—Christopher Macy, The Freethinker

£3.00 plus 47p postage

G. W. FOOTE & COMPANY
702 Holloway Road, London N19 3NL

THE CHURCH AND THE HOMOSEXUAL by John J. McNeill. Darton, Longman & Todd, £2.60.

As a straight-forward, no-nonsense catalogue of Judeo-Christian oppression of homosexuals over the centuries, John J. McNeill's *The Church and the Homosexual* succeeds admirably. But it is doubtful whether the same measure of success will ever apply to the book's central aim of helping overcome "the myths, stereotypes and prejudices" among Christians towards homosexuality by persuading churchmen that gay people are not the debauched sinners the scriptures "allegedly" insist they are.

"Allegedly", because through the application of reasoned argument, and reference to many thoroughly interesting interpretations by leading theologians of both the Old and New Testaments, this Jesuit priest, formerly a professor of moral theology at Fordham University, concludes that nowhere in the scriptures is to be found any condemnation of "real" homosexuals. What the bible does condemn, however, is "perverse homosexual activity indulged in by otherwise truly heterosexual individuals as an expression of contempt or self-centred lust, and usually associated with some form of idol worship."

He argues, for instance, that the tale of the sin of Sodom, which is the basis of many a fundamentalist's condemnation of homosexuality, "was never interpreted in Old Testament times as being primarily sexual, to say nothing of involving homosexual practices; rather it is portrayed as a sin of pride and inhospitality." Another example is the assertion that the Pauline epistles . . . "cannot be read as explicitly condemning homosexual activity between persons who share the homosexual condition" because St Paul's condemnations were reserved only for debauched individuals "who rejected their true heterosexual nature, male prostitutes, and those given to anal intercourse, which is not necessarily nor exclusively an homosexual activity."

It is highly unlikely that the Roman Catholic Establishment will allow any of this to sway official attitudes. Nevertheless, one cannot help but admire McNeill for trying. Getting the book published was no easy matter, for the Church placed a great many obstacles in his way between 1972 and 1976 when he finally got the go-ahead after his manuscript was carefully vetted by a commission of Jesuit theologians "who did not necessarily agree with my arguments and conclusions, yet, I understand, a majority of the commission reported that they found the manuscript a serious and scholarly work worthy of publication."

And indeed it is. Nevertheless it is a most exasperating work because McNeill unconsciously conveys the feeling that whatever he says, whatever arguments he uses to demolish flawed Christian

thought, will in the final analysis be totally disregarded by the Church hierarchy. The only concession Mother Church will make is to hide its traditional disgust and indignation behind a mask of grudging condescension towards a group of people who will always be regarded as "sinners" in Christian-based cultures.

McNeill introduces the feeling that *The Church and the Homosexual* is an exercise in futility right from the outset when he states that the permission he received to publish the book "in no way implies that the conclusions . . . are accepted by the Catholic Church as part of its official teaching; only the Pope and the Bishops have the authority to teach officially in the name of the Church."

Later he refers to a pronouncement on homosexuality issued by the sacred congregation for the Doctrine of Faith in January 1976. Entitled *Declaration on Certain Questions Concerning Sexual Ethics*, the document reinforces the Church's traditional "anti" stance, and blithely dismisses the recent decision by the American Psychiatric Association to stop regarding homosexuality in itself as a mental illness. The document insists that the permanent homosexual psychological condition is "pathological".

He then turns to Father Curran's recent book, *Catholic Moral Theology in Dialogue*. Curran, while finding himself "in general agreement with the practical conclusions proposed by McNeill", offers little comfort to Catholic homosexuals. Indeed, some of his pronouncements are frankly insulting. For example: "Homosexuality can never become an ideal, and attempts should be made to overcome this condition if possible; however, at times one may reluctantly accept homosexual unions as the only way in which some people can find a satisfying degree of humanity in their lives." What patronising rubbish. And McNeill politely says so. But by this time it has become clear that his is a voice in the wilderness, and has as much chance of dispelling 2,000 years of Christian clap trap on the subject of sexuality as he has of convincing me that one can be happy and homosexual within the stiflingly dogmatic confines of the church.

At one point McNeill asks: "How can Christian homosexuals accept themselves and their homosexuality with any sense of their own dignity and value as long as they must see themselves and their actions as essentially in contradiction to the divine will for man? How can individuals with such an understanding of themselves possibly enter into a con-

REVIEWS

structive homosexual relationship which expresses true human love?

His answer to the "terrible dilemma" of Catholic homosexuals who have to choose "either to continue their relationship with the Church at the price of being cut off from any deep human relationship and deprived of their potentialities for growth and development in their personal self-identity—not to mention their agonies of guilt, remorse, self-hatred and potential emotional breakdown when they fail to achieve the accepted goals—or to seek their personal growth by means of a homosexual relationship only at the price of cutting themselves off from the Church community and its sacramental life, with all the attendant guilt and emotional stress which such a separation involves" seems to be the rejection of those parts of the scriptures which could be and are used by Christians to persecute gay people.

This leaves me with a question. Why, if it is possible to re-evaluate at will and find false or misleading certain sections of the bible, should one not apply the same rationale to other offensive passages which have done so much to mould contemporary Christian intolerance? Of course this might well mean having to throw the baby—in this case Christianity and all its irrational trappings—out with the bathwater, an action which would surely provide anguished Christian homosexuals with the best solution to their "terrible dilemma".

BARRY DUKE

THE TRIAL OF ELVIRA BARNEY by Peter Cotes.
David and Charles, £4.95.

A fascination with trials is comparable with the medieval love of morality plays. There is the same concern for right and wrong and the same feeling of—there but for the grace of God goes every man. Yet the eschatology is earthbound and the emphasis is shifted from justice being done to justice being seen being done.

The scene of drama moves from a courtyard to a court room. Here there are star roles and bit parts, suspense and maybe an unexpected *dénouement*, with a good chance of a long monologue, adorned with weighty and pithy reflections. It is a literary by-road that twists from Agatha Christie to Dostoevsky.

The Trial of Elvira Barney is edited with an introduction by Peter Cotes whose own career has in-

cluded the original direction of *The Mousetrap*. It is one of a series of texts of celebrated trials. Elvira Barney was tried for murder in 1932, and her case was surrounded in notoriety. She was associated with "high society", had titled parents and lived a life fitting among the cocktail set: a Bright Young Thing the lustre of whose life was fading. A doctor was summoned to her mews flat in the early hours of the morning and her lover was found shot dead. Add to that separation from a brutal husband and a brief appearance on the stage, and scandal was bound to follow.

There is nothing more attractive to the public than *noblesse* obliging with a tale of its own ignominy and downfall. It is a tale the press will happily embroider (as extracts from the papers at the time in the Appendix demonstrate), especially if murder most foul provides the spiciest ingredient. The text of the trial itself is most notable for the defence of Sir Patrick Hastings, who contributed an unexpected *dénouement* and a summing-up which is famous for its skill in marshalling evidence and swaying the case.

The introduction by Peter Cotes does not add a great deal for the story tells itself. There is insufficient knowledge to enable the reader to gain much understanding of Elvira Barney as a personality. Hints of a sado-masochistic relationship in the love nest of Elvira are more tantalising than informative, and quoting Dr Johnson on human nature's "general inclination to make people stare" is of superficial value in increasing our insight into her.

The text of the trial reads well. Peter Cotes has provided a few personal reminiscences, where his own life crossed that of Elvira. Although she was only 27 at the time of the trial and, as was pronounced there, had her life before her, she died four years later: "Her end was a fitting conclusion to a theatrical play that had all the overtones of *grand guignol* and the undertones of a morality tale."

JIM HERRICK

SPEAKERS' CORNER—AN ANTHOLOGY

Edited by JIM HUGGON

The book is a useful backcloth for everyone interested in the history of all radical, revolutionary and other protest movements that have held demonstrations in the past century—The Freethinker

Price £1.75 plus 23p postage

G. W. FOOTE & COMPANY
702 Holloway Road, London N19 3NL

Muslims and Secular Movement in India

A. B. SHAH

The effect of secularism in Indian society is here examined by A. B. Shah, President of the Indian Secular Society. Whereas traditional Hinduism has been much influenced and modified by scientific and rational ideas, Islam has remained less flexible and more fundamentalist. Here some of the ways in which changes are taking place and the part played by the Indian Secular Society in this are described in an article reprinted from the Indian publication "The Atheist".

All religious cultures are opposed to the growth of secularism because by definition religion and secularism cannot go together. This is so because religion claims divine sanctions whereas secularism is concerned with the affairs of this world in the light of reason and experience. Since every religion is at heart dogmatic, in the sense that it is based on assumptions which cannot be empirically or rationally tested, it is obvious that it would be opposed to any approach which seeks to understand the world of man with the help of reason. The only difference in this respect between one religion and another can be that of degree. Certain religions have gone through a period of conflict with the forces released by modern science and have been compelled to shed many of their irrational features. They have also been required to accept a drastic contraction of the field of their influence. Christianity and, to a lesser extent, Hinduism today are religions of this kind. That is why one finds a significant number of Christians and Hindus who are willing to treat religion as a private affair of the individual and to prevent its encroachment in the social sphere.

Not so with Islam. Like classical Hinduism, Islam too makes no distinction between the sacred and the profane, the religious and the secular. Everything that the individual does from birth to death has a religious significance. Hence no decision can be taken by a believing Muslim which goes counter to the doctrines or tradition of Islam. For instance, Islam asserts the sovereignty of God and thereby denies the right of men to organise their life according to their own ideas. The earthly monarch or his modern counterpart (the dictator or the national parliament) is merely an agent who is entrusted with the task of implementing the law promulgated by God. Hence all legislation has to be in conformity with the injunction of the Quran and the Hadis (Traditions of the Prophet); none of its provisions can go against them. To the extent that this restriction is observed, the state is Islamic; to the extent it is flouted, its claim to the loyalty of "true"

Muslims is weakened. And unfortunately, most of the decisions that a modern State and or its citizens have to take—such as those on war, and peace, equality of citizens regardless of sex or creed, promoting the growth of the scientific outlook, to mention only a few—are incompatible with the teaching of Islam.

This was also the case with Hinduism in earlier times. However, in the early years of the nineteenth century confrontation with the West promoted a movement among the Hindu elite which led to a re-examination of the doctrines and practices of traditional Hinduism. Beginning with Raja Ram-mohan Roy, a series of reformers in different parts of the country subjected their religion and social institutions to a rigorous and comprehensive scrutiny. It was also because of the same background that untouchability could be declared a crime and the constitution of free India clearly subordinated religion to the demands of social welfare and reform. True, these provisions have not yet been fully translated into practice. But their presence in the constitution or the statute book lends legal sanction and moral sanctity to the efforts of those who strive for the abolition of untouchability or the glorified slavery of women as prescribed by the *Dharmashastra* of the Hindus.

Chained to Tradition

No such renaissance took place in the Muslim society in India or, for that matter, in any other country of the world. Consequently, in spite of being a part of the modern world, Muslim society everywhere continues to be chained to traditional religion. The hold of the *Ulama* on the mind of the ordinary *Muslim* is still immense and Islam is exploited for political purpose to a much greater extent than Christianity or Hinduism. The fact that Islam is a religion of power lends it all the more to such exploitation.

Besides the general features mentioned above, Muslim society in India also suffers from memories of the past. There was Muslim rule in India for a period of nearly 800 years, during which time Muslims enjoyed special privileges even though they were a minority community. When Muslim rule ended under the attack of the Marathas and the Sikhs, and was ultimately replaced by British rule, Muslims refused to understand the significance of the change. Unlike Hindus, they did not take to Western education till the last quarter of the nineteenth century. Consequently, compared to the Hindus and Christians, they remained backward in the educational and economic fields. Combined with the loss of political power, this backwardness gave rise

to a sense of inferiority and insecurity among the Muslims. The absence of a tradition of self-criticism made them blame their ills on the British government and the Hindu majority. The result was that till recently it was well-nigh impossible for anyone to criticise the culture and social institutions of the Muslims, not to speak of subjecting Islam itself to a critical scrutiny.

It was only in 1967 that with the establishment of the Indian Secular Society (then known as "Indian Secular Forum") that Islam was first subjected to a critical examination in India. The publication of *Islam in India: Challenge and Opportunity* by S. E. Hassnain in 1967, *Muslim Politics in India* by Hamid Dalwai in 1968 and this writer's *Challenge to Secularism* in the same year marked the beginning of a new trend in Muslim thought in this country. All three books, particularly the one by Dalwai, were severely attacked not only by the spokesmen of Muslim orthodoxy but, surprisingly, by many who claimed to be progressive and even Marxists. Marx himself was a critic of religion, which he describes as the opium of the masses. It was therefore amusing to find Indians, both Muslim and Hindu, who talked of Marx day in and day out, criticise Dalwai and the Indian Secular Society as "anti-Muslim" and pro-Jana Sangh" simply because they dared to turn the searchlight on Muslim obscurantism. And under the inspiration of communal Muslim leaders, attempts were even made to kill or maim Mr Dalwai. If he did not come to any harm, it was not for lack of trying on the part of these self-appointed guardians of the "religion of peace".

Within a couple of years of the formal inauguration of the Indian Secular Society, the Muslim Satyashodhak Mandal was founded at Pune in March 1970. The Mandal is active in Western Maharashtra and Vidarbha and has inspired similar work by other groups in other parts of the country. The Vidarbha group of the Mandal has recently organised two vasectomy camps in Amravati in which about 300 Muslims willingly underwent sterilisation. The Mandal has also organised a number of conferences at New Delhi, Bombay, Pune and Kolhapur to focus public attention on the problems of Muslim women in particular and of the Muslim society in general which stem from its blind attachment to an outdated religion.

Radical Transformation

The Muslim Education Society of Kerala is probably the only other organised movement working for the modernisation of Muslim society in India. However, the MES confines itself to the spread of education among Muslims and does not directly stress the need for a radical transformation of the outlook and institutions of Muslim society. Besides the Muslim Satyashodhak Mandal and the Muslim Education Society, there are a number of individuals in Gujarat, West Bengal, Marathwada, UP,

and Andhra Pradesh who have started speaking out against the inequities of the Muslim social structure and stress the need for confining the role of religion to the strictly personal sphere. But they are like drops in the ocean and hardly make any impact on the Muslim mind.

Muslim Secular Movement

The secular movement among Muslims is still in its infancy and it would be unrealistic to expect any major change in their attitudes in the near future. What seems to have been achieved by the Indian Secular Society and the Muslim Satyashodhak Mandal during the past eight years is in the nature of a breakthrough. A dent has been made in the Chinese Wall of Islamic obscurantism. It is now possible to look upon Islam no less than Hinduism and Christianity as a historical phenomenon subject to the law of change, and therefore capable of modification in the light of experience. Muslims like M. R. A. Baig can now freely proclaim their atheism without the fear of being excommunicated or subjected to worse forms of persecution. The Muslim Satyashodhak Mandal has nearly 500 members on its roll and they can now move about in Maharashtra without the fear of being beaten up by bands of fanatical Muslims. But all this is only a beginning. The magnitude of the problem and its variety from region to region are so great, and the resources and manpower available for work are so limited, that it would be utopian to expect significant and comprehensive results in the next few years. The process could have been expedited provided the Hindu elite and the government had adopted a more firm and imaginative attitude. Unfortunately, very few Hindus have even bothered to study Islamic culture and institutions. As P. Spratt points out in his *Hindu Culture and Personality*, Hindus are and have remained an essentially narcissistic people in spite of their long exposure to Western thought and modern science. (Muslims too share this characteristic but this is not relevant here.) Government and political parties have always looked upon the Muslim problem and the problems of the Muslims, mainly from the political point of view. Consequently, they have hesitated to take up any stand likely to alienate the vocal Muslim elite even when it would have been in the interest of an overwhelming majority of the Muslims of India. The task of those who work for the propagation of modern ideas among Muslims is, therefore, all the more difficult. Besides combating the opposition of Muslim orthodoxy, they have also to take into account the indifference of the majority community and the opportunism of its political elite. But precisely because of this, the task is all the more exciting too. Those of us who have been involved in it feel that while the present may be difficult, sometimes even disheartening, the future will bear witness to the new trail that is being blazed by us to-

day. Islam, like Christianity and Buddhism, came as a light in the midst of darkness. Today all traditional religions, Islam no less than others, have themselves become enemies of enlightenment. The secular movement is an attempt to combat these forces of darkness. It is bound to succeed, for light is the law of life as darkness is of death, and given the trend of the modern world, no group of human beings can for ever live in darkness.

LETTERS

A vice of authors is to complain of mistreatment by reviewers, as a vice of reviewers is to make play with phrases or statements culled out of context from their victim's pages. Editors must ignore the complaints, to spare their readers. All the same, I feel bound to ask to be allowed to comment on the last paragraph of David Tribe's review of my "Humanism" in the April "Freethinker", not to protest at the last part of it, which I fail to recognise as relevant to anything I think or have really said, but to explain why I did omit the men and movements he mentions in the first part.

My historical chapter picked out a particular strand in the history of thought, in which the Utilitarians are consciously linked with the "philosophes", as they are with the Greek sophists. My thesis was that this is the essential humanist intellectual tradition, with a strong educational concern. I was not attempting a comprehensive history of freethought, as the bibliography shows. The names mentioned by Mr Tribe are in "A Guide to Humanist Books in English", which I published in "The Plain View" in 1955. At the time I was writing the Pelican, "Humanism" was a word contemptuously rejected by the NSS, although since found worthy of espousal. All the same, I now regret that I did not bring in the contribution made by the men and movements David Tribe mentions. And if I were writing today I would certainly do so. The reprint of my book was not a revised edition, since the exigencies of publishing did not allow that. Merely a few updating alterations were substituted for equivalent lines of text in one chapter. I do apologise to readers of "The Freethinker" for ignoring some main contributions and contributors to secular freethought, as outside the scope of my theme. I deeply regret that this was not explained in the text at the time, and am thankful to David Tribe for giving me an opportunity of saying so. He has done the job himself of course, fully and finely if not finally, for nobody has the last word.

H. J. BLACKHAM

The Government has stated that it will not grant parliamentary time for the passage of the Abortion (Amendment) Bill. Mr William Benyon, sponsor of the Bill, said: "That means there is no chance of the Bill becoming law during the present session." Michael Foot, Leader of the House, has replied to representations made by the sponsors of the Bill to the Prime Minister. It was stated that the Government is "still not convinced that it would be right to change the normal procedure of the House in order to give the Bill special treatment."

Religion and Sex

its devotees of their confidence and giving them the corresponding vice of moral masochism. The moral sadism of the churches is, the author says, the fundamental turning of the spontaneity of the inner life against itself. He condemns moralism as being neither divine nor demonic, but merely absurd.

On the suppression of Eros he writes, "Eros is the urge towards personal mutuality, and it is crucial to psychological health because it is simply the other side of the coin of individual integrity and creativeness. Psychological health can be defined equally well as taking oneself seriously as a creative autonomous being or as having a satisfactory love-life, for the two definitions imply each other."

The idea of religion as a neurosis is, of course, derived from Freud, who has much to say on this subject, as well as upon the evils caused by sexual maladjustment and guilt. He shows that we set up within ourselves a super-ego to monitor everything we do.

On the question of money as the basis of man's sexual and other frustrations, Norman Brown, in the book mentioned earlier, quotes from Marx's early writings, "The alienated consciousness is correlative with a money economy. Its root is the compulsion to work. This compulsion to work subordinates man to things, producing at the same time confusion in the valuation of things and devaluation of the human body. It reduces the drives of the human being to greed and competition. The desire for money takes the place of all genuinely human needs. Thus the apparent accumulation of wealth is really the impoverishment of human nature and desires—asceticism. The effect is to substitute an abstraction—Homo economicus—for the concrete totality of human nature."

By implication, religion is involved in this alienation, for the compulsion to work and the ideal of money-making had their origin in religion, and derived particularly from the "non-conformist conscience" of Protestant sects after the Reformation. Tawney, in *Religion and the Rise of Capitalism* makes this abundantly clear.

Another writer who has consistently condemned our society as anti-sex is A. S. Neill. His books are full of commonsense on the subjects of education, sex and "discipline". Religious obscurantism had no place at Summerhill, and ex-pupils of that fine school, unlike the conventionally educated, will have little to unlearn in later life.

Wilhelm Reich went perhaps a little too far as the champion of sexual permissiveness, but his work is a necessary corrective against the subordination of man to the State in fascist societies, and against our generally hypocritical and prudish mores. He shows

(Continued on back page)

PUBLICATIONS

The Presumption of Atheism, Antony Flew £3.50 (26p). Honest to Man, Margaret Knight, £3.75 (26p). Humanism, Barbara Smoker, 50p, (9p). The Longford Threat to Freedom, Brigid Brophy, 10p, (7p). The Right to Die, Charles Wilshaw, 25p, (9p). An Introduction to Secular Humanism, Kit Mouat, 45p, (9p). What Humanism is About, Kit Mouat, 53p, (26p). The Dead Sea Scrolls, John Allegro, 95p (17p). Morality Without God, Chapman Cohen, 5p, (7p). Woman and Christianity, Chapman Cohen, 5p, (7p). Thomas Paine, Chapman Cohen, 15p, (7p). Religious Roots of the Taboo on Homosexuality, John Lauritsen, 20p, (9p). The Absurdities of Christian Science, Joseph McCabe, 12p, (7p). The Jesuits: Religious Rogues, Joseph McCabe, 12p, (7p). How Christianity Triumphed, Joseph McCabe, 12p (7p). Phallic Elements in Religion, Joseph McCabe, 12p, (7p). The Fraud of Spiritualism, Joseph McCabe, 12p, (7p). Legends of Saints and Martyrs, Joseph McCabe, 12p, (7p). Morals in Ancient Babylon, Joseph McCabe, 12p, (7p). Revolt Against Religion, Joseph McCabe, 12p, (7p). Psychology of Religion, Joseph McCabe, 12p, (7p). The Sources of Christian Morality, Joseph McCabe, 12p, (7p). Lies and Bunk About Racial Superiority, Joseph McCabe, 12p, (7p). The Moorish Civilisation in Spain, Joseph McCabe, 12p, (7p). The Degradation of Women, Joseph McCabe, 12p, (7p). RI and Surveys, Maurice Hill, 5p, (7p). The Cost of Church Schools, David Tribe, 20p, (7p). Religion and Ethics in Schools, David Tribe 8p, (7p). The Case Against Church Schools, Patricia Knight, 20p, (7p). The Little Red Schoolbook, S. Jansen, 30p, (11p). Why I am Not a Christian, Bertrand Russell, £1, (17p). On Education, Bertrand Russell, 65p, (20p). Education and the Social Order, Bertrand Russell, 75p, (17p). Unpopular Essays, Bertrand Russell, £1, (20p). Roads to Freedom, Bertrand Russell, 60p, (20p). Practice and Theory of Bolshevism, Bertrand Russell, £1.25, (17p). Principles and Social Reconstruction, Bertrand Russell, 75p, (20p). Mysticism and Logic, Bertrand Russell, 75p, (20p). Marriage and Morals, Bertrand Russell, 55p, (20p). Legitimacy versus Industrialism, Bertrand Russell, 50p, (20p). In Praise of Idleness, Bertrand Russell, £1, (20p). Authority and the Individual, Bertrand Russell, 60p, (14p). Common Sense and Nuclear Warfare, Bertrand Russell, 40p, (14p). The Conquest of Happiness, Bertrand Russell, £1, (17p). Impact of Science on Society, Bertrand Russell, 60p, (17p). Political Ideals, Bertrand Russell, 50p, (14p). Bertrand Russell's Best, Robert E. Enger, £1, (17p). Bertrand Russell: a Life, Herbert Gotchalk, 25p, (17p). Bertrand Russell: the Passionate Sceptic, Allan Wood, 50p, (20p). The Origins of Christianity, G. A. Wells, 20p, (7p). The Jesus of the Early Christians, G. A. Wells, £2.95, (47p). Broadcasting, Brainwashing, Conditioning, David Tribe, 25p, (7p). Nucleoethics: Ethics in Modern Society, David Tribe, 90p, (26p). Questions of Censorship, David Tribe, £4.75, (55p). Religion and Human Rights, David Tribe, 3p, (7p). President Charles Bradlaugh, MP, David Tribe, £4, (70p). 100 Years of Freethought, David Tribe, £1.50, (47p). Herbert Armstrong and his Worldwide Church of God, J. Bowden, 25p, (11p). Rights of Man, Thomas Paine, 75p, (20p). Pioneers of Social Change, Royston Pike, 95p, (20p). A Chronology of British Secularism, G. H. Taylor, 10p, (7p). 103: History of a House, Elizabeth Collins, 5p, (7p). Radical Politics 1790-1900: Religion and Unbelief, Edward Royle, 65p, (20p). The Devil's Chaplain, H. Cutner, 10p, (11p). Gods and Myths of Northern Europe, D. E. E. Davidson, 80p, (17p). The Bible Handbook, G. W. Foote and W. Ball,

65p, (20p). Sociology of Religion, Ronald Roberston, 75p, (23p). Boys and Sex, W. B. Pomeroy, 60p, (14p). Girls and Sex, W. B. Pomeroy, 60p, (14p). The Nun Who Lived Again, Phyllis Graham, 5p, (6p). Rome or Reason, R. G. Ingersoll, 10p, (11p). The Vatican versus Mankind, Adrian Pigott, 20p, (20p). The Vatican Billions, Avro Manhattan, £3, (29p). The Humanist Outlook, Editor: A. J. Ayer, 95p, (32p). The Humanist Revolution, Hector Hawton, 95p, (20p). Controversy, Hector Hawton, 95p, (21p). A Humanist Glossary, Odell & Barfield, 20p, (9p). Humanism and Moral Theory, Reuben Osborn, 60p, (20p). A Humanist Anthology, Margaret Knight, 60p, (20p). Christianity: The Debit Account, Margaret Knight, 3p, (7p). Housing: an Anarchist Approach, Colin Ward, £1.25, (23p). Ethics Without God, Kai Nielson, 95p, (17p). Birth Control, NSS Report, 20p, (7p). Abortion Counselling, Madeleine Sims, 50p, (9p). Ten Non Commandments, Ronald Fletcher, 13p, (7p). Origin of the Species, Charles Darwin, 60p, (23p). The Rights of Old People, NSS Report, 15p, (7p). Middle East Mythology, S. H. Hooke, 90p, (17p). Lift up Your Heads, William Kent, 30p, (11p). Life, Death and Immortality, P. B. Shelly, 10p, (7p). Not in God's Image, Julia O'Faolain (Ed), 50p, (23p). The Arts in a Permissive Society, Christopher Macy, 75p, (14p). On the Nature of the Universe, Lucretius, 75p, (20p). Way of Zen, Alan Watts, 60p, (17p). Secret History of the Jesuits, E. Paris, £2.50, (23p). Religion in Modern Society, H. J. Blackham, £1, (29p). Civil Liberty; NCCL Guide, Anna Coote and Larry Grant, 50p, (23p). Against Censorship, various authors, 25p, (11p). Whose Land, James Parkes, 40p, (20p). Introduction to Politics, Harold Laski, 50p, (14p). Women's Rights: A Practical Guide, Anna Coote and Tess Gill, 60p, (20p). Our Pagan Christmas, R. J. Condon, 20p, (7p). Power, Bertrand Russell, £1, (17p). Did Jesus Exist? G. A. Wells, £5.80, (47p). Poems of an Angry Dove, Kit Mouat, £1.20, (16p). The Freethinker Bound Volume 1974, Editor: Christopher Morey, £2.70, (47p). Fact and Fiction in Psychology, H. J. Eysenck, 65p, (20p). Freedom versus Organisation, Bertrand Russell, 50p, (20p). The Debate on Spiritualism, Joseph McCabe, 12p, (7p). The Nonsense Called Theosophy, Joseph McCabe, 12p, (7p). Anarchy, Erricho Malatesta, 25p, (14p). Wider Horizons (suggestions for school readings), 30p, (9p). The Rise of the Mediocracy, David Tribe, £4.95, (29p). The Tamarisk Tree, Dora Russell, £5.95, (47p). Thomas Paine: His Life, Work and Times, Audrey Williamson, £5, (47p). Wilkes: a Friend to Liberty, Audrey Williamson, £4.95 (47p). Oration on Thomas Paine, R. G. Ingersoll, 20p, (7p). Witchcraft and Sorcery, Max Marwick (Ed), £1.25 (20p). Sakharov Speaks, 30p, (14p). Common Sense, Thomas Paine, 60p, (14p). The Psychology of Superstition, Gustav Jahonda, 30p, (14p).

Obtainable by post from 702 Holloway Road, London N19 3NL (telephone 01-272 1266).

Make cheques and postal orders payable to G. W. FOOTE & COMPANY.

Figure in brackets denotes postage charge; any overpayment of postage will be credited.

NATIONAL SECULAR SOCIETY
MEMBERSHIP ENQUIRIES to the General Secretary,
702 Holloway Road, London N19 3NL

us that sex can be a truly liberating factor in life.

In conclusion, though some of us find it difficult to exorcise the phobias and wrong notions inculcated by religion, we can at least see clearly that they are irrational. The remedy, it seems to me, is to carry out the humanist philosophy to its ultimate limits. In this philosophy, moral masochism has no place, and the super-ego is discredited and discarded. In sexual matters, as in others, human beings must attain confidence and mastery. Where society stands in the way of our true fulfilment as human beings, we must endeavour to change it.

DAVID TRIBE

THE RISE OF THE MEOCRAOY

£4.95 plus 29p postage

G. A. WELLS

DID JESUS EXIST?

£5.80 plus 47p postage

G. W. Foote & Company

702 Holloway Road, London N19 3NL

Greetings have been sent to the New Zealand Rationalist and Humanist Association on its fiftieth birthday. They read: The Executive Committee of the National Secular Society has asked me to send our congratulations, on behalf of all our members, to the New Zealand Rationalist Association on its fiftieth birthday. There has always been a strong link between freethinkers in Britain and New Zealand, both personally and through the exchange of freethought literature, and we look forward to its continuation as long as religious privilege and threats to freedom remain to give our respective organisations and publications a socially necessary function.

As the NSS was already well past its half-century mark when the NZRA was founded, we may perhaps be allowed a hint of grandfatherliness in our felicitations and our best wishes for your "next" fifty years. Keep up the good work down under!

Barbara Smoker

EVENTS

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 White-abbey 66752.

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

Lewisham Humanist Group. Unitarian Meeting House, 41 Bromley Road, Catford, London SE6. Thursday, 30 June, 7.45 pm. A Meeting.

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

Merseyside Humanist Group. 248 Woodchurch Road, Birkenhead. Wednesday, 15 June, 7.30 pm. Current Affairs. Tel: 01-608 3835 (4 to 6 pm).

Muswell Hill Humanist Group. 15 Woodberry Crescent, London N10. Thursday, 23 June, 8.30 pm. David Cymberlist: "The Development of the Detective Novel".

Sutton Humanist Group. Friends Meeting House, Cedar Road, Sutton. 7.30 pm for 8.00 pm. Jim Herrick: "Humanism and the Arts".

Passionate Humanism

on a farm you don't think anything else is work any more." It was work 365 days of the year, milking herds by hand and carrying sacks of seed-corn from rail-waggon to granary. Now he saw himself returning not as a beast of burden but as an old crow, with a sardonic streak which would give him a perspective from which to view continuing activities in London.

The Humanist Housing Association needs a piano for its new premises, Robert Morton House, Hampstead. Any "Freethinker" reader in the London area who is able to present one to the Association should contact the secretary (Peter Ward, 311 Kentish Town Road, London NWS, telephone 485 8776).

THE FREETHINKER

Editor: JIM HERRICK

702 HOLLOWAY ROAD

LONDON N19 3NL

TELEPHONE: 01-272 1266

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.