

# The FREETHINKER

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## BLASPHEMY RULES — OK ?

1883 G. W. Foote sentenced to twelve months hard labour for BLASPHEMY.

W. J. Ramsey sentenced to six months hard labour for BLASPHEMY.

H. A. Kemp sentenced to three months hard labour for BLASPHEMY.

"Freethinkers must all rally to the point of attack. It is the turn of this paper today, it may be the turn of another tomorrow; and when the 'extreme' organ is put down (ay, when!) the 'moderate' will have to bear the brunt of persecution. Thomas Paine well said that defence of another man's threatened rights was a defence of his own. Every Freethinker who holds aloof from our defence is a traitor to his own liberties . . . The infidel hunt is in good swing, and it will try all our metals."

G. W. Foote *The Freethinker*, February 1883

1889 Bradlaugh unsuccessfully introduces into Parliament a draft Bill for the Abolition of Blasphemy Laws.

1922 J. W. Gott sentenced to nine months hard labour for BLASPHEMY, for his pamphlet *Rib-Ticklers* and his placard *God and Gott*.

"You appear determined to defy the law . . ." Mr Justice Avory, after referring to J. W. Gott as a "socialist and Atheist of the worst kind."

"To us these blasphemy trials seem supremely ridiculous." Quoted in *The Freethinker*, January 1922

1923 J. W. Gott dies, his weak health ruined by hard labour.

1967 Blasphemy Laws removed from the Statute Book.

1977 Denis Lemon, Editor of *Gay News*, sentenced to nine months imprisonment suspended for 18 months, and given £500 fine—for BLASPHEMOUS LIBEL, a common law offence.

"The first successful prosecution for blasphemy in 56 years must make Britain the laughing stock of the civilised world. But it is no laughing matter.

The Blasphemy Acts were repealed ten years ago as obsolete, but the common-law offence of blasphemy was left untouched. It was generally felt that it was of little consequence as the blasphemy laws would never be used again. But the National Secular Society has continually warned that it might well be used some day against people disliked by the authorities who could convict them of no other 'crime'." Barbara Smoker, President of the National Secular Society.

"Maybe blasphemy laws should be extended to cover sacred beliefs other than those of the Christian Church." Judge Alan King-Hamilton, during the trial.

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# Freedom on Trial at the Old Bailey

"The Freethinker" has a tradition of reporting blasphemy trials in detail. This stems back to prosecutions of this paper in its early years, when many pages were devoted to trial speeches. It is not therefore surprising that we should bring our readers a full report of the recent blasphemy case at the Old Bailey. It is an outrage that the criminal court can be used to test matters of opinion, that a prisoner sitting under threat of sentence should have to listen to what amounted at times to antediluvian sermons, and that a jury should have to decide guilty or not guilty on an offence the meaning of which even expert lawyers would dispute.

This was the case of the *Queen v. Gay News* (with Mrs Mary Whitehouse remaining the private individual bringing the prosecution throughout the case). The defendants were Denis Lemon, Editor of *Gay News*, and the paper's publishers. Counsel for the prosecution was Mr John Smyth, and counsel for the defence of the publishers was Mr Geoffrey Robertson and of Denis Lemon was Mr John Mortimer, QC. Presiding was Judge Alan King-Hamilton, a 72-year-old judge whose interests are listed in *Who's Who* as cricket and the RAF.

The defendants were charged with "unlawfully and wickedly" publishing a "blasphemous libel concerning the Christian religion, namely an obscene poem and illustration vilifying Christ in his life and crucifixion." The prosecution called only one witness, Mr Kenneth Kavanagh, to give evidence that he had bought the issue of *Gay News*, in which the poem was published, at a St Pancras bookstall. Later in the trial, when the question of the poem's tendency to cause a breach of the peace became an important issue, the defence counsel emphasised the number of months that had elapsed before Mr Kavanagh had discovered how outrageous was the poem.

A lengthy legal wrangle then took place in the jury's absence. The judge claimed that no literary or theological evidence was relevant to the trial. He said it was not an obscenity trial, in which case literary merit and context could have been presented—though later in passing sentence he made it quite clear that obscenity and scurrility, not decent controversy, were an essential ingredient of the crime. He felt the jury could judge for themselves the poem "The Love That Dares to Speak its Name", by Professor James Kirkup, a distinguished poet and literary critic. The poem describes a homosexual centurion's feelings of physical love for the crucified Christ.

Mr Geoffrey Robertson in outlining his defence of *Gay News* Ltd, the publishers, contended that three elements were necessary to prove blasphemy. These were an intention to attack the Christian religion, a tendency to cause a breach of the peace, and an intention to shock and insult believers and sympathisers of the Christian religion. Judge King-Hamilton, quoting many cases including one which involved *Secular Society Ltd*, ruled that intention was quite irrelevant, thus disallowing any explanation of the reason for publishing the poem. Conscientious no doubt that he was establishing blasphemy definition in common law in the second half of the twentieth century, he ruled that it must consist of an attack so scurrilous as to cause outrage, and likely to cause a breach of the peace.

## The Character of the Paper

The only evidence the defence were therefore able to submit was evidence as to the character of the paper, *Gay News*. Bernard Levin, the well-known journalist and theatre critic, was asked in the witness box what was his opinion of *Gay News*. He replied that he thought it a responsible paper reporting matters of interest to homosexuals and others interested in civil liberties. The high quality of the literary section of the paper was also praised.

Margaret Drabble, novelist, biographer and a Vice-President of the Campaign for Homosexual Equality, was also called to give evidence to the character of *Gay News*. She testified to its responsibility and high standard. The prosecution in questioning referred to an article on paedophilia (the sexual attraction to children) in the same issue, and relentlessly questioned her as to whether it was a responsible treatment of the subject. She firmly insisted that she felt discussion of such subjects, however difficult they might be, was right, and that we could not pretend that people with such feelings did not exist. To air opinion was not necessarily to condone action.

The judge interjected at one point to ask if she would allow her teenage sons to read the paper. She claimed that she would not prevent them and that her 16-year-old son had read the poem in question.

Bernard Levin, returned to Mr Smyth's cross-examination on the following day, after having been released to fulfil an engagement as a theatre critic. Mr Smyth questioned whether Bernard Levin's knowledge of the paper was sufficient to give it a good character; and repeatedly referred to articles over a period of several years (particularly referring to paedophilia) which Bernard Levin was unable specifically to recall. He was pressed at one point

as to his understanding of the word "model", and when admitting that it could have a slang connotation of prostitute was asked to look at an advertisement from *Gay News* for male models. A moment of amusement was caused shortly after when it emerged that the advertisement was also to be found in the *Evening Standard*.

The prosecuting counsel, Mr John Smyth, summed up his case in the ringing tones of a hell-fire sermoniser. The poem he insisted is not about love, but buggery—and he rolled his tongue round the word with great deliberation that its weight should not escape the jury. He also quoted freely from the Bible, from Leviticus to St Paul, to demonstrate how appalling were homosexual acts.

Mary Whitehouse may have had a jubilant post-trial moment of being "not anti-homosexual", but any homosexual Christian or atheist could not listen to Mr Smyth's powerful and opprobrious summing up without feeling a nasty whiff of the Inquisition cross the air-conditioned courtroom.

In the defence case presented by John Mortimer and Geoffrey Robertson, where the compatibility of homosexuality and Christian love, of explicit sexuality and Christianity, were being posed, it seemed as though the case was really a struggle between two approaches to Christianity. Christianity, in its disarray as to what it is about at all (for instance *The Myth of God Incarnate*, see p120, was referred to in the trial) seemed to be exhibiting a fierce battle between its firm fundamentalist roots and its nebulous, liberal modernism.

Geoffrey Robertson, in defending the paper, gave an interpretation of the poem that was dramatic and poetic. He stressed that literature was powerful and quoted Kafka: "A book must be an ice-axe to break the frozen sea within us." The poem, he pointed out could be seen as being in a long line of Christian love poetry, where ecstasitic physical love and the love of God were metaphorically equated. He concluded, after suggesting that there were many reasons for reasonable doubt about the case, with a plea for tolerance—"tolerance which is itself part of public decency which must be preserved."

### Persecution an Easy Virtue

John Mortimer, in presenting his defence commented that he was appearing for an individual, Denis Lemon, unlike the prosecution, who were apparently acting on behalf of certain supernatural forces. There could be good reason, he suggested, why there had been no successful blasphemy trial for over 50 years. He questioned the process by which the prisoner had found himself in the dock. This was a case brought by a private individual, and Lord Coleridge, who tried the case of G. W. Foote and Ramsey in the nineteenth century, was quoted: "Persecution is a very easy virtue." The

Festival of Light might dance round bonfires at the preservation of standards, but we all have different standards and arrive at them differently, and don't need a criminal court to dictate them to us. Times have changed since the blasphemy case brought against J. W. Gott. There was room for a variety of views of the poem. But this was not a television debate; it was a court of law with an individual in the dock. Before urging the jury to acquit, Mr Mortimer most pertinently quoted the gospel according to St Matthew—"And whosoever speaketh a word against the son of man shall be forgiven"—casting arrows of doubt on the whole conception of blasphemy as a legal offence.

### Judge's Pearls of Wisdom

Judge King-Hamilton in his summing up to the jury asked them to put aside the idea that this law was complex, and to put aside their own opinions about the law as it existed. All they had to decide he said, as though it were a matter of Not Out LBW, was whether the poem was so scurrilous and abusive that it would vilify Christ and could lead to a breach of the peace. Tending to a breach of the peace he then defined as liable to arouse feelings of anger. (As if we were all entitled never to have feelings of anger aroused!) He requested the jury to ask themselves about the poem—as they had first reacted to it and not as they had come to think of it as they became used to it during the trial—would you be proud to have written it or be prepared to read it aloud to a group of Christians without blushing? He also cast pearls of wisdom before the jury about living in a permissive age and "some may think permissiveness has gone far enough." When he said that the trial was not about freedom of speech a murmur of indignation across the gallery caused him to threaten to clear the court.

After five hours the jury declared a verdict of guilty for both editor and publishers. It was a majority decision by ten to two. In sentencing, the judge left anyone who had been curious about his own feelings towards the case in no doubt. He congratulated the jury on their moral courage, said the poem was "quite appalling" and hoped that "the pendulum of public opinion is beginning to swing back to a more healthy climate."

Denis Lemon was sentenced to a nine month prison sentence, suspended for 18 months. He was also fined £500 and ordered to pay one fifth of the costs of prosecution. The company *Gay News Ltd* was fined £1000 and ordered to pay four-fifths of the costs of prosecution. Denis Lemon declared he would appeal—as far as the courts of Europe if necessary. Mrs Whitehouse declared herself overjoyed and "Thanked God".

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# Joseph Symes, the Mephistopheles of Melbourne

NIGEL SINNOTT

Joseph Symes played an energetic and important role in the exciting, early days of the secular movement. He was a vice-president of the National Secular Society and was involved with the founding of "The Freethinker". He travelled to Australia, where he also took a vigorous part in initiating freethought ideas. This article by Nigel Sinnott, a former editor of "The Freethinker" now living in Australia, is being published in two parts. It is based on his booklet "Joseph Symes, the 'flower of atheism'", published in Australia last month.

He had a wispy beard and wore glasses, but otherwise looked like a taller, scrawnier version of Bradlaugh as he stood in an old frock coat and held the attention of packed meetings. He was a vice-president of the National Secular Society for more than 25 years, and in the service of the "best of causes" worked 15 hours a day and travelled to the ends of the earth. In his native land he is all but forgotten. Yet his loyalty and courage were second to none. He was part Cassandra, part Prometheus, a mixture of tragi-comedian and Old Testament prophet. He was a naive, tireless, tender-hearted fury with a touch of genius: this paper was his idea!

Joseph Symes was born at Portland, Dorset, on 29 January 1841, a date which coincided with Thomas Paine's birthday. Encouraged by his strict Wesleyan mother, he entered the Wesleyan College at Richmond (Surrey) in 1864, then went to Scotland to start his probationary circuit in 1867. During the latter period he married his first wife, Matilda (a widow) in 1871.

Symes's eager, earnest temperament soon succumbed to the epidemic of Victorian intellectual religious doubt. In his case contributing factors were the Franco-Prussian War, the declaration of Papal Infallibility, exposure to Unitarian views, and the lot of the rural poor. In 1872 Symes refused ordination and resigned his appointment. He found employment for a time on the Newcastle-upon-Tyne *Weekly Chronicle*, and while in that city assisted the Agricultural Labourer's Union and became a lecturer to the Northern Union of Mechanics' Institutes. In 1876 he found the cause for which he had been searching; and on 17 December 1876, spoke for the first time as its official lecturer in Newcastle: his subject was "The biography and character of Jehovah, the Jewish and Christian god."

Symes's cause, of course, was the National Secular Society. In May 1876 he started writing for Bradlaugh's *National Reformer* (under a *nom-de-plume*). Soon he was appointed an official NSS

lecturer in the provinces, a task which Symes undertook with frightening energy:

"A score of times have I gone from Newcastle, Leeds or Birmingham to London, lectured morning and afternoon in the streets, Parks [*sic*], and other public places, often in the rain . . . At night I have lectured in the Hall of Science [in Old Street, London] . . . and then home by the night mail train."

Joseph Symes had joined the secular movement in "stirring times". For at the beginning of 1877—as *Freethinker* readers cannot fail to know by now—Charles Watts was prosecuted for selling copies of a pamphlet, *Fruits of Philosophy*, by Charles Knowlton, which dealt with birth control. Watts, in order to mitigate the full rigours of the law, decided to plead "in point of law guilty" to the resulting obscenity charge. Appalled at what they regarded as faint-heartedness, Bradlaugh and Annie Besant decided to republish the pamphlet as a test case for press freedom and the right to popular information on contraception.

## Symes and Bradlaugh

The centenary of the trial of Bradlaugh and Besant for republishing the Knowlton pamphlet is being widely celebrated in England—deservedly so. Symes's rôle in the affair has, alas, almost been forgotten. For between the republication of the *Fruits of Philosophy* and the trial later in the year, a huge row developed in the secularist ranks between the Bradlaugh party and the neo-Malthusians (as advocates of birth control were called) on the one hand, and, on the other, supporters of Charles and Kate Watts, opponents of contraception, "respectable" freethinkers, and minor factions with a grudge against the Bradlaughite leadership. Symes soon chose his side:

"When I read the *Fruits of Philosophy* it opened my eyes considerably: and although I disagreed with a few things in it, I could not help thinking that it was written with a thoroughly good intention, and was well calculated to be a useful thing. I never for a moment hesitated; and so sprang into the fight and defended the action of Mr Bradlaugh and Mrs Besant with what ability and earnestness I could command."

So he promptly joined Bradlaugh and Besant's "Defence Committee", and, in addition, travelled and lectured in an effort to rally secularists in the provinces to Bradlaugh's cause. The show-down came in May 1877, at the NSS Whitsun conference at Nottingham. Symes, representing the Northern Branch of the NSS, Seghill and Plymouth (all solid-

ly pro-Bradlaugh) spoke in favour of retaining the presidency (and subsequently Bradlaugh as President); but when the time came for taking a vote, tempers were so heated that counting hands proved unreliable, uproar ensued, G. J. Holyoake (in the chair) seemed unable to restore order, and Bradlaugh was about to walk out (which would have been disastrous for his side).

Symes at this point got up and managed somehow to make himself heard. He proposed that the members and delegates should file between two chairs to be counted.<sup>3</sup> The meeting agreed, and with Harriet Law (editor of the *Secular Chronicle*) and Symes as tellers, the vote was taken. The Bradlaughites won by a margin of seven votes! Their success did not prevent a schism in the secularist ranks, but it ensured that the mainstream movement was firmly behind the leadership when the *Fruits of Philosophy* trial came to court. The eventual success of the publishers enabled the Malthusian League (established largely by members of the NSS, South Place Institute and the Dialectical Society) to flourish, and "from that date the large Victorian family began rapidly to dwindle."<sup>4</sup> Nearly 30 years later Symes looked back on the incident with touching pride:

"... We have succeeded in our neo-Malthusian crusade, opened in London in 1876 [*sic*] . . . We have given women the lamp of knowledge . . . and have taught them to use their own judgment as to whether they will be mothers or not. It is too late for fools and tyrants to reverse that . . . We have wrought the greatest revolution ever known in domestic life, and all in 27 years or so. I am proud to have been mixed up in it from the beginning and to have borne my share of rotten society's condemnation and punishment."<sup>5</sup> The 1880s marked a "new departure" with the beginning of Charles Bradlaugh's long "parliamentary struggle". Symes, who was still writing for the *National Reformer* and had risen to the rank of vice-president of the Society (1877), realised the need for diversity on the publishing front. The story had best be told in his own words:

"In the summer of 1880, I resolved to start a paper on my own account. I had no fault to find with Mr Bradlaugh's paper . . . , but I saw that, after Mr Bradlaugh was elected to parliament, the *National Reformer* must necessarily be devoted more exclusively to politics than heretofore . . . Something more sledge-hammerish was needed, more jocular, more dashing, more fun-poking. And I was wondering how to get it started. I mentioned my dream to a few London friends, and they told me that they had the same project in view, and would start at once if I would remove my residence from Birmingham to London and edit the paper! Agreed! I dropped a note to Mr Bradlaugh to apprise him of the scheme, and he very graciously wished me success, and

offered to give me a note respecting the new paper in the *National Reformer* as soon as I let him know I was ready."<sup>6</sup>

Symes, however, was unable to leave Birmingham after all. (He does not explain why, but I suspect it may be connected with the secular boarding school Symes and his wife were planning, and which certainly opened in Birmingham in 1882.) Anyway, at this point, G. W. Foote, who had fallen out with Bradlaugh in 1877, "happily returned to the fold", and, says Symes, "I was asked if he might take the editorship; and, if so, would I contribute to the new journal. I was very glad to fall in with this suggestion."<sup>7</sup> Thus it is that you will see Foote's name on the final page of this number of *The Freethinker*. To the first issue, published in May 1881, Symes duly contributed an essay on "Bible Biography".

I need hardly add that *The Freethinker* became everything that Symes wished of it. Blasphemy prosecutions commenced, and in 1883 prison sentences of twelve, nine and three months were imposed on Foote, W. J. Ramsey and H. A. Kemp respectively. Symes felt that "my articles were amongst those which got them into trouble" and wrote to Bradlaugh and Foote offering to surrender himself to the rigours of the law. Symes's martyrdom complex was much appreciated, but he was strongly urged that he might be "wanted for another occasion." When Foote was carted off to Holloway Jail Symes expected to be given the interim editorship (as Foote would have wished). But the editorial committee had other ideas and Symes was horrified when Dr Edward B. Aveling "by downright chicanery and most unblushing lying, diddled me out of it; stepped into the post; [and] softened down the gallant *Freethinker* into gruel and homoeopathic medicine."<sup>8</sup> Symes could be gullible at times, but on this occasion he was faster than Bradlaugh at spotting a "con man".

Symes's urge for action did not remain frustrated for long. In the middle of 1883, Bradlaugh received a letter from the Australasian Secular Association, Melbourne, asking for a lecturer to be sent out to them. "The Chief" forwarded the letter to Symes, suggesting that he write back to Melbourne if he was interested. He was; he did. A send-off present of £139 was raised by the British freethinkers and presented by Bradlaugh. In December 1883 Symes, eager as ever, sailed off to Australia.

(To be continued in the next issue)

#### NOTES

1. *Liberator* (Melbourne) 20 November 1887: p.439.
2. *Ibid.* 27 November 1887: p.2.
3. *Ibid.* 4 December 1887: p.20.
4. TRIBE, D. H., 1971, *President Charles Bradlaugh, MP.* (London): p.184.
5. *Liberator* (Melbourne) 12 March 1904: p.3561.
6. *Ibid.* 4 March 1888: p.225.
7. *Ibid.*: p. 225.
8. *Ibid.*: p. 225.

# The Ballad of the Blasphemy Trial

Oh there is a place on Parnassus  
where all the world's myths stand  
rank on rank awaiting  
the sign from a poet's hand.

Some are long dust and forgotten  
their papyrus mummy shroud  
crumbled. They wait for a scholar  
to call them out of the crowd.

But some have names of thunder  
that echo the centuries through  
Isis, Venus, Moloch  
Thor and his hammer too.

Yet at the call of a poet  
each must rise and come  
and only one law is god here  
they must be true to their name.

So up in the morning early  
Lord Jesus came to the hill  
and there again he laid him down  
to do the poet's will.

For love is Jesus' forename  
where he sits on Parnassus hill  
and he came to do his best there  
as any great myth will.

And when his task was over  
he went back to take his place  
and all the myths moved over  
and smiled into his face.

Lord Jesus he was troubled  
as he gazed at the world below.  
He nudged Socrates beside him  
and asked was it true or no.

He saw a court and dock there  
he knew them well of old  
he saw what was put on trial  
and the vision made him cold.

"Oh I have stood in a courtroom  
and now what's this I see?  
They are trying a man at the bar  
and all in the name of me.

Oh I have hung between two thieves  
so all my stories say  
and shall the law that broke my limbs  
be invoked for me today?"

Then Jesus stood on Parnassus side  
and tore his long dark hair  
but Socrates restrained him  
and spelled it out with care.

"Although we must always follow  
and be true to our stories' truth  
no such constraints can bind them."  
Lord Jesus gnashed his teeth.

"They have made me into a mockery  
with their blasphemy of trial.  
They have taken love, my given name  
and broken it on a wheel.

I shall curse them in their blindness  
I curse them in their pride.  
They align themselves with Judas  
and Pilate takes their side."

Then Socrates gave him hemlock  
as they sat on Parnassus hill  
to soothe his deep affliction.  
"Oh do not take it ill.

We both died condemned felons  
though you by another's hand  
and we must forgive our children  
who do not understand.

Some in the name of reason  
do things I shudder for  
others for love invoke you  
and stand you at their bar."

But Jesus answered him fiercely  
"Reason is not my name.  
You must do as you have answer  
I will not play their game.

I will go down to the courtyard  
and hang me on a cross  
while the judge pronounces sentence  
and they will see their loss."

Socrates looked down sadly  
and reached below with his hand  
to pluck the dear Lord Jesus  
out of his own grandstand.

"Come up, come up, dear Jesus  
they must not see you there  
they will only think you demonstrate  
and drag you off by your hair.

Remember your name is love, lord  
come up along with me.  
In time myths of love and reason  
may cause the blind to see."

MAUREEN DUFFY

# Reflections on the Blasphemy Trial

WILLIAM McILROY

Not since the trial of the late Dr Bryn Thomas by a Consistory Court, followed by his unfrocking at a ceremony in Southwark Cathedral, have the luminaries of religion and the law made such asses of themselves as in the *Gay News* case. *Gay News* is not primarily concerned either with religious controversy or the campaign against blasphemy law. Its Editor, Denis Lemon, and publishers, *Gay News Ltd*, stumbled into the arena quite by chance, so their decision to resist the Philistines was all the more courageous and laudable.

The trial was presided over by Judge Myer Alan Barry King-Hamilton, aged 72, whose enthusiasm for cricket is matched by his ignorance of sexology. As the defendants were accused of having "unlawfully and wickedly published . . . a blasphemous libel concerning the Christian religion namely a poem vilifying Christ in his life and in his crucifixion", the selection of the President of West London Synagogue to try the case may seem a trifle droll.

Judge King-Hamilton is, however, inordinately deferential towards Christianity, and he evidently believes that the Christian religion—and others, we suspect—should enjoy legal protection from rationalists, infidels and unbelievers. His lordship's grasp of history is somewhat shaky ("Homosexuality caused the fall of the Roman Empire") so he may not be aware that it was rationalists, infidels and unbelievers, and not the predecessors of Mary Whitehouse, who championed the cause of religious liberty and equality, thus enabling people of all faiths, including the Judaic, to become judges.

Mrs Whitehouse, the prosecutor, has been praised for her sincerity, integrity and other virtues. But when she and a small band of followers held a prayer session during an interval in the Old Baily proceedings, their "screwed-up, grace-proud faces" were not a pretty sight.

Mrs Whitehouse's protestation that she is not anti-homosexual should be taken with a pillar of salt. She has not acted against other journals which have published "The Love That Dares to Speak its Name" and letters have appeared in the *Guardian* and *New Statesman* offering copies of the poem to anyone who cares to send a stamped, addressed envelope to an address in Harrow. But never a cheep from either Mrs Whitehouse or her side-kicks. Why not?

The answer will be found in publications issued by organisations which support the Whitehouse cause. They spew hatred and contempt on the homosexual community. The true intention of Mary Whitehouse and her friends both inside and outside the Old Bailey was pinpointed by *Gay News* itself in a comment on the trial: "Most of the time has

so far been spent on articles published four years ago in the paper, on two classified advertisements, on readers' letters, on book reviews, on feature articles. All of which tends to support the view that what is on trial here is not 'blasphemous libel' . . . but the newspaper itself."

Approving noises have emanated from some quarters about the way in which the *Gay News* verdict has drawn a line. But Mary Whitehouse and the network of religio-political organisations which support her will not be content by drawing a line. They want to put the clock back.

Happily their activities are often self-defeating. *Gay News* readers had probably forgotten about "The Love That Dares to Speak its Name", and the general public was unaware of it, when Mrs Whitehouse initiated the prosecution. By the time the trial ended, the offending work was known, by title at least, throughout Britain and much further afield. Eventually it will be included in anthologies, poetry recitals and A-level syllabuses.

Whilst not underestimating the strain that Denis Lemon and his colleagues underwent during the trial and in the preceding months, we suggest that Mary Whitehouse may be the loser in the long run. *Gay News* has already benefited from the furore arising from her action. Readers of the paper have donated over £21,000 to the defence fund: *Gay News* has received an enormous amount of free publicity which should increase its circulation; isolated homosexuals from Penzance to Portskerra now know about a fortnightly journal that is of particular interest to them; the lingering, if undeserved, respect for Christianity held by thousands of uncommitted liberals has been finally destroyed.

The *Gay News* case should alert freethinkers to a new menace—the insidious campaign now afoot to extend blasphemy law. The proposition that all religions, rather than Christianity alone, should enjoy this privilege sounds reasonable and democratic. In practice such a development would be exploited by religious fanatics of all faiths who regard the mildest criticism of their beliefs or leaders as an act of depravity.

It would be not only the followers of Jesus Christ and Mohammed who would take advantage of such a retrogressive step. During the last decade there has been an alarming increase in "new" religions—usually imported from the United States or from the East—many of which are quite simply a family business or a vehicle for extreme Right-wing political propaganda. The charlatans who run these enterprises indoctrinate and encourage their gullible followers to regard them as "prophets" and

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## SPIRITUAL TAKE-OFF

Beneath the stony stare of Nelson on top of his column in Trafalgar Square, Krishna was welcomed in the form of an ornate, but flimsy-looking, cart. This was when the ninth annual Rathayatra Festival took place on a blazing summer Sunday afternoon to the mild interest of myriads of tourists. It is an important event in the calendar of the International Society for Krishna Consciousness (better known as Hare Krishna devotees and recognisable by their shaven heads, dull-coloured robes, and jangling and chanting).

It has been reported that the festival would start with the arrival of a procession from Hyde Park. This arrived, with more or less divine punctuality, with about 60 followers and what looked like a decked float for a village fete, but turned out to be the (cardboard?) temple of Krishna—the one god of all gods. While the motley crew assembled for their dancing, an announcer did his best to get the crowd to join in the chanting, to the rhythm of the sitar. Despite enormous efforts, and some of the techniques of a pantomime dame—“No all you on this side can chant louder than those on that side . . .”—the crowd showed feint curiosity rather than religious rapture.

Once the chanting and dancing was under way food was served—“Come along if you feel a bit peckish and just have a bite with god.” The underlying beliefs of ISKON, are hard to fathom, a fact reinforced by one speaker saying he did not need to explain the exact significance of the festival. The basic principle is to reach god and transcendence by chanting “Hare Krishna, etc . . .” until you reach a state of self-induced semi-hypnosis.

The Society's guru is His Divine Grace A. C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupa. His writings have the clarity of mud. He uses classical Eastern religious texts like the *Bhagavad-Gita* in much the same mindless way that Jehovah's Witnesses use the Bible, with little regard for context or meaning. It seems to be important to quote in Sanskrit, which few followers can understand, and to spell Krishna as Krsna to give the word a special mystique.

It might all seem a harmless addition to the variety of English eccentrics providing Sunday afternoon entertainment, but for the fact that those caught up in it find themselves enmeshed in an autocratic organisation, where it is hard to think for oneself or change one's ideas. Members commit themselves to four principles: no “illicit sexual connection”, no intoxication, no meat eating and no gambling. There is also the commitment to abandon personal possessions, avoid privacy and regularly chant oneself into a mindless trance.

A rumour, not confirmed, that a number of Hare Krishna disciples were involved in an incident in which several people were shot in India, suggests slightly more sinister implications.

## NEWS

Another guru from the East is expanding claims for his teaching. The Maharishi Yogi has already elaborated considerable claims for Transcendental Meditation, suggesting that if enough of the world were to practice this, it would be a much better place. Without wishing to cast doubt on the value of meditation, it is a bit dangerous to see it as a panacea for all that irks in the world.

It is now reported that some of the Maharishi's pupils are learning to fly. Twenty minutes meditation twice a day can achieve that perfect co-ordination which enables the pupil to levitate. The Maharishi's training can be obtained at the International Capital of the Age of Enlightenment in Switzerland (a land where tax regulations allow the pound to accumulate with the same ease as flights on air). A photographer was not allowed to take pictures of people off the ground, but some have been supplied. A course of expensive lessons is required to reach the realm of higher consciousness necessary for flight. One successful student declared “At first I rose an inch or so for just a few seconds. Now I can rise three or four feet for minutes, even gliding about the room.”

It is to be hoped that someone is not floating some hot air to the media.

## MYTH UNDERSTOOD

A new book questioning the divinity of Christ has caused a flurry among the faithful. The book, *The Myth of God Incarnate*, (SCM Press), examines the incarnation of God in Jesus Christ and asks whether it should not be “interpreted afresh in the modern world”. The authors are headed by the editor John Hick, Professor of Theology in the University of Birmingham. They are a group of radical theologians who study the history of the idea that Christ was an incarnation of God and question how essential the idea is to Christianity.

Churchmen have reacted strongly and national newspaper columns have debated the issue heatedly. The Moderator of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland (the Right Rev John Gray) called on the authors to resign their appointments. He said they were divorced from the real world of faith and life. Lady Lothian, chairman of the Order of Christian Unity, was another protester; she sent a telegram to the heads of all Churches in Britain



# S AND NOTES

entreating them "to assert the truth and affirm the divinity of Christ."

An application for an emergency debate at the General Synod of the Church of England was refused. (You would think the disappearance of divinity from Jesus Christ would be something of an emergency for the Churches.) The Archbishop of Canterbury said that he regretted the title of the book, but felt that it would be irresponsible to engage in discussion before there was time to read the book. Dr Sansom, a member of the Church's Council for Evangelism, said it did not help when people came up and said "Oh, but your leading theologians say it's all a myth."

Freethinkers will not be surprised to learn that "it's all a myth", but it is something of a turn-about to find leading theologians saying so. (A review of the book will be published in a future issue.)

## THE NON-GOD SPOTS

Members of the National Secular Society have broadcast their views several times recently. Barbara Smoker, the President, twice talked on London Broadcasting Company about blasphemy. In one short interview she gave an account of the legal background to blasphemy in this country. In a 40-minute programme, on the day on which the editor of *Gay News* was sentenced at the Old Bailey for the crime of blasphemy, she explained how outmoded a concept blasphemy was and exchanged views with listeners phoning in—the majority of whom agreed with her.

The ex-Secretary of the NSS, Bill McIlroy, shortly after his departure, was interviewed on the occasion of his resignation on the London Broadcasting Company programme *Sunday Supplement*. The new Secretary of the NSS, Jim Herrick, shortly after starting, took part in a discussion about morning assemblies on Radio 4's programme *You and Yours*. After listening to snippets of a traditional and modern assembly the Secretary, with Raymond Johnston, Director of the Festival of Light, and Peter Watkins, an Anglican headmaster, compared their attitudes to morning assemblies. Jim Herrick described them as a sham, which no-one concerned to bring up children honestly could wish to encourage.

In the ITV religious programme *Saints Alive*, Phyllis Graham, author of *The Jesus Hoax* and

contributor to *The Freethinker*, explained why she had abandoned her career as a nun. She said that she became appalled at the concept of hell and as she began to study the gospels became convinced that one Jesus had never existed. She also hoped that he had not, since the religion he was alleged to have founded had caused such untold human misery.

For good measure, it was noted that a BBC announcer, referring to the delay in starting business in the House of Commons on the day of Mr Healey's economic proposals, said that the House starts with prayers—"one of those strange Parliamentary procedures."

## Freethinker Fund

At the holiday time of year, when support for funds is traditionally found to be low, it is encouraging to report a good total for the last month from 21 June to 19 July. The total of £75.13 is much appreciated, and it is emphasised that these contributions do help to keep *The Freethinker* going.

Thanks are expressed to Anonymous, £5; Anonymous, £2; Anonymous, £1.00; Anonymous, £2.60; C. K. Bilbrough, £2.25; Miss R. Bush, 75p; R. F. Carr, 25p; Mrs L. Cordesse, 60p; A. Chambers, 25p; E. Gomm, £6; W. Gerrard, £3; E. Henderson, £3; D. Harper, £10; E. J. Hughes, £1; S. E. Johnson, £25; W. G. Lock, 25p; J. Manus, £2.50; J. H. Morten, 25p; A. E. Morris, £1.25; B. W. Mills, £1.25; F. W. Moore, £1.25; D. Probert, 68p; R. Reader, 60p; D. Redhead, 25p; N. J. Severs, 25p; J. C. Tugwell, £1.25; J. Verney, £1; V. Wilson, 40p; I. Yettram, £1.25.

## OBITUARIES

### MR S. BRYDEN

Sam Bryden, who has died aged 93, was a pioneer of Freethought in Glasgow. He was knowledgeable on a wide range of subjects including Shakespeare and Ingersol and lectured at open air meetings.

Professor John Anderson of Sydney University is on record for causing a furore in 1943, when, in a lecture on Religion In Education, he began by saying: "It would be possible to deal with this subject as briefly as with the subject of snakes in Iceland. One could say, 'There is no religion in education'. In other words, education is necessarily secular; the more religious instruction there is in any 'educational' system, the less it is truly educational."

# BOOKS

WRITERS AND ARTISTS IN REVOLT—THE PRERAPHAELITES by Audrey Williamson. David & Charles. £4.95.

The Pre-Raphaelites were for humans, against inhumans and especially against the Landseer “stuffies” of the Royal Academy. Art was being academised to death and *something* had to be done.

The members of the Brotherhood, Ford Madox Brown, Rossetti and Millais dug around in the late 1840s for new foundations. They came up with a number of things: an intensive study of natural forms, a new historical sense of things that predated science and technology, social commitment, extraordinary attention to detail and the elaboration of new standards of craftsmanship to match.

Despite Ruskin's role among them as their aesthetic mentor they missed the vital Turner message (although Holman Hunt's *Sunset* reproduced in this book shows that he almost made it) and the Impressionists, who might well have been English, turned out to be French. The world, as we know, went the way of the French and left the Pre-Raphaelites in an exquisite backwater of their own making.

With all the advantages geared to hindsight we can now see that the lasting achievements of our Victorian geniuses were not where they hoped they would be—in the highest flights of the imagination in painting and poetry—but in the creation of the arts and crafts movement, in new standards of domestic design, in the foundation of modern conservationism and in some interesting additions to the tradition of English Utopianism. But they kept the arts vital at a time when they were threatened with all the horrors of Victorian philistinism. The odds they worked against were quite appalling and eventually they lost. Morris finally abandoned hope and the police took Wilde to Reading Jail. England from 1890 to 1914 was a dreadful place for the sensitive and perceptive soul. Owen's comment on the war that followed is a fit epitaph to the not-so-strange death of Victorian England:

“Was it for this the clay grew tall

Oh what made the fatuous sunbeams toil  
To break earth's sleep at all?”

Audrey Williamson's book is a collection of nine essays. If the book is read straight through it is a little disjointed because the method is deliberately biographical and therefore necessarily discontinuous. But the risk was worth taking and, by and large, it comes off.

The Pre-Raphaelites are little read today. The florid flourish of Ruskin, Swinburne and Morris is no longer to our taste. As with Turner in painting they missed the literary boat as well. One can say this because the new option was alive and amongst them in the person of Gerard Manley Hopkins and

# FREETHINKER

through his friendship with Christina Rossetti. *The Wreck of the Deutschland* was written in 1875 (and suppressed by the Jesuits). Three years earlier Hopkins wrote of Christina: “for pathos and pure beauty of art I do not think her brother is her equal: in fact the simple beauty of her work cannot be matched.” That is extraordinary high praise from the founding genius of modern English. If there is one particular criticism I would make of this book it is its total omission of any treatment of Christina Rossetti.

Audrey Williamson has a good nose for detail (not all of it strictly relevant to her subject) thus: “it was 1920, about 100 years after his death, before Shelley's penetrating and dangerous *A Philosophical View of Reform* was published”—the first reference, I must shamefacedly confess, that I have ever seen to this work. Then, as one who goes to Gladstone's Hawarden every year, I had to read this book to find out that the parish church features a Burne-Jones window.

Audrey Williamson is a little given to romantic speculation as witness her Swinburnian account of Swinburne: “Swinburne's concern—and there is no reason to suppose that it was not a genuine concern—for the freedom of the writer to cover all the experiences of life was supplemented by an equal concern that he, as a human being, should not personally miss any of them. How much of this passionate thirst for knowledge was actually gratified it is not easy to say, as he was by no means above boasting of a frantic virility it seems questionable that, more than spasmodically if at all, he actually possessed. In fact there is much in his life to support the view that pornographic cravings on an unbalanced scale are often accompanied by impotence and frustration, or a sadism as much self-inflicted as satisfied on others. What is unquestionable is that Swinburne achieved more of his defiantly-propagated dissipations in youth than his slight physique could sustain, and his early death would have been certain if Theodore Watts-Duncan had not stepped in . . .” (p.162).

The author retains an old-fashioned faith in “socialism”. Of course the word actually *meant* something before it was taken over and ruined by the Fabians and the Marxists. To the Owenites, the Pre-Raphaelites, John Stuart Mill and others, before the fateful 'eighties, it meant a vision of England as a complex of producers, consumers and political co-operatives, and it had nothing to do with centralised government and power-mad political parties. But that meaning has been essentially dead

# REVIEWS

since 1893 (the year Morris gave up) and it serves no useful purpose to suggest otherwise. For the social action of the future we need a new *clean* name.

The book provides plenty of evidence for the male chauvinism that was as endemic in the Pre-Raphaelites, as it was in Victorians generally, even if our attention is not expressly drawn to it. Their women appear as crosses between nubile and ethereal Madonnas and vacuous Ophelias. Like Coleridge and Turner before them they saw woman as either immaculate (and without character) or as whore. The woman, in consequence, has a very difficult time. Elizabeth Siddal, model for Millais' *Ophelia* (lying for days in a bath kept "warm" by candles!) and later Rossetti's wife, noted the lines:

"I wish I were dead, my foe,  
My friend, I wish I were dead,  
With a stone at my tired feet  
And a stone at my tired head."

and then took her own life. She was 28. Christina went Tractarian. Jane Morris dissolved into a tragic enigma. There is a broth of a book yet to be written on Pre-Raphaelite women.

It is, I think, a mistake to leave out the end of the Turner-Ruskin story. Ruskin was Turner's executor and he found the vast collection of erotic paintings that Turner had made in the brothels of dockland. He destroyed the lot. This book tells us a good deal about Ruskin's probable impotence—all the more reason for indicating the appalling dénouement. That we are only able to know the bowdlerised Turner is a hair-raising shame.

The book includes a useful number of illustrations of the Pre-Raphaelites and their work. Cost precludes colour one supposes—yet another comment on the poverty of contemporary England. Come back Morris! Come back Kelmscott! (And thank you, Audrey, for saying as much . . .)

PETER CADOGAN

## TWO HUMANIST PUBLICATIONS

### **Collapse of a Myth—and what to do about it.**

A Humanist Economic and Social Perspective, by James Dilloway.

This booklet is intended to stimulate ideas concerning a humanist attitude towards social and economic affairs. Although written by one individual, it is the result of a lengthy inquiry by a special study group of the British Humanist Association.

The booklet deals with an analysis of the process whereby the Western (and particularly the British) economy has reached a state of permanent crisis. A wide number of radical proposals are also put forward, as a necessary consequence of re-considering many of today's economic assumptions. A number of issues which are central to the booklet's closely argued thesis are: values—and the "all-pervasive conditioning to consumer values"; the assumption and meaning of continuous economic growth; and the effect of large scale economic structures on people's participation and the quality of their experiences.

Price £1.00. Available from the British Humanist Association, 13 Prince of Wales Terrace, London W8 5PG.

### **Question 10.** Edited by G. A. Wells.

This annual collection of essays from the Rationalist Press Association is under the new editorship of G. A. Wells. The range of topics is wide and the contributors distinguished. There is a trenchant discussion of the literary critic's use of dazzling but unclear terminology and a down to earth attack on admiring that which is meaningless by Ronald Englefield. Margaret Knight examines the religion of Florence Nightingale, showing how springs of altruism can come from freethinking Deism. Hermann Bondi poses the question "Why does science hide its human face?" Professor Wells himself rigorously examines "Miracles and the nature of truth".

The variety takes the reader into many separate specialist fields, but he can be assured of a clear, clean dose of reason and common sense whatever the topic.

Price £1.00 paper, £2.25 cloth. Available from Rationalist Press Association, 88 Islington High Street, London N1 8EW.

## THEATRE

**STATE OF REVOLUTION** by Robert Bolt. Lyttleton Theatre, National Theatre. In repertory.

"History is hard", Lenin says several times in this new play about the Russian revolution. It is not too hard in this play by Robert Bolt, which has all the solid virtues of a good school history lesson. Its school-masterly credentials are brought to mind by the framework of the play in which Lunacharsky, Minister of Education, reminisces about the revolution to an assembly of Young Communists, on the occasion of the anniversary of Lenin's death. Despite the known importance of historically determined forces, Lunacharsky asks to be allowed a personal note. And it is the personal note in history—the charting of the development and conflicts of striking individuals—at which Robert Bolt is particu-

larly skilled. This aspect of history, of course, has great appeal.

The play is dramatically effective. The structure of Lunacharsky's address gives it much dramatic irony, since we see the revolution from the perspective of Stalin's regime. Even in the balmy days on Capri, when revolution is only being vigorously talked about, the audience knows that the dark figure of Stalin looms in the future. The play swiftly moves into revolution, civil war, and war with Germany. The outline of events is clear, with famous highlights, for instance Lenin's rousing address at the Finland Station, staged to give vivid reproduction of the photographs. (The verisimilitude of the physical appearance of the leading figures is a notable feature of the production.) It seemed a little like one of those huge Victorian panoramic paintings depicting scenes from history—effective and informative but without much imaginative spark.

The heart of the play lay in the second Act, where the new order is seen relentlessly moving towards dictatorship, with the Cheka (secret police) growing in importance, the "people" for whom the revolution took place being bullied into relinquishing grain and organising counter attacks, such as the Kronstadt uprising. The most energetic impulse of the play lies in its demonstration of the development towards Stalinism. The figure of Josef Stalin, played with a laconic sense of growing power by Terence Rigby, is seen to develop from an unobtrusive mediocrity to a dangerous mediocrity. And yet the story of how the revolution failed, at least in many ways, to fulfil its ideals would have had greater impact if a stronger sense of the excitement of new possibilities in a new age had also been established.

In its demonstration of the revolution's momentum towards communist dictatorship the play became more thought-provoking. Especially interesting are the questions—was eventual dictatorship inevitable? what ethics did the revolution require? and what forces did the revolution release? Concerning the inevitability of what happened we keep returning to the importance of individuals. The play seems to be quarrelling with Lenin's statement "Big events aren't formed by people, people are formed by big events." Lenin's single-minded driving force as an individual is most important to events. The struggles between Trotsky, seen as a clever, cocky intellectual and Stalin, the slow ruthless man of action, affected committee decisions. The end of the play, where Lenin is chronically ill after strokes, suggests that the ailing leader recognises that Stalin is not the man to succeed him: if he had not been ill, if the personal concerns and differences of the central committee had not led to the quashing of Lenin's testament . . . then maybe Stalin would not have gained power? The clash of personalities and the drama of circumstances are as important as any inevitable march of historic forces.

The ethics of the revolution are summed up by Lenin's infuriated comment in argument with Gorki, the man of literature and conscience, "A man who insists on impossible ethical standards isn't an ethical paragon—he's an ethical clown . . ." But does the play imply that allowing too easy a shift of ethical standards leads to an ethical monster. Certainly there are more than hints of the monstrous in one of the later scenes of the play, where a Georgian farmer is roughly questioned by Stalin about his attitudes and it dawns on this tough, burly peasant that reason and common sense will be no use in a reign of terror.

Gorki hovers through the play, humane and weak, in a warm performance by Brian Blessed. He taunts Lenin: "You promised us new life . . . And all you have released is atavistic envy. There is no novelty whatever in your revolution." Upheaval and disorder may always allow brute force and envy to assert itself; but it is not an adequate comment on the Russian revolution, and suggests some of the limitations of the play.

The greatest strength of the evening lay in an outstanding performance by Michael Bryant as Lenin and brilliant direction by Christopher Morahan. Michael Bryant looked every inch like a photograph come to life and he succeeded in the difficult feat of making quite sympathetic a man of rigorous force and little charm. Among the many theatrical effects—beware if you dislike gunshot—the use of loudspeakers to give the effect of a massive crowd being addressed impressively made you feel as though you were there.

This is a workmanlike play. It certainly deserves to be seen, particularly in the National Theatre production. To give coherence to such a sweep of events is a considerable achievement; to remind us of the contradiction between revolutionary hopes and repression is ever important. But I did not feel this was a profound or deeply imaginative play. Doubtless it will join the A-level set texts in a few years, and the film of the play will I expect be a success. But I would prefer a historical play to bare its honourable intentions less obviously, and to try to catch more passionately the inner qualities of past events; not "to point a moral or adorn a tale", but to give an imaginative leap into the "otherness" of the past.

JIM HERRICK

## RADIO

**THE CHECK OUT: A HUMANE DEATH, SUICIDE OR MURDER?** Radio 4, 6 July.

During a week in which listeners to Radio 4's new assortment of trivia were being severely tested for stamina, welcome relief came in the form of a serious examination of euthanasia. One hundred minutes

of mid-evening broadcast time were directed to the question of whether or not an individual has the right to determine his own hour of death. The focus, for once, was a medical one as Ian Kennedy, a lecturer in medical law at King's College, London, undertook to consider a recent case in California where a patient with an incurable lung illness was allowed to "check out", to decide that life in a respirator was "not for me". At the appointed hour, Dr Ray Killingsworth was given morphine, placed under general anaesthesia and nature was allowed to run its course. The patient ended his life with dignity and a minimum amount of suffering to himself and his family.

Mr Kennedy presented the programme through a series of lengthy interviews with Dr Killingsworth's doctors and his wife. The doctors emphasised that their concern was not a religious one. Before them was the single question that the request to die was sincere and made in full consciousness. Mrs Killingsworth confirmed that her husband, a psychiatrist, was an intelligent and witty man, who loved life and had not succumbed to a "death wish".

The interviews were conducted without prompting, the subjects permitted to respond in their own time as to their feelings and their concern that the patient's wish should be carried out. One doctor admitted to extreme feelings of unease about taking responsibility for turning off the respirator, but at no time were the Christian implications of the decision made a factor. California state law decreed that the doctor faced with such a request was bound to honour it, once he had determined that Dr Killingsworth's judgment was sound and that there was no reasonable hope of recovery. Under a health system where intensive care of the kind Dr Killingsworth was receiving runs to a thousand dollars a day, his decision may be said to take account of his family's financial hardship before his own physical discomfort and the prospect of mere existence by the grace of medical technology.

The law relating to euthanasia in this country is exceedingly intricate. Mr Kennedy's contribution to the subject included a lucid outline of its main points. As in California, a patient who is conscious and refuses treatment must have his wish respected, provided he is judged to be mature and of sound judgment at the time of the request. In terminal cases, the doctor is not obliged to continue treatment if he thinks it is of no benefit to the patient. He is obliged, at all times, to ease the patient's suffering, and this may include measures which incidentally hasten death, provided his concern is to ease the patient's suffering. Both physicians and relatives are bound to decide in the best interests of the patient.

In an age when sophisticated medical care can keep General Franco all but alive for seven weeks, the Christian call to preserve the sanctity of life whatever the cost sounds alarmingly hollow. We

were given a penetrating look at the humanist alternative in a rare, "unprepackaged" radio documentary.

JAMES McDONALD

## WORLDWIDE

### WEST GERMANY

Two exorcists and the parents of a girl who died last year, after a long period of "possession by demons", are to be charged with manslaughter by criminal neglect. Anneliese Michel, a student teacher, died in July 1976. She weighed just over five stones and had been refusing food for several weeks. The two priests and her parents had not sought medical help.

The girl had first been treated for convulsive fits at the age of 16, and epilepsy had been diagnosed. Her parents, who are wealthy Roman Catholics, had consulted a priest, who detected symptoms of "possession of the Devil". A prominent exorcist was consulted and his report led the Bishop of Wurzburg to authorise exorcism.

A public prosecutor has spent a year investigating the case. The Bishop of Wurzburg and his adviser Father Rodewyk, an 82-year-old Jesuit prominent as an exorcist, will not be charged. They had assumed medical attention was also being given.

### PAKISTAN

A martial law regime in Pakistan is imposing medieval Islamic punishments. General Zia ul-Haq has taken control in a coup which displaced Mr Bhutto. Apart from the attempt to resolve an impasse concerning elections, the new regime represents a clear shift back to Islamic fundamentalism. Mr Bhutto had favoured liberal and secular attitudes.

The old punishments now revived include death by hanging or amputation for banditry or theft. (The regulation states that amputation would have to be performed by a qualified surgeon and with a local anaesthetic.) Other punishments include a maximum five years imprisonment or whipping for student agitation, and ten years or whipping for insulting or molesting women. Political activity can be penalised by five years imprisonment or whipping. A law which has not been revived is public stoning for adultery.

The idea of reforming a prisoner is alien to the Islamic code. The *Shariat* punishments were seen as a deterrent and retribution.

It is yet to be seen how these laws will be enforced, but they show clearly the outlook of the new regime. The religious wing of the Pakistan National Alliance is in favour. There is some indication that a new generation of army officers is less influenced by Western secularist ideas and more influenced by Islamic religion. The increased power

and wealth of oil states like Saudi Arabia and Libya may be stimulating the attraction of Islamic fundamentalism.

## SWITZERLAND

Archbishop Lefebvre has taken the Roman Catholic Church a step nearer to schism by ordaining 16 sub-deacons. This took place in the open air in a Swiss valley, with much publicity, despite Papal warnings of excommunication. His traditionalist approach goes far beyond a desire to retain the Latin mass, and is a quarrel with the many liberalising changes which Vatican II began.

The Archbishop is vehemently anti-Communist and has been a strong critic of the visit of the Hungarian Communist Party leader to the Vatican. He claims he is remaining loyal to the true faith, at a time when "mercenaries, thieves and wolves are already in the Church." His support taps deep wells of conservatism, and the rift can also be seen as a politico-religious split.

## LETTERS

In a David Frost Programme on BBC television Lord Longford discussed penal reform with Lord Hailsham. The former expressed his abhorrence of keeping criminals in prison for many years.

No doubt many Freethinkers will sympathise with this point of view, but does this mean that his Lordship will never enjoy heaven when he thinks of the unfortunate who are eternally in hell and the unbaptised babies who are forever in limbo?

P. BROWN

## FAR TOO COMPLACENT

I am writing to express my profound shock and outrage at the verdict delivered yesterday in the case brought by Mrs Mary Whitehouse against the Editor of "Gay News" on a charge of blasphemous libel.

It is absolutely incredible that such a case could even be brought in the first instance and it is apparent that many freethinkers—and I do not exclude myself from the charge—have become far too complacent in recent years because we have tended to believe that in attacking the Christian religion in this increasingly secular society we are more or less flogging a dead horse. This outrageous case demonstrates conclusively that it is imperative and of paramount importance that every reader of "The Freethinker" should write at once to his or her MP insisting that this ancient, ludicrous archaic law of blasphemy should be removed from the Statute Book forthwith. Is it not possible for you to devote a part of your precious space in the next issue to urging readers to take up their pens to ensure that MPs are made aware of a substantial section of public opinion on this absurd law of blasphemy?

M. O'BRIEN

## TO COLLECT OR NOT TO COLLECT . . .

A decision earlier this year of a large chain store to stop giving trading stamps prompted me to think over the question of trading stamp collection. Is it right to

accept a shopping incentive in this way, or would shops be able to pass on a greater saving to their customers if the money spent on stamps was directed towards price cuts? And do we, by accepting them, encourage their use so that these cuts cannot be made? Obviously the chain store in question thinks this is so.

But when trading stamps came into being in this country, we understood that the saving made by extra patronage of the shops would pay for the inducement to customers of "free" stamps. Today, however, because of the constant rise in prices, this can no longer be. Many garages offer stamps "or" discount so that those who collect stamps can see they are being paid for. Therefore shops who give them must surely pass on some of the cost too?

Despite this, I can see no reason to discontinue their collection, even though individual customers will only get the occasional few, because of the decline in the number of shops that provide them. In fact, I am hoping that Humanist ventures will benefit even more in this way, because it is by collecting up these "occasional few" from individuals all over the country that many extras can be obtained for the Humanist Housing Association flats and other Humanist ventures. And by belonging to the companies' Community Savings Plan a discount of one in six books is given to registered charities.

Maybe we are paying a fraction more because of the stamps (and this is debatable) but think what the joint collection provides. In January 1967 the collection started and the table gives a good idea of the way in which individuals and groups have been able to help provide many useful items for both older and younger people.

- July '68—Rose Bush Court: Bedding/bedside lamp etc for guest room.
- July '69—Burnett House: Six lightweight garden chairs.
- March '70—Rose Bush Court: Five card tables.
- Sept '70—Burnett House: More garden chairs.
- Feb '72—Rose Bush Court: Ten card tables.
- Feb '73—Blackham House: Patio table and chairs.
- April '73—Blackham House: Plant tub/trowel and fork.
- Jan '76—Edinburgh Youth Homes: Variety games and books etc (two of each).
- Sept '76—Sunhill Court: Eight garden chairs/Two wall clocks.
- Feb '77—Robert Morton House—Bedding/electric kettle/bedside lamps for guest rooms.
- Feb '77—Rose Bush Court: Wall clock.

Not only are the stamps exchanged for material goods, but in one instance they are given in return for waste paper collected in the Enfield and Barnet area, where the paper is later sold to help research into child blindness. So, with the help that trading stamps can obviously give, and the fact that I have received only one letter opposing the scheme in over ten years—and many in favour—the collection for Humanist projects will continue. Please, don't throw away your unwanted trading stamps, pop them in an envelope until there are sufficient to make a second class stamp worthwhile! Many thanks.

MARGARET SIDDALL  
2 Hutchings Road, Beaconsfield HP9 2BB

## NATIONAL SECULAR SOCIETY

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

# GOOD GOD!

Barbara Smoker is well known for her pugnacious and witty attacks on religion. In a forthcoming book she turns to verse to plunge into weighty questions concerning the existence of God. She uses rhyme, rhythm and plenty of reason in this "string of verses to tie up the deity." The book is generous with entertaining illustrations by Joyce Harpur.

When I refer to God as 'her',  
your senses all but fail;  
but if, being God, 'he' has no bod-y  
why must he be male?



God's proved (I'm told) since life is  
splendid;  
yet (with logic equal)  
life's so unjust that when it's ended  
it must have a sequel!

No longer keeping us in view,  
he's lost his human face.  
There's nothing left for God to do;  
no plans, no power, no place.



'The ground of being' has a grand  
and philosophic ring—  
but theists who would take their stand  
on abstract 'ground' tread shifting sand:  
it doesn't mean a thing.



'Blaspheming atheist!' So you deem?  
Submit it to your reason.  
How can atheists blaspheme?  
(Can aliens talk treason?)

If churchmen fear lest things I say  
against their childish creed  
should harm their god in any way—  
*that's* 'blasphemy', indeed!



"Good God!" (48 pp.) published by B & T at 95p.  
will be available from September.

"teachers". Their failure to establish themselves permanently in Britain is largely due to the devastating exposés which have appeared in the press and on radio and television. It would become exceedingly difficult to expose these rogues if the law relating to blasphemy were extended.

Ten years ago the key act relating to blasphemy law was repealed by the Criminal Law Act. But the common law offence of blasphemy was not dealt with and secularist protests against this omission were swept aside by "liberal" religionists and others who readily accept any Christian sop. It is now imperative that freethinkers resist any proposed expansion of blasphemy law.

Mrs Dora Noyce, a colourful and unrepentant brothel keeper in Edinburgh, has recently died aged 77. She once claimed that although her busiest time was during the Edinburgh Festival, the two weeks of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland came a close second.

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## 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 Whiteabbey 66752.

**Havering & District Humanist Society.** 16 August, 8 pm. Harold Wood Social Centre. R. J. Condon: "The History of Humanism".

**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.** 17 August, 7.30 p.m. At 248 Woodchurch Road, Birkenhead. Discussion on Humanist interests. Tel. 051-608 3835 (4 to 6 pm).

**West Glamorgan Humanist Group.** Details of summer activities from 24 Glanrafon Gardens, Sketty, Swansea.

Mr William McIlroy, who has spent much of the last 14 years energetically campaigning against censorship, has received a police summons. As part of his campaign against obscenity laws he mailed copies of the poem "The Love That Dares to Speak Its Name", the subject of the "Gay News" Blasphemy trial, to a number of individuals known to favour more censorship. Mr Kenneth Kavanagh, a senior probation officer associated with a group called The Responsible Society, received a copy of the poem. (The same Mr Kavanagh had already passed on the crucial copy of "Gay News" to Mrs Mary Whitehouse.) Mr Kavanagh contacted the police and Mr McIlroy has been charged with sending an "indecent or obscene" article through the post. He was due to appear at Highbury Corner Magistrates' Court on 2 August 1977.

### Freedom on Trial

Atheists, and many undogmatic Christians, will be shocked and amazed that a successful blasphemy prosecution has taken place in 1977. They will hope indeed that it is no turn of the pendulum, no harbinger of increased censorship and prurient religious oppression, no shadow casting itself backwards from an unenlightened future.

### THE FREETHINKER

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