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## FORMER FREETHINKER EDITOR FINED FOR PROTEST AGAINST CENSORSHIP

Mr William McIlroy, a former editor of "The Freethinker", who recently retired as Secretary of the National Secular Society, appeared before a magistrate at Highbury Court on Monday 19 September. He was charged, under a Post Office Act, with sending an obscene and indecent package through the post. The magistrate fined him £50 and ordered him to pay £50 of the prosecution's costs and £50 towards cost of legal aid.

William McIlroy explained that his act was an expression of protest against censorship. He had sent a copy of the poem by James Kirkup *The Love that Dares to Speak Its Name* to a number of people well known for their pro-censorship views. The same poem, which depicts a centurion's homosexual fantasies about Jesus Christ, was the subject of a private prosecution against *Gay News* on a charge of blasphemous libel.

### Poem Through the Post

Mr David Fingleton, defence counsel, said that the poem had been sent to some dozen or so public figures, including Mrs Mary Whitehouse, Raymond Johnston, Director of the Festival of Light, Lady Birdwood, Jill Knight, MP, and Rhodes Boyson, MP. The poem had been posted shortly after it had been made public that Mrs Whitehouse was to bring a private prosecution against *Gay News*, and Mr McIlroy was clear that those to whom he sent the poem would be likely to have seen it already.

Mr Kavanagh, a probation officer from Bedfordshire, also received a copy. (Mr Kavanagh figured in the *Gay News* trial as the individual who had brought to Mrs Whitehouse's attention the offending issue of the paper.) Mr Kavanagh complained to the Director of Public Prosecutions, as a result of which the case was brought. The only previous contact Mr McIlroy had with Kenneth Kavanagh

arose when a review of a pamphlet, *Sex Education—Its Uses and Abuses* produced by The Responsible Society, was printed in *The Freethinker* (July 1976). Kavanagh was sent a copy of the review and given the opportunity to comment—an example of the defendant's fairmindedness.

It was accepted by all parties that William McIlroy was a man of integrity. *The Freethinker* was described by counsel as a serious journal, of sombre and formal format, with a horror of intolerance and censorship as one of its platforms.

It was clear that Mr McIlroy was not the only individual to have sent the poem through the post. Someone else had sent it through the post to Mrs Whitehouse—no doubt like Mr McIlroy, for the legitimate reason of expressing his views about censorship. It was also mentioned by counsel that a Mrs Valerie Riches of The Responsible Society had apparently posted the poem to Mrs Coggan, the wife of the Archbishop of Canterbury, requesting that it be conveyed to her husband in a sealed container, so that the Church of England might take a stand on this issue.

### Brigid Brophy and Edward Blishen Defend

Counsel claimed that the seriousness of intent and the fact that Mr McIlroy was not alone in using postal services for the distribution of the poem were arguments for leniency. The plea of guilty had been put forward since it was recognised that, while the obscene nature of the poem was debatable and its blasphemous nature was yet to be considered by an appeal court, the poem was admitted to be likely to be considered indecent in the sense that it offended some standards of propriety.

Two well-known writers, Brigid Brophy and Edward Blishen, were questioned as to Mr McIlroy's motives and character. Brigid Brophy, the novelist

(Continued over)



and literary critic, referred to his serious and responsible social concern. She made it clear that the poem did not offend her, and she did not feel there had been any intention to hurt anyone in sending it through the post. It was a personal protest against the use of the law to prevent free speech. The recipients were all known to be publicly committed to censorship. They were mostly religious and therefore, she suggested, likely to be used to the use of erotic religious imagery in poetry.

Edward Blishen, writer, broadcaster and authority on children's books, emphasised his agreement with what Brigid Brophy had said. He felt the motives for posting the poem were understandable, and that none of those to whom it was sent would have been likely to be hurt by the action.

### "Monumental Humbug"

After the sentence was announced, Mr McIlroy said that he had accepted counsel's advice to plead guilty on the grounds that the poem was technically indecent within the meaning of the Post Office Act. "Although I was technically prosecuted under the Post Office Act, I have no doubt this will help the campaign against blasphemy law." He described the prosecution by the Director of Public Prosecutions as a "monumental act of humbug and folly." The case was reported in *The Times*, *Daily Telegraph*, *Guardian* and *Morning Star*.

Barbara Smoker, President of the National Secular Society, has commented on the case. Setting aside the question of blasphemy which is a law existing to sustain religious privilege, she pointed out, it seemed that even when the Post Office Act was being used the law operated strangely. "Since the Director of Prosecution has prosecuted Mr McIlroy and not pro-censorship people who sent the poem through the post—is there one law for the religious and another for the non-religious?"

Detestation of any attempt to suppress freedom of speech and opposition to blasphemy law will remain firm policy of *The Freethinker*.

● Mr McIlroy is honorary secretary of the Committee Against Blasphemy Law (CABL) and further details may be obtained from him: W. McIlroy, 32 Over Street, Brighton, Sussex.

● The poem *The Love that Dares to Speak its Name* is available on application with a stamped addressed envelope from the Free Speech Movement, 134 Northumberland Road, Harrow, Middlesex.

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**NATIONAL SECULAR SOCIETY**  
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702 Holloway Road, London N19 3NL

## WORLDWIDE

### FRANCE

The number of priests in France dropped from 41,000 to 32,000 in the decade between 1966 and 1976. If this trend continues the number will fall to 10,000 by the year 2000, according to the Paris newspaper *Le Monde*, and there is a higher percentage of older men. In 1950 about 50 per cent were between 25 and 45 years of age, but by 1970 that percentage had dropped to 25, and if trends continue only 10 per cent will be in that age range by 1980.

### STOCKHOLM

A district medical officer in Stockholm has suggested inaugurating a suicide clinic to help people to die. Dr Ragnar Toss, aged 63, said in a Swedish Medical Journal that the seriously ill, the very old and the suicidal should be given help in dying. The cases should be thoroughly examined by doctors and psychiatrists, he said, and eventually help in dying could be allowed, for those voluntary applicants where it was considered appropriate.

### HOLLAND

Christian opposition to the reform of abortion law has proved a major factor in forming the new Dutch government. Theoretically, abortions in Dutch clinics are illegal. Christian Democrats have until now opposed the campaign of most Dutch political parties to allow abortion on demand.

In a new coalition government formed between the Socialists and Christian Democrats, the Christian Democratic Party has agreed to compromise on the abortion issue. New abortion legislation will be prepared before 1 January 1979 and a free vote allowed. Christian groups in the Upper House opposed to abortion are likely to prove a stumbling block.

### GOOD GOD!

by BARBARA SMOKER

*A "string of verses to tie up the deity"*

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Religious relics are often sought or wrought to give substance to myths. There have been many expeditions to discover the remains of Noah's Ark upon Mount Ararat and yet another is taking place. In this article R. J. Condon shows that those interested in understanding the Flood Myth would do better researching into ancient Egyptian mythical sources than burrowing in the mud for elusive planks of wood.

Some time during 1977 the impressively named Scientific Exploration and Archaeological Research Foundation (SEARCH) will be sending an expedition in furtherance of its sole raison d'être, the finding of Noah's Ark upon Mount Ararat. Such an enterprise may raise doubts about the Foundation's claim to be scientific, but at any rate one of its directors is said to be a brilliant nuclear physicist. SEARCH has been up Ararat before. Its 1969 expedition returned with timber claimed to be from the Ark, although radiocarbon tests have indicated the wood's age to be a mere 1300 years.

Doyen of the Ark hunters is Eryl Cummings of New Mexico; the 1977 expedition will be his tenth in 30 years. According to him there have been 37 in the last 15 years alone. He knows most of those who have taken part, but the only success any of them have reported is the frequency with which they have been arrested. Mount Ararat is in Turkish Armenia, close to the Soviet border. It is therefore a very sensitive military zone, and the Turkish authorities are understandably uneasy about the presence there of foreign adventurers. In 1975 French and German parties were arrested for climbing Ararat without a permit, while a group of American zealots were thrown in jail for the fifth year running.

The belief that the Ark may yet be found on Ararat is enough to keep men like Cummings searching. Says he: "If you had the experiences I've had with atheists, agnostics, infidels, evolutionists . . . then you know why I'm in it. Just to see them change their whole attitude . . ."

Contrasting strangely with the modern Ark hunters' lack of success is the ease with which the vessel has allegedly been discovered in the not-so-distant past. A Russian airman spotted it in 1916 while flying over Ararat. The Czar led a search and found it, entering the ship and walking through its hundreds of cabins. Unfortunately the Bolshevik Revolution occurred shortly afterwards and all records of the expedition were destroyed.

In 1920 an Armenian confessed on his deathbed that more than 60 years earlier he had led a group of English atheists to the site of the Ark. The

enraged unbelievers tried in vain to destroy the ship, and threatened their guide with death if he ever revealed its location. English atheists are like that.

By 1952 the Ark had got itself stuck in a glacier. In that year a mining engineer, George Jefferson Greene, was flying his helicopter over Ararat on an assignment when he saw the ship's prow jutting out of the ice. He photographed it from as close as 90 feet, but never published his pictures. He was later murdered and his possessions vanished.

Noah's Ark would appear to be as elusive as the flying saucer—many sightings but not a scrap of concrete evidence. Assuming the Genesis story to be factual, there is no reason why the Ark should be on Mount Ararat at all, for that eminence is nowhere named in the Bible. Genesis 8:4 states that the Ark rested "upon the mountains of Ararat." Ararat was a kingdom, described as such in Jeremiah 51:27. It corresponded roughly with the modern Armenia, where there are many mountains from which to choose. The Chaldean version of the Deluge story makes Mount Nisir the Ark's resting place. In Islamic tradition it is Mount Judi. Nicolaus of Damascus, cited in Josephus, says the Ark came on shore upon the top of Mount Baris, the modern Eburz range bordering the Caspian Sea. Josephus himself cautiously settles for "a certain mountain in Armenia." He adds: "The Armenians call this place The Place of Descent, for the Ark being saved in that place, its remains are shown there by the inhabitants to this day." The Place of Descent is the English rendering of Nachid-sheuan, not a mountain but a town some 60 miles from Mount Ararat.

## Egyptian Origins

Noah's Ark did exist and its remains may be seen, though not in Armenia. In the time of Menes, its legendary first king, Egypt was mostly marsh, no land showing above water except the city of Uast and its surrounding nome or canton. Modern scholarship thinks this unlikely, but it was a very old tradition when Herodotus heard it. Uast, it seems, was regarded by its inhabitants as the teba or ark which had saved their ancestors from the surrounding flood. The Greeks, hearing Uast referred to as "teba", called it Thebes after their own ark-city of that name. Isolated hills appear to have been generally regarded as arks of refuge which could be fortified and resorted to in times of siege. The Grecian Thebes and many other cities were built around such natural vantage points. Teba passed into Hebrew as tebah, used in the Old Testament both for Noah's Ark and Moses' ark of bulrushes. It is the root of our "tub".



Old Testament writers knew of Thebes and its traditions, and they called it by a form of Noah's name. Nahum 3:8 reads: "Populous No . . . that had the waters round about it." Thebes is here both Noah and the Ark is one.

The Abbé Guérin de Rocher published his *Histoire des Temps Fabuleux* in 1824. Citing Diodorus, Manetho and other ancient historians, he sought to show that the Egyptians had a travesty of the Deluge story. There were Theban traditions, he found, of the building of an immense ship there, of the first men and animals of the present world coming out of Thebes, and of the Thebans, like Noah, being the first to make use of the vine.

Thebes, moreover, was the ark from which the doves flew out. The priests there told Herodotus that "two of the sacred women were once carried off from Thebes by the Phoenicians, and that the story went that one of them was sold into Libya and the other into Greece, and that these women were the first founders of the oracles in the two countries." The Grecian oracle was at Dodona where, says Herodotus, "the women who deliver the oracles relate the matter as follows: Two black doves flew away from Egyptian Thebes and while one directed its flight to Libya, the other came to them. She alighted on an oak, and sitting there began to speak with a human voice . . ." There is a Hebrew tradition that Noah's doves were black.

### The Deluge and the Sun-god

The assyriologist Zimmern noted that the hero of the Deluge was originally the sun-god voyaging on the celestial ocean. Nu, the earliest god of Thebes, is called the Waterman of Heaven by Budge in his translation of *The Book of the Dead*. In chapter 85 of that work the deceased assumes the identity of the god. He says: "I am the god Nu . . . the divine exalted being who is lord of the land of Tebu" or Thebes. In chapter 136a, still as Nu, he "saileth round about in heaven . . . he turneth back the water-flood." Nu was master of both the waters of the firmament and the Nile flood: in fact he was the flood personified, the "watery abyss" (chapter 175). Nu and Noah both mean "rest".

The boat of the sun was the ark of salvation for the Egyptian dead. Nu was the oldest of the gods, and even Ra deferred to him. In *The Book of the Dead* he is called Father Nu, the original Father Noah. He heads a crew of four gods and four goddesses, who may be compared to the four human pairs in Noah's Ark. The mystic boat is represented as coming to rest on Mount Hetep, the highest point of heaven, where the gods and those who have gone before are assembled to welcome the souls saved in Nu's Ark.

Abbé Guérin de Rocher naturally thought that the Egyptians had borrowed the story of Noah from

the Old Testament. But Nu the heavenly waterman was in the Egyptian scriptures, the oldest religious literature known, for thousands of years before the Jews were ever heard of. In common with so many religious ideas, the world's Deluge myths stem from roots in ancient Egypt.

## CASE DISMISSED

The charge against Eva Ebury for obstruction (reported in *The Freethinker* last month), which was adjourned until 7 September, was dismissed after considerable deliberation at Marlborough Street Magistrates' Court on that date. PC Garry Jones testified on oath that he had arrested Eva Ebury for obstruction at Marble Arch on 7 August, while she was selling "religious literature". Eva questioned the constable from the dock, but he maintained that the literature in question was religious, though one must admit he looked a bit sheepish!

However, the main reasons the case was dismissed seemed to turn on two points: firstly, there had been no obstruction until the constable arrived, and a crowd gathered through interest in the commotion this created, and secondly, Eva, with her husband Len, have been selling secularist literature at Speakers' Corner for over 50 years, and have always "moved on" when asked to by the police. On this occasion there was no warning before the arrest was made. In evidence, Len Ebury stated that many people visited them at Marble Arch in order to purchase *The Freethinker*, as it was difficult to obtain elsewhere. In view of the constable's evidence that Eva was selling religious literature, it was not surprising that the lady magistrate raised her eyebrows, when Eva requested to affirm before giving her evidence.

### THE FREETHINKER

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# Art as the Enemy of Rationalism

GEORGE JAEGER

The rationalist has to face many things that obstruct freethought and that aid the religious beliefs to which he is opposed. Here, George Jaeger discusses several of the arts from this point of view.

There are certain forms of modern art that deny or defy what is rational, but these represent no threat to rationalism in general. There are some "art" objects displayed to the public that are plainly not art but a practical joke. It is not, however, these affronts to rationalism that concern me here. What concerns me is classical art itself. One has only to think of the recurring motif of the Madonna and Child or The Last Supper and the many portrayals of biblical or quasi-biblical subjects that are the stock-in-trade of the older classical painters Michelangelo, Raphael, da Vinci and others to see what I am getting at. The masterpieces of classical art, devoted as they are so largely to religious subjects are still a source of religious inspiration and have their propaganda value. In the same way, architecture, music and literature serve as buttresses to Christianity and tend to show the Christian as an aesthete and the rationalist as a mere philistine. It would be superfluous to dwell upon the beauty of the great cathedrals and the architectural treasure represented by the ancient churches of this country and elsewhere. About 18 months ago I visited some half dozen examples of the renowned baroque churches of Bavaria. Granted that I found them over-painted, over-gilded and somewhat too cluttered with statues and carving, the overall impression was to leave one somewhat breathless.

To digress for a moment to the subject of cost. Some of these churches had been endowed or entirely built by rich patrons, but others must have depended on the exploitation of the relatively poor among the faithful. They had certainly been built at a fabulous cost. The same thought occurs on seeing rich ecclesiastical buildings, monasteries and temples in other parts of the world. Some years ago I visited the magnificent Buddhist temples of Bangkok, with their masses of gold leaf, marble etc, and their many hundreds of Buddhas, one at least made of solid gold and all of great value. This obviously represented exploitation of the populace on a colossal scale. Christianity has no monopoly in this line, as I have discovered.

To return to our theme. Another art form which in many respects is a hindrance to rationalist advance is that of classical music. The great musicians set the Christian mass to music of a compelling grandeur, and composed fine anthems and oratorios

that are sung by church and other choirs up and down the country. The influences of Bach, Beethoven, Haydn and Handel is paramount here. In addition to this we have the great Christian hymns and carols, the popular settings for "Ave Maria" and so on. Even the most convinced rationalist will no doubt find himself, as I do, occasionally humming a piece of strictly religious music. It is so all-pervasive as to be inescapable.

At one point in the post-Reformation period, the Scottish Presbyterians and other dissenters greatly opposed the use of music in church services. It was, I think, because they were opposed to joy in general. A story concerning a modern Presbyterian minister occurs to me. The minister was approached by another of his cloth who complained that people came to his services only to enjoy the singing. The other shook his head sadly. "Sheer dissipation", he said disapprovingly.

## Literature and Rationalism

Let us now consider literature. Some of the literary classics undoubtedly support Christianity in a big way. This, like other forms of art, makes the rationalist's task harder, particularly when he teaches English Literature as I once did. The authorised (King James) version of the Bible is not to be dismissed because it is discredited in our eyes as to the greater part of the material it contains. To people of my generation it stood as a standard by which to judge what was good English and what was not. It still has its influence on that score. Other religious classics could be cited, e.g., those of Augustine, Thomas à Kempis, Bunyan and others. There are many religious poets, and these still exercise an influence on the minds of the young, and perhaps also the not-so-young. Among them are Milton, Tennyson, Browning, William Blake (an unorthodox Christian!), Francis Thompson and Gerard Manley Hopkins. I know how much I have always been haunted by Thompson's "Hound of Heaven". Also worthy of mention are some lesser poets e.g. John Oxenham.

Certain forms of literature therefore must be included in our list of the arts inimical to the rationalist temper.

What is the answer of the rationalist to all of these assaults on his reasoning? He must first of all see that great art will remain an abiding treasure to the human race, but that, as reason advances, these forms of art are rightly treated as belonging to the past, among the antiquities, and regarded much as we regard the treasures in our museums. He must hope that the churches and cathedrals may come to be used for a more humanist purpose,

(Continued on back page)



Tokens, used as a form of currency in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, give much information concerning the periods when they were struck. Many depicted political viewpoints, and Christopher Brunel describes the influence of many tokens, including some showing Thomas Paine.

The collection of books, pamphlets, engravings and ceramics associated with Thomas Paine that I inherited from my father included a few coin-like objects. One had a fine bust of Paine on one side with the legend of the mountain in labour, bringing forth a mouse, depicted on the other. Others had Paine strung from a gibbet and attacking him for his Jacobinism—I knew enough about Paine even then to know that he had, on the contrary, associated himself in France with the Girondins.

During the 1959 commemorations of the 150th anniversary of Paine's death, I put these coins into exhibitions, and, in order to write captions I began to study these eighteenth-century equivalents of pocket cartoons—the political token coins which were issued in the 1790s—and before them, the local traders' tokens.

As banks today distribute a well-balanced range of different denominations of small change throughout Britain, it is difficult to imagine the periods when serious local shortages occurred. Necessity caused the ever-practical British people to have their own coins made. Tokens are grass-roots coins. With only a few exceptions the tokens of the mid-seventeenth century record no names of monarchs or political leaders, but those of local traders in an enormous number of villages and towns. They were also issued by mayors, overseers of the poor, churchwardens and chamberlains in the boroughs and large towns.

Pennies, halfpennies and many, many farthings were struck in copper, brass, bronze and occasionally lead. Most were thin, though with an occasional thicker, cast piece occurring.

Towards the close of the eighteenth century a similar shortage of small change arose, due to the inefficiency of our rulers. Industry developing in new areas strained resources further. The Mint did not distribute its few small denomination coins, and banks were not organised on a nation-wide basis. The Mint itself reckoned that in 1787 there were more light-weight forged coppers in circulation than regal coins.

The first token issuer on a mass scale was the Parys Mines Company in Anglesey—and appropriately it was a copper mine. For ten years from 1787

pennies, half-pennies and farthings came in profusion from Matthew Boulton's steam presses. They were issued to pay the miners in what appears, from the painter Turner's contemporary account of the area, a most unpleasant place. "The whole aspect of this tract", Turner wrote in his *Diary of a Tour of Wales* 1792, "has, by the mineral operations, assumed a most savage appearance. Suffocating fumes of the burning heaps of copper arise in all parts, and extend their baneful influence for miles around."

But the Parys Mines tokens are finely struck and of full weight; the obverses of all denominations carry the bust of a Druid in profile, surrounded by a wreath of oak, while the reverses have a monogram of PMC<sup>o</sup>, the date, denomination and name of issuer.

Other big industrialists very soon issued their own tokens, and the trading classes, too, found that the demands for food, clothing and other essential goods by urban communities necessitated their commissioning rather smaller individual quantities of half-pennies, in particular. But, apart from their utility, tokens soon were recognised as good advertisements. The trade tokens often proclaimed their purpose with such legends as *For Change Not Fraud* or *Payable At . . .* Generally the design and workmanship was superb, and, as with modern advertising, this helped create an aura of goodwill around the issuer.

## Propaganda Value of Tokens

Because of this flowering of artistry on the eighteenth century tokens, they give a considerable insight into the social life of the period. Buildings and contemporary clothing are depicted, and such pastimes as lotteries, menageries and equestrian performances shown. Not all were genuine traders' tokens. As today, there was a burgeoning of commemorative pieces issued solely for the collectors' market. But the propaganda value of tokens was not missed by the political bodies of the time, both left and right.

The French Revolution of 1789 had a profound effect on British politics. Government here was corrupt and the people were burdened by taxes, so the example of the French in revolting against tyranny was a potent one. "More Trade and Fewer Taxes" was the slogan on one side of a halfpenny token, issued by Richard Dinmore & Son of Norwich, whose other side proclaimed "Prosperity to Old England", and significantly the figure of Hope.

More acute radical sentiments emerged, when the great debate of the period developed over Edmund Burke's attack on the French Revolution in *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (1790), and



Thomas Paine's classic reply, *Rights of Man* (1791-92). Burke had tactlessly called the people "a swinish multitude", and a number threw the taunt back in his face.

The land reformer, Thomas Spence, issued a number of halfpenny and farthing propaganda tokens, many of which publicised his magazine, *Pigs' Meat*. The halfpenny-size die has a fine picture of a pig (with, as the numismatic journals faithfully record, its "male member expressed"), trampling on the emblems of royalty and the Church; a ribbon issues from its mouth with the words, "Pigs Meat published by T. Spence London", and above this the Cap of Liberty.

In his booklet on tokens, *The Coin Collector's Companion*, (1795), Spence describes a farthing die of his as, "A Hand referring to the Political Bible, Pig's Meat. Motto. If Lords all Mankind are, then they the Rents should share", the motto being a quotation from an issue of *Pigs' Meat*. Spence admired Thomas Paine (though he criticised him for not going far enough), and a number of Spence tokens have the legend "Noted advocates for the Rights of Man" with the names of three Thomases, Spence himself, Paine and Sir Thomas More.

In 1796 this gave rise to some right-wing tokens. The obverses had three men hanging from a bar and the legend "Noted advocates for the Rights of Men" (*sic*). A reverse to this halfpenny-sized die parodies Paine's famous book with a picture of an open book on one page of which is "The Wrongs of Man", and on the other "Jany 21 1793", the date of the guillotining of Louis XVI in France.

Quite a few others have a gibbet with just one man hanging, and the legend "End of Pain" (*sic*). (This wrong spelling of Paine's name was probably deliberate—a mild insult—if contemporary literature and cartoons are anything to go by). Paine was hung in effigy in a number of towns in the troubled 1790s, and this would have been his fate if he had remained in England for his trial. Burke refused to answer many of Paine's arguments, and in *An Appeal from the New to the Old Whigs* called for the exercise of "criminal justice".

### Suppression of Radicals

The courts were not always successful in suppressing the Radicals. After Thomas Hardy, the secretary of the London Corresponding Society, was acquitted in 1794 for High Treason, a halfpenny token was issued to commemorate the democratic victory. It carries his bust, facing left, on one side, and on the other the words "Acquitted by his Jury. Counsel Hon T. Erskine V. Gibbs Esqr." Similar copper tokens were issued the same year to mark John Horne Tooke's acquittal; some have the names of the jurymen, as well as those of Erskine and Gibbs.

Daniel Isaac Eaton was a brave publisher, and

was put on trial many times for publishing Paine's *Rights of Man*, *The Age of Reason* and *A Letter to the Addressers*, as well as other progressive works. The obverse of his halfpenny token has his bust, facing left, with the motto, "Frangas Non Flectes", below—"You may break, you shall not bend" were his lifelong principles; around the rim are the words, "D. I. Eaton three times acquitted of sedition." The reverse side has "Printer to the Majesty of the People. London. 1795." around the rim; in the centre is a visual representation of the name he gave his house, The Cock and Swine.

### The "Swinish Multitude"

A cock is crowing over pigs in a sty. This represents the French Cock triumphantly crowing over the poor "swinish multitude" in Britain. It is a finely-executed token, made in Birmingham, and its political message was easily spread as it passed from hand to hand.

Actually, many such tokens were so much prized for their good design that they went straight from the issuers into coin cabinets; as a result one can often find examples today still in brilliant mint condition. The vast issue of Matthew Boulton's "Cartwheel" twopenny pieces, pennies and the halfpennies soon drove the tokens out of circulation. But by 1811 the high price of copper resulted in many of the "Cartwheels" going into the melting pot, so again there was a shortage of the small denomination currency.

For a few years rather plain and utilitarian tokens were issued, chiefly by manufacturers. In style they were nearly all quite different from the tokens of the late eighteenth century, rightly being described by a modern numismatist, the late Mrs Monica Bussell, as being as heavy as the hearts of the owners of the "dark satanic mills". Smoke belches out of the chimneys shown on the Hull Lead Works penny tokens. More smoke from the four chimneys of the Weybridge Mills of I. Bunn & Co, in Surrey, on their penny token, which also advertises its hoop and iron warehouse in London's Dowgate Wharf.

Occasionally, the industrial archaeologist will find, in addition to such representations of factories and mines, pictures of manufacturing processes and early industrial products.

In this brief survey it is only possible to mention a few of the main kinds of tokens. Today, gaming and vending machines have given rise to a great new generation of tokens—and many of these go straight into collectors' cabinets. The modern collector is very conscious of social conditions and so is keeping careful notes of the full circumstances of the latest tokens, the numbers manufactured and exactly when they were issued. Let us hope posterity will be grateful.



## INFANT EUTHANASIA

It may be morally right to terminate the life of new-born infants with severe brain damage. This was the conclusion of a task-force report to the Anglican Church of Canada. The report was entitled *Dying: Considerations Concerning the Passage from Life to Death* and it caused furious controversy.

Before the report was discussed by the delegates of the Church's Synod at Calgary, Alberta, public debate and outrage were widespread. It became known in one major daily paper as the "baby-killing report". The recommendations were contained in four paragraphs of a 16 page report and were moderately expressed. "Our senses and emotions", said the report, "lead us into the grave mistake of treating human-looking shapes as if they were human, although they lack the least vestige of human behaviour and intellect. In fact the only way to treat such defective infants humanely is not to treat them as human."

Professor Ian Gentles, of Toronto, a member of Anglicans for Life, said the report was "extremely dangerous . . . inhumane theorising. What they are advocating is at present regarded as a serious crime in this country." Condemnation of the report by Church officials from other denominations, the medical professions and members of "pro-life" groups caused the General Synod to issue a statement stressing that the report was not expressing the official view of the Church.

The clergy debated the subject with greater coolness than the press. The report was presented with much skill by its author Dr Lawrence Whytehead. He made it very clear that severe neurological damage and retarded development were quite different, and that the report referred only to severely neurologically damaged infants. During the 90 minute debate a proposal was made that the report be rejected. This was not passed and it was recommended that the report go back to the task-force for clarification and expansion. It was felt that clearer definitions were needed, particularly of "human life". Several delegates praised the report for raising controversial issues, and ensuring that the realities of modern medicine were considered.

Following the reports of the General Synod debate a letter was published in the *Church Times* (16 September) by Barbara Smoker, President of the National Secular Society. The letter read:

" . . . Surely it is time that across humanist and religious organisations this very important ethical question raised by new medical discoveries be considered.

"Now man and science intervene to preserve quite 'unnaturally' the life of 'severely neurologically defective' babies such as spina-bifida cases. (Dr Glover in his book *Causing Death and*

## NEWS

*Saving Life*, reviewed in the same issue, quotes expert opinion that only about 3 per cent of spina bifida babies are likely to live with 'self-respect, earning capacity and even marriage'.)

"If man has acquired the skills he must face the responsibilities of his cleverness and choose how far he is going to preserve marginal existence. The National Secular Society is, of course, firmly in favour of euthanasia at birth in such cases.

"It is more than time for a far wider airing of this topic in Parliament, the media and across the community."

## DEMANDS FOR PRIVILEGES

The Muslim community is making demands for special privileges for its members. Secular humanists would vigorously defend the right of all minority groups, religious and non-religious, to exist peaceably and without discrimination. But private beliefs should not bring public privileges—and we would argue this in the case of Christian groups as much as any other group.

The demands being made relate to Islamic law, which is based on the Quoran, itself believed to be the authentic word of God. Important to these demands are family life and particularly divorce law. The English divorce law has slowly creaked towards a rational position where mutual recognition of irretrievable breakdown is ground for a divorce. Islamic law has always allowed breakdown of marriage as a reason for divorce, but with one vital difference. The decision whether the marriage is viable rests solely with the man, and the woman has no say at all—not a very mutual agreement.

Other demands for special treatment were clarified by Dr Pasha, of the Muslim community, on the radio programme *You and Yours* (21 September). They are hoping for special school meals for Muslim children to allow for Islamic rules about food preparation. Surely there would be limits to how far school meals can be prepared to suit special interests—are vegetarians, for instance, catered for?

Another request relates to time off for Muslim workers to fulfil their obligations to pray. It is to be hoped that employers are always as considerate as possible towards all their employees, especially over matters of deep concern to them. But this is no argument for special legal rights.

A representative of the Jewish faith, questioned



# S AND NOTES

on the same programme, pointed out that the only legal privilege ever requested by the Jewish community was to be allowed to close shops on Saturday, the Jewish Sabbath, and open on Sunday. For holy days, such as the Day of Atonement, it was recognised that suitable arrangements could be made without special legal rights. As Barbara Smoker, President of the National Secular Society, pointed out in a letter she wrote to the programme, one way to ensure completely equal rights would be to abolish all Sunday trading laws, and allow everyone to make whatever arrangements suited them.

Muslims who wish to pray five times a day may find it difficult to be sure that they are always facing Mecca. A new device being marketed by a Walthamstow businessman ingeniously ensures that devotion may always be rightly directed. It is a compass that always points to the holy city of Mecca. The compass is in much demand and made in Japan. Mr Mirza, who has used his own investments to market the device, has said, "Everyone is amazed they never thought of it before."

## THE TRUTH ABOUT THE MYTH OF GOD

A strong attack has been launched on academic theologians who have "damaged Christianity" by describing the divinity of Jesus as a myth. The book *The Myth of God Incarnate* has been speedily countered by *The Truth of God Incarnate* (Hodder & Stoughton, 80p).

This attack, which is avowedly polemical and aimed less at theologians than ordinary believers who will have been disturbed by talk of *The Myth*, is edited by Canon Michael Green. He claims to be speaking on behalf of traditional, full-blooded Christianity and likens the process by which its essential elements have been reduced to dismantling a car: "if you remove the engine or the chassis, it is questionable whether you are still talking about a car at all . . ."

The reductionist attitude to Christianity has involved abandoning the doctrine of God's inspiration of Scripture, rejecting miracles, the "death of God" theology, and questioning the bodily resurrection of Christ. Now the latest step—seeing Jesus's divinity as a myth—is "like removing the chassis which held the whole thing together."

Non-Christian observers have watched this dis-

mantlement with the same surprise as Canon Green. Like him they must have felt "The Cheshire cat had disappeared: only the smile remained", the puzzle being only why people should wish to go on believing in the disembodied smile once they had seen through the substance.

If the fight is on to keep a seat warm for Jesus among the deities, the devil has not quite lost his place. New liturgical proposals for baptism and confirmation put forward by the Church of England Liturgical Commission have been vetoed by the Bishops. Among the vetoed changes is a reference to the devil, who retains his hoof firmly in the baptism service. Well, perhaps the church needs to keep a few of its best tunes.

*"The Myth of God Incarnate"* was reviewed by Margaret Knight in the last issue of *The Freethinker*.

## DOUBLE CROSS

Dressing up in robes and expecting people to kiss the ring on one's finger is the sort of play-acting which many would think was part of the everyday life of the churches. But in a recent incident in co Cork the boot was on the other foot. The full antics of a self-styled "Archbishop of Jamaica" have not been revealed by the red-faced clergy in the town of Mallow, co Cork.

Mr James Clark, a restaurant manager from Northumberland, booked a place at an expensive hotel, Longueville House, just outside the town of Mallow. He carried a full wardrobe of clerical garb, announced he was a Caribbean "archbishop", and began to preside over several receptions run by the local clergy. He was treated as a VIP by nuns at a convent, preached a sermon, and was given the opportunity to concelebrate a mass. Local people were impressed by his genuine pontifical air.

Unfortunately for those who mourn the decline in the number of priests, someone became suspicious of the "archbishop", and it was discovered that the bogus bishop was more practised at waiting at table than waiting for the lord. After he had returned to England the police said, "He did not commit any offence as far as the law is concerned."

It was not Mr Clark's first jaunt into the clerical world. Some time ago he caused consternation among the Roman Catholic authorities in the diocese of Hexham and Newcastle-upon-Tyne, when he had donned purple robes to become a visiting archbishop from San Diego, California. No doubt there must have been purple faces there too, among those who had revered his priestly cross.

Where one wonders could his third apparition be? Perhaps he could "go" international and take a package tour to Rome.



## BOOKS

**THE CHRISTIANS** by Bamber Gascoigne with photographs by Christina Gascoigne. Jonathan Cape, 1977, £7.50.

I found this fascinating book most enjoyable to read, despite its awkward size and shape and the paleness of its print (is printers' ink in short supply these days?)—but not without misgivings as to how it would transfer to the public medium. "The 13 chapters were written", so the preface tells us, "while preparing 13 programmes on *The Christians* for television. Each chapter therefore covers the same ground as the companion programme" (understood) "but often it will treat the material in a different way." (Only too well understood.) The photographs which continually break up the text—over 200 of them, some in colour—are presented with great skill and beauty by Christina Gascoigne: these, I suspect, will form the main material for the television screen. The end result will probably approximate to Kenneth Clark's *Civilisation* in a more specifically Christian version. Viewers will bask happily in the glories of Christian art, without a qualm for Christian craziness, craft and cruelty, and continue in their state of crass ignorance about the sort of world created by "The Christians" in the nineteen horrible centuries that still impinge—as far as they dare—upon our own. Am I too pessimistic? Maybe, yet I cannot help suspecting that undiluted Gascoigne on Christianity might put out the television lights.

The fact is, he doesn't spare either Christians or Christianity, though his weapons are always polite and his irony is delicious. His opening words set the pattern of no compromise with wistful thinking. "For the first 50 years of what we now call the Christian era, not a word survives in any document about Christ or his followers. During the next 50 years the Christians themselves wrote down most of the books that now make up the New Testament. But still not a word, with one small exception, from any outside writer. And then, in the second century, Roman authors began to comment." He duly quotes those bitter comments from Tacitus, Suetonius, Celsus, Lucian, Pliny the Younger; though he adds as a sop to Christian pride, "How wrong they were, those Romans . . ." and quotes St Clement, fourth pope, as confident even then:

"God chose our Lord Jesus Christ, and us through him to be his peculiar people."

The chapter deals briefly with the origins of this new sect of Peculiar People: with the human elements in it "which may have made it, at times, the most sentimental of religions", yet have also, through the linking of God with man, been its strength. To the question "What made ordinary

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people follow Jesus?" the "more ordinary answer" of history is as the gospels imply: "because the people believed he could work miracles." Gascoigne comments shrewdly, "If word gets round that a miracle-worker can cure illness, he will find followers." This is fine, but one cannot accept the general statement, "What Jesus did was attractive, and what he said was equally so, especially to the poor." Much of what he did and said was repulsive—though perhaps the poor didn't notice. Commenting on the primitive Christian "love-feast" which so upset the Roman proprieties, Gascoigne remarks, "It is because we are familiar with the sacrament in Christian countries that we don't notice how strange it is, in a highly developed religion, that the central ritual should be eating the god." A delicate problem when evangelising cannibals!

To quote again from the Preface: "It is a difficult task to divide Christian history into 13 brief but equal sections." It most certainly is, and the authors, on the face of it, have done a magnificent job—as truthfully, as wittily, as humanly possible for two twentieth-century minds called on to cater simultaneously for gospel and goggle-box. The book, of necessity, has to be expensive, which ensures that television will provide for the main body of the interested. This I am bound to regret, because many subtleties which delighted me will be lost to the non-reader. Also, I doubt if the darker side of Christian belief and behaviour will ever be permitted to defile the sacred screen. For instance, the sad-making contrast between crusading Christians and those more civilised, tolerant "People of the Book"—Jews and Muslims—on some notable occasions. I think too of the fear of hell that haunted the Middle Ages (the reverse side of mediæval romanticism): the horrid dogma of eternal punishment in the everlasting fires that God has prepared for the wicked; which, we are reminded in no uncertain terms, remains to this day the official teaching of the Roman Catholic Church. (And of the growing mob of Fundamentalists who thrive on fire and brimstone in a nuclear age.) There is still, too, enforced belief in the later-developed doctrine of Purgatory, on which depends the notion of indulgences, now discreetly played down by the sophisticated, yet extant. The traffic in indulgences and holy relics which so incensed Luther, provides a rich fund of amusement in the present book. The details of the trade, as recounted in Gascoigne's collection, are fantastically funny, though pitiable from the viewpoint of human intelligence.

But all this is surely unthinkable in the sacred



# R REVIEWS

precincts of the television studio? So also, I imagine, are the full horrors of the slave trade run by the Christian nations; the "obscene inequalities" and multiple injustices sanctioned under Christian dominion, so close, so very close to our own time. And the rising torrents of revolt against it all, in France surging in one revolution and counter-revolution after another; boiling in secret in the miserable hovels of the poor, the "sink of iniquity" that was the darker side of London and other great cities, the cry of the oppressed working class that had no vote or union or social service, and had nothing to hope for, from Church or State. The ghastly illustration from Doré's *London*, "Scripture Reader in a Night Refuge", on double page 236-7, opens the chapter called "Lighten Their Darkness", and vividly captures the hopeless situation of the starving destitute and the rich uncaring Church. I hope this picture will be shown; if so there will be sighs of thanksgiving to Socialism, Evolution, or possibly God, for the changes in social conditions fought for and won since then. But the violent rejection of Christianity by Russia, the most Orthodox nation in Europe and the most backward, during the chaos of the First World War, remains incomprehensible still to the believing Christian. The stark realities behind the triumph of communism in Holy Russia, and elsewhere, could no more be shown on the screen than the scarlet scandals of Renaissance popes, or the brutality of Christian crusades, or the fiendish tortures of the Inquisition. Yet all these, and much more, are acknowledged fruits of the Christian regime, and I think that Gascoigne knows this. Which makes it all the more strange that he has made no mention of the witch-hunting mania that disgraced Europe for over three centuries, even to the first half of the seventeenth. The sole reference to witchcraft (under W in the most inadequate Index) relates a somewhat comic incident with a cheerful ending—in New England, not Europe. Why, I wonder, this curious reticence? Was the subject censored even in print?

What will, no doubt, be taboo is the main issue of any appraisal of Christianity as a historical phenomenon: namely, the certainty that its preposterous survival in a scientific age is due to its basically political structure. From the victory of Constantine to the Imperialism of the nineteenth century, the Christian Empire has been a Church-and-State viability. Even now, despite the Darwinian revolution and all the personal upheavals in religious thinking, including the spread of "conventional atheism" and outright unbelief, and in

defiance of spectacular advances in all the sciences, our English Church has not been dislodged from its Establishment shrine; nor is it, guarded by the Monarchy, likely to be so in the near future. The British Empire is no more, but the Christian Empire still holds us in a ghostly grip . . . as the machinators of a certain recent trial have amply demonstrated.

Gascoigne's final chapter admits that the calm acceptance, by the well-to-do, of the abject misery of the working classes was fundamentally due to the teaching of Jesus on poverty and deprivation and their heavenly reward, which led to the bitter fallacy that God himself had ordained the condition of the poor, "ordered their estate" as the famous hymn puts it and therefore, as Jesus expressed it, "the poor ye have with you always." Gascoigne himself concludes on a new note for modern Christianity: "If our countries move gradually into a Socialist form of society, we shall hear rather more . . . that the central theme of Christianity is sharing", and assures us that "This is not a cynical point, nor would such a development be cynicism on the part of Christians. To be able to adapt is strength in a religion as much as in a species. It is something which two thousand years of Christianity have amply proved."

Yet he himself says that when he read the New Testament straight through "as if it were the scripture of an unknown religion . . . I found it impossible to believe that a stranger, coming to the Bible for the first time, would receive from it any clear idea of what Christ and Christianity stood for—so varied and so self-contradictory are its messages and parables."

This muddled vagueness could account, I suppose, for the possibility of being all things to all men, in the sense that you can dip into the scriptures and take out what you fancy. It has indeed been common practice throughout the Christian era, and the results are only too manifest. Times without number this thing called Christianity has had to "adapt" to new forms: to slough its proud wholeness in order to survive. So the snake sheds its skin, while retaining its venom.

I discern a spurt of poison in the title of the final chapter: why otherwise should it have been blazoned as "The Godless State?", question-mark and all? Calculated, I imagine, to leave viewers with the nasty taste of atheism in the mouth and a panic fear of it in the mind. I prefer to think it was willed from the studio rather than the Gascoigne pen. Yet there is that photograph, sprawled across two pages that seal off the chapter . . . and I find it even more regrettable. "A packed congregation in one of the monastery churches of Zagorsk, in Russia" . . . with row upon row of devout, pathetic, yearning, sullen or strained-looking worshippers crowded up to the altar-rails. Good folk, all of



them, and no doubt kindly—but the poison comes out with a gush.

The last photograph in colour, a full-page silhouette of St Peter's, coal-black against a Roman sunset, except for a tiny slit of light at odd points like the half-closed eyes of a cat—will leave the impression, I am sure, that it is intended to leave. More dignified, indeed, than the colossal poster I saw the other day, high up on the wall of a Baptist church in a busy traffic-filled street: "Jesus Lives; Okay!"

But the message is the same.

PHYLLIS GRAHAM

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**THE NATIONAL FRONT** by Martin Walker. Fontana Paperback, £1.00.

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The creation of a new political party that can attract widespread support is a formidable task. Popular support depends on credibility; credibility in turn depends on popular support. Breaking into this vicious circle is hard enough for those who are trying to revive a once great party, such as the Liberals; for those who are trying to attract support from scratch, the odds against their success are even greater. But there is never a shortage of those willing to try. New parties are formed almost as easily as new pop groups, and most of them have about as many members. But the lack of a widespread power base leave these fringe parties open to all the weaknesses of fragmentation. When a party with just four members reaches a crisis, the almost inevitable result is the creation of three new parties.

And yet, against all the odds, Britain has in the last ten years given birth to a new political party which has, in that short time, fought hundreds of election campaigns, made party political broadcasts on television and radio and made its name almost into a household word—the National Front. Strictly speaking the National Front began not out of the blue, but as a coalition. But the older parties from which it has grown were so disreputable and so without credibility that the Front's achievement has been all the more remarkable.

Martin Walker of the *Guardian* has spent four years studying the National Front and his book sheds a great deal of light on the intriguing puzzle of how a handful of political eccentrics and ultra-right-wing fanatics could create what has become Britain's fourth largest political party. It is, or at any rate, ought to be, well-known that the National Front is dominated and led by men who once made no secret of their dedication to Nazism. This is the chief interest which the NF holds and so, quite rightly, Martin Walker has not set out to write a critique of right-wing extremism. He has been content to give us a history of the NF—a history told largely in terms of its notorious personalities—and a very colourful story it is. Whether or not the

story was worth an entire book is admittedly debatable. The National Front has no future and so there is no sense of a timely "exposure". Much credit is, however, due to Martin Walker for the care with which he has researched the book and for the clarity with which it is written. A particularly refreshing feature of his account of the NF is the absence of any left-wing cant or Trotskyite hypocrisy.

There have been exaggerated warnings about the "threat" which the National Front is alleged to represent—but it is noticeable that the loudest warnings have come from those who are themselves as bitterly opposed to democracy and liberty as is the NF. The policies and activities of the National Front are of course abhorrent, but the dispassionate and factual account which Martin Walker has produced should help us to keep the NF in perspective. Too great an emphasis on a mythical "fascist menace" could distract us from the more immediate dangers represented by the extreme left.

MICHAEL LLOYD-JONES

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**I LEARN** by Gora. Published by Atheist Centre, Patamata, Vijayawada, India.

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Gora represented one strand of the broad Secularist-Rationalist-Radical-Humanist-Atheist movement in India. From Vijayawada on the east coast of India, Gora published *The Atheist* in which he wrote, among other things, a short article under the title "I Learn" based on incidents important or trivial, from which he drew some lesson. These articles have been collected together in this little book (86 pages) after Gora's death on 26th July 1975 at the age of 73.

Even as an atheist Gora was an unusual man. He had worked with Mahatma Gandhi and tried to cooperate with the communists and finally struck out on his own to propagate his challenging ideas on a Partyless Democracy, on the need deliberately to break the taboo on beef among Hindus, and pork among Muslims and so on. The acute and humorous observations in these articles, with their old-fashioned flavour of finding a "moral" in all sorts of experiences, therefore make interesting reading.

However, the reader in the West will find them fascinating for a reason which would not occur to a reader in India. For here, the Western reader is entering into a different world. Railways form a large part of life here. Gora is glimpsed at Pakala junction where he should change trains for Madanapalli; Gora in a third class compartment on a 42 hour journey, including two nights; the tea-stalls at railway stations like Kaikalur or Vijayawada; taxis in Delhi squabbling for his custom. Suddenly, you have a glimpse of Gora on a foot-march to Delhi with 13 companions, to protest against waste of public money. It was only 1100 miles and



took 99 days on foot! Then there is Gora leading the homeless to squat on municipal land. There are snippets on conferences, reception committees, delegates and unpunctual meetings, not to mention the strange spectacle of a man who called himself an atheist, but sacrificed his hair, along with the pious, at the temple at Tirupati!

Finally in contrast to all this, there is Gora in Manhattan—in the sub-way, learning atheistic moral lessons, of course! G. N. DEODHEKAR

## CINEMA

**THE DEVIL'S PLAYGROUND** written and directed by Fred Schepisi. General Release.

The Australian film industry has come of age in the last five years, and this evocation of life in a boy's Catholic seminary in 1953 is a fine example of that maturity. Billed as semi-autobiographical, Fred Schepisi's first feature concentrates on a rarely explored area for film, the frustrations of onsetting adolescence. The boys studying to realise their religious vocation are told to be afraid of their bodies and to pursue the spiritual life instead. They are forced to shower in swim suits and to dress and undress under cover of a dressing gown. The result is a singular obsession with masturbation, matched only by the fear of discovery. The central figure is so terrified of the priest that he repeatedly makes bad confessionals. For his part, the priest is so astonished by the fear he inspires in the boy that he fairly does nothing when he discovers the truth.

There is, in fact, a curious absence of physical punishment for so strict a discipline. Miscreant boys are put on kitchen duty or told to do extra penance. The cure for bed-wetting is not public humiliation but a drop of Lourdes water on the tongue every night.

The brothers themselves are scarcely less pre-occupied with sex. Each one is fully aware of the boys' interest, and there is continual debate about revising the rules. One kindly brother admits that temptation offered up by the boys' ignorance is the devil's playground of the title. Yet after the discovery of a homosexual ring and the leader's drowning, the laws are allowed to remain. "One bad apple cannot spoil the bunch", says the chief defender of the faith, who is himself beset by sexual fantasies and reduced to peeking into women's changing cubicles at the public swimming baths. Another brother subverts his sexual drive by reckless driving and by downing cold lager and spirits by the pitcherful.

The anti-religious theme is underscored by a series of ironical touches. A florid brother leads the boys in happy sing-alongs of Guy Mitchell love ballads and "the Anniversary Waltz". The brother beset by sexual frustration upholds the tradition of pointing

to himself as its supreme example. Another brother celebrates the communal fellowship with one breath and yearns to be among normal people with the next. By the end of the film each of the major characters has arrived at his personal crisis of consciousness. The frustrated brother affirms that he actually detests a life of abstinence. The eldest brother, before he dies, advises the hero to leave the seminary while there is still time. In the closing moments he is seen hitching a lift from a farmer who tells him he does not look happy. The runaway boy receives a final lift from two of the brothers who agree to take him with them to the semi-final football match before delivering him to his parents.

The acting is uniformly good, particularly by the non-professional boys. Simon Burke, as the central adolescent, manages to be engaging without being sentimental. When at last he denounces God for failing to answer his prayers, one feels the pent up emotion of a young lifetime being released like a tidal flood. There is also an impressive cameo appearance by novelist Thomas Keneally as the bovine, avuncular brother who conducts the three-day silent retreat. His invitation to the boys to open themselves to him before the retreat is undermined by a thundering commandment to maintain God's silence on pain of hell-fire. This silent tableau serves as an emblem for the entire film, proof positive not of God's omnipotence but of man's reason to doubt.

JAMES MACDONALD

The play "Once a Catholic", reviewed in the September issue of "The Freethinker" has transferred from the Royal Court Theatre to Wyndham's Theatre. It is strongly recommended as an entertaining and caustic picture of life in a convent school.

## Freethinker Fund

We live in times when for most spare cash is scant and when "causes" make continual pleas for financial support. It is therefore emphasised that the generous support for this fund is very much appreciated. The total for the last month 23 August to 20 September was £66.14.

Thanks are expressed to: M. Ansell, £2.00; G. A. Airey, 25p; Mrs M. E. Balcombe, 50p; A. Bayne, £1.25; J. Barrett, £1.25; S. Berry, 25p; F. Bradford, £1.00; Mrs Brown, £1.00; S. Burt, £10.00; R. J. J. Condon, £3.25; P. Crommelin, £3.00; S. and M. Clowes, £5.00; M. Duane, £2.00; G. Donald, 45p; In memory of R. Follett, £1.00; J. E. Futter, 19p; E. J. Hughes, £1.00; C. F. Jacot, 25p; Miss S. E. Johnson, £15.00; P. L. Lancaster, £8.25; A. F. M. MacLennan, 25p; M. P. Morf, £3.25; T. Mullins, £2.50; C. Richards, £1.25; G. Stewart, £1.25; N. G. Thanki, 75p.



# LETTERS

I am writing to celebrate the twentyfirst anniversary of my life as a freethinker. Although I was born in the year 1904 it was not until the year 1956 that I achieved a state of mind that I now recognise as "freedom of thought". I can even give an exact date for the event. It was on 22 October. On that day I came to the final and absolute conclusion that I would never again acknowledge the divine and supernatural authority of the Catholic Church and never again participate in the liturgical worship of Jesus Christ. The recent publication of "The Myth of God Incarnate" came 21 years too late to assist my exit from the Church although I can welcome it now as a contribution to freedom of thought, though it fails in my opinion to provide an effective defence of the Christian Faith. It merely confirms the opinion that I came to in 1956 that the posthumous deification of the Founder of Christianity was a major error of human judgement that has greatly retarded human progress especially in matters metaphysical and moral. It might be said that if we live in a godless universe what harm is done by the worship of false gods? It might be considered better to worship a false god than to accept the grim reality of life without any driving hope or expectation. In my opinion, the answer lies in the fact that false gods falsify the true capacity of the human soul to achieve a true if limited knowledge of the world in which we live and move and have our being. All that is attributed to a false god is really and truly the work of human thought and imagination.

Yet I freely admit that I do not like the word "Atheism". To an ex-christian it has an ugly sound and seems to freeze the heart even if it does not stop the intellect from working. And I do not like the word "Humanism". That sounds too scientific and too much like something out of a computer. But I do like the word "human". I am human. I have a human body and a human mind. I have human thoughts and feelings. I have a human sensitivity to pleasure and to pain. I have a human awareness of the infinite possibilities of good and evil, and that nothing is too good or too bad to enter the life of a human being. I have a very genuine feeling of gratitude to the artists and poets and musicians who have done their best to make our life at least endurable. I also share those deeper hopes that have been present in the human imagination from the very beginning, that perhaps, yes just "perhaps", there may be a life beyond life, a life where perhaps we shall find a God that really is almighty and a soul that really is immortal. As I have never yet been dead, how can I be absolutely sure that death is all that it appears to be? Here if any where there may be some big difference between appearance and reality. Before death or after death it is only insofar as things are convertible into thoughts that they can bring any satisfaction to the rational mind.

PETER CROMMELIN

Mr Crommelin was formerly a priest—Editor.

## FREE PUBLICITY?

In fairness to the truth (and to the readers of "The Freethinker" who have not read the document in question) it should be pointed out that the poem that featured in the "Gay News" trial was not about homosexuality. It was about necrophilia.

I am told by Nicolas Walter that the author of the

poem has now disowned it in the sense that it will not appear in any future collected works.

While a blasphemy charge of any kind is today absurd (and I am with "The Freethinker" on that) it is also important that the facts be not discounted by those who should know better. In my "book" necrophilia is an obscenity and a poem about it an ultimate exercise in bad taste; but there are better ways of dealing with bad taste than going to court about it.

There are also better ways of dealing with Mrs Whitehouse than by giving her endless front page publicity for free.

PETER CADOGAN

## FORTHRIGHT AND INDEPENDENT SECULARISM

I should like, through the columns of "The Freethinker", to express my deep gratitude for many expressions of kindness and goodwill which I have received in recent weeks.

In case there should be any misunderstanding about the news item in the September "Freethinker" stating that I was "leaving the NSS", readers are assured that I have withdrawn from full-time service only. Promotion of the National Secular Society's principles and objects remain my chief concern. For one important lesson can be learnt from the events of the last decade—the need for a forthright and independent secularist organisation that is prepared to campaign against religious superstition and privilege, and to resist the blandishments of the more cunning and sophisticated of our opponents.

BILL McILROY

# OBITUARIES

## MRS FRIDA LASKI

Frida Laski has died aged 92. She was the widow of Harold Laski and had, like him, showed a lifelong concern for social reform. She had been an early suffragette and a strong advocate of colonial independence. The Indian High Commission gave her the International Women's Year Award for her work in campaigning for birth control in India.

She was a humanist by conviction and humanitarian by practice, it was said at a non-religious committal, which took place at Golders Green Crematorium.

## DR DAVID STARK MURRAY

Dr David Stark Murray has died at the age of 77. His major interest was socialist medical policies. He was a vigorous supporter of the National Health Service and bitterly opposed private practice.

Dr Stark Murray was an occasional contributor to *The Freethinker* and *New Humanist*. Earlier in his life he wrote two volumes for the Thinkers' Library about medical science. While he was a Director of the Rationalist Press Association he took a careful interest in publishing policy. He was familiar as an enthusiastic supporter of humanist events.



# PUBLICATIONS AVAILABLE

- The Dead Sea Scrolls, John Allegro. 95p (15p).  
 The Humanist Outlook, Ed: A. J. Ayer. 95p (26p).  
 Religion in Modern Society, H. J. Blackham. £1 (29p).  
 The Longford Threat to Freedom, Brigid Brophy. 10p (7p).  
 Thomas Paine, Chapman Cohen. 15p (7p).  
 Woman and Christianity, Chapman Cohen. 5p (7p).  
 Must We Have Religion?, Chapman Cohen. 5p (7p).  
 Women's Rights: A Practical Guide, Anna Coote & Tess Gill. 60p (19p).  
 Pagan Christmas, R. J. Condon. 20p (7p).  
 Origin of the Species, Charles Darwin. 60p (22p).  
 Bertrand Russell's Best, Robert E. Engar. £1.00 (26p).  
 Fact and Fiction in Psychology, H. J. Eysenk. 65p (15p).  
 The Bible Handbook, G. W. Foote & W. Ball. 65p (19p).  
 Ten Non Commandments, Ronald Fletcher. 13p (7p).  
 The Presumption of Atheism, Antony Flew. £3.50 (26p).  
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## Art and Rationalism

as, for instance art galleries or concert halls. Music is in a slightly different category to the other arts as having a more immediate effect on the emotions. I think there is no reason why the rationalist should not enjoy good music whatever its theme, especially if it adds some joy to the "unhealthy and o'er darkened ways made for our searching."

In conclusion, if one may be allowed to voice a criticism of the rationalist movement, it would appear, like the old Presbyterianism, to be too solemn. We have to rediscover joy, happiness, occasional lightness of spirit, otherwise we shall not be able to move effectively against orthodoxy with its support in the great arts of painting, architecture, music and literature. This is not to deny our main purpose, which is "to advance and advance on chaos and the dark."

## 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.

**Brighton and Hove Humanist Group.** Jim Herrick: "Humanism and the Arts". Sunday, 6 November, 5.30 pm. Imperial Hotel, First Avenue, Hove.

**Bristol Humanist Group.** "The Samaritans—why is the suicide rate declining?" Sunday 9 October, 3.00 pm. 6 Redland Park, Bristol 6. Inquiries: Derrick Hunt, Tel Bristol 504163.

**Golders Green Unitarian Church.** Barbara Smoker: "The Social and Psychological Ills of Organised Religion". Sunday, 30 October, 6.00 pm.

**Hampstead Humanist Society.** Madeleine Simms: "The Abortion Struggle". Saturday, 22 October, 3.00 pm. Meetings Room, Swiss Cottage Library, 88 Avenue Road, NW3.

**Hasving and District Humanist Society.** Kenneth Furness: "The British Humanist Association". Tuesday, 18 October, 8 pm. Harold Wood Social Centre. (Corner of Squirrels Heath Road and Gubbins Lane.)

**Lewisham Humanist Group.** Barbara Smoker: "Blasphemy—1977". Thursday, 27 October, 7.45 pm. Unitarian Meeting House, 41 Bromley Road, Catford, SE6.

**London Young Humanists.** Shaikh Gamal Salaiman: "What is Islam?". Sunday, 16 October, 7.30 pm. (Non-members 30p) 13 Prince of Wales Terrace, W8.

**Merseyside Humanist Group.** Discussion led by members from Campaign for Homosexual Equality. 7.30 pm. 46 Hamilton Square, Birkenhead. Inquiries: Anne Coombes Tel: 051-608 3835 or Marion Clowes Tel: 051-342 2562.

**Muswell Hill Humanist Group.** Informal meeting with music. Thursday, 13 October, 8.30 pm. 214 Muswell Hill Broadway, N10.

**Oxford Humanist Society.** Jim Herrick: "The Blasphemy Trial". Tuesday, 25 October, 8.00 pm. St Peter's College.

**Oxford Union.** Barbara Smoker, Mervyn Stockwood. Debate: "That Christianity is a Dying Creed". Thursday, 3 November. Students Union.

**South Place Ethical Society.** Sunday Morning Meetings. 11.00 am. 16 October, Nicolas Walter: "A Rational Religious Sentiment?". 23 October, Peter Abbs: "Symbols and Rituals in Education". 30 October, Robert Waller: "The Influence of Ruskin on Gandhi". Sunday Forum, 3.00 pm, 9 October: Marion Boyars: "Non-Militant Women's Lib".

**Sutton Humanist Group.** Peter Hahlo: "Sutton Theatre Project". Wednesday, 12 October, 7.30 pm. Friends' Meeting House, Cedar Road, Sutton.

**Tyneside Humanist Society.** Cllr Mrs Peggy Murray: "Changing Patterns of Living", Wednesday, 19 October. A. C. Hobson: "A Humanist Ideology", Wednesday, 26 October. Both meetings 7.30 pm. Friends' Meeting House, 1 Archbold Terrace, Newcastle upon Tyne.

**Warwickshire Humanist Group.** H. Stopes-Roe: "Education: Religious or Open?". Monday, 31 October, 8.00 pm. Lecture Room, Kenilworth Library, Smalley Place, Kenilworth.

**West Glamorgan Humanist Group.** Ivor Russell: "Presidential Address". Friday, 21 October, 7.30 pm. Friends' Meeting House Annexe, Page Street, Swansea.

## THE FREETHINKER

Editor: JIM HERRICK

702 HOLLOWAY ROAD  
LONDON N19 3NL  
TELEPHONE: 01-272 1266

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