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APOLOGY OVER ABORTION PROSECUTION

The use of an archaic section of the law to prosecute a 13-year-old child for attempting to "procure her own miscarriage" was challenged last month. The result has been an apology from an Assistant Director of Public Prosecutions and a Home Office pardon.

The girl was brought to court in Leamington Spa, where she admitted attempting to bring about an abortion, and her 16-year-old brother also admitted supplying "noxious substances" in the form of six laxative tablets.

Prosecution under Obscure Law

The DPP advised the police to institute proceedings under the first part of Section 58 of the 1861 Offence Against the Person Act. This part of the law is thought never to have been used before. It refers to "every woman being with child who with intent to procure her own miscarriage shall unlawfully use any instrument or other means whatsoever with the like intent." Her brother was charged with supplying laxative tablets under the second part of Section 58, which has commonly been used to prosecute back-street abortionists.

Mrs Diane Munday, of the British Pregnancy Advisory Service, wrote to express her concern, and to ask whether this recent case could establish a precedent so that this part of the statute was likely to be used again. Mrs Munday was concerned with the effects on the girl, who was suffering from the trauma of a still-birth and now faced a maximum sentence of life imprisonment. She was also worried, because of her association with the BPAS, that with the use of the law being uncertain women would less freely admit to having taken something in the early stages of pregnancy, and this might be important for health reasons.

The Assistant Director of Public Prosecutions, Mr Kenneth Dowling, has admitted that his department was wrong to prosecute under that law. He said: "It is not the policy of the department to

institute, or advise the institution of, proceedings under the first limb of Section 58 of the Offences Against the Person Act of 1861, save in exceptional circumstances. Although with regard to juveniles we might feel that some action was called for, in which event care proceedings could well be deemed appropriate.

"In the case of the 13-year-old girl, I found that there were no exceptional circumstances, and I consider that the advice given from within this department to the police to institute proceedings against her under Section 58 was wrong and is greatly regretted.

"Furthermore, the additional scientific evidence which I have received establishes that the quantity of laxative tablets which the girl took did not amount to a 'noxious Thing' within the meaning of the section. I am, accordingly, referring that matter to the Home Office with a view to rectifying the position."

Anti-Abortion Pressure?

It might be speculated that such a peculiar use of the law is related to pressure from anti-abortion quarters. And it is pleasing that when the law is used in a bizarre way mistakes can be admitted and rectified. Freethinkers will be heartened that concern about unjust use of the law can produce a just response. For, as Mrs Munday said "I think this was a fairly magnanimous apology—after all, anyone can make a mistake."

Mrs Munday also said that while the law is on the statute books the same mistake might happen again, and has now referred the matter to the Criminal Law Revision Committee in the hope that it will recommend repeal of that part of the Act. The Co-ordinating Committee in Defence of the Abortion Act had considered asking an MP successful in the ballot for Private Members' Bills to sponsor a Bill to kill the law. Several MPs have been approached.

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Following the failure of Mr Benyon's Abortion (Amendment) Bill earlier this year, it was feared that another Private Members' Bill to introduce restrictions on a woman's right to obtain an abortion might be launched. But abortion campaigners are relieved that no-one likely to be sympathetic to such a Bill has drawn a place high in the ballot. A possibility which remains, however, is that a com-

promise Bill to satisfy both sides be given time by the government. The Health Minister, Mr Roland Moyle, is known to have been consulting MPs with strong views on both sides. The advantage of such a Bill might be that it could forestall a harshly restrictive Bill from a new Government later next year. But there is much division of opinion on both sides about any compromise.

Humanist Calls for Resistance to Religious Anti-Abortion Pressure

It is well-known that Catholic pressure groups—in particular LIFE—are campaigning vigorously to deprive women of the right to abortion at all. In a talk to the Hampstead Humanist Society, Madeleine Simms, former Secretary of the Abortion Law Reform Association, asked the question "What Ought Humanists to Be Doing?" She stressed that part of the answer to this question lay in two great movements of our time—towards racial equality and towards sexual equality. There was an alarming growth of superstition and irrationalism, based on fears for the future in the uncertain times we live in. This is seen in the expansion of the National Front and the growth of Roman Catholic pressure groups, both of which have a deeply anti-feminist outlook.

Madeleine Simms commented on the resolution at the Labour Party Conference, a resolution in favour of abortion on request, which was passed by an overwhelming majority, 4,500,000 to 73,000—despite desperate efforts of the Roman Catholic Church to prevent this. "As you might suppose, it did not take long for the Roman Catholic Church to react to the insult offered it by the Labour Party. On 12 October the *Guardian* and several Scottish papers came out with the headline: 'Catholics Warn Labour over Abortion'. It transpired that an emergency conference was to be held in Scotland under the auspices of the Catholic Lay Apostolate Council. Its object was to blackmail the Labour Party in Scotland over the Labour vote of Scottish Catholics. There are nearly one million Catholics in Scotland, out of a population of some five million:

'If MPs do not satisfy the Church hierarchy Catholics could be urged not to vote Labour at the next general election.'

"This attempt at blackmail is a great lesson for us Humanists. There are at least as many Humanists, Secularists, Agnostics in Scotland as there are Catholics—but we have no politically alert hierarchy that issues threats to the politicians when it regards itself as offended in some way by the opinions and beliefs of the majority. I know the answer to this too well. It is that we are not in the business of compelling others to share our beliefs and knuckle

under to our dogmas. Indeed, we don't have any dogmas, so how could we begin to compete in this degrading battle?

"This answer would have satisfied me a few years ago. It does not do so any more. The threat from the Roman Catholic Church as a political entity concerned with destroying the freedom of non-Catholics, together with the very similar threat from the National Front, constitutes a danger from which we avert our eyes at our peril. Women in particular cannot afford to do so, for their liberty and privacy are in the front line of fire from both these sources."

Catholic Detestation of Toleration

The spirit of toleration was detested by the Catholic hierarchy and the National Front, Madeleine Simms continued: "You can guess from what I have already said that I do not think we can sit back and simply hope for the best . . . It is of great importance that the 'Organised Conscience' (to use a phrase of Lord Houghton) of the humanist movement be heard by government and parliament, with the accent on the word *organised*. Some ten years ago or more, I sat briefly on the executive committee of the British Humanist Association and voiced these views on many occasions, but they were not taken wholly seriously by my colleagues who thought I was exaggerating the nature of the threat, and that anyway humanism was not a political doctrine and ought not to be treated as such. After all, members of all political parties are members of the Association, and such politicking might produce splits and divisions within the movement. I do not accept this view. And I don't see how anyone looking out at the world today, can accept it, or maintain that I was unduly alarmist a decade ago. The forces of irrationalism are growing apace, and the Humanist Movement, like the Women's Movement, needs to recognise that the threat from outside is far greater than the differences that divide us internally. In a well known phrase, if we don't hang together, we shall certainly hang separately.

"In every region, and ultimately in every con-

(Continued on back page)

Enough to Make You Swear

BARBARA SMOKER

Under the Administration of Justice Act 1977, "Any person who objects to being sworn shall be permitted to make his solemn affirmation instead of taking an oath in all places and for all purposes where an oath is or shall be required by law, which affirmation shall be of the same force and effect as if he had taken the oath" (Section 8). But how does it work out in practice? Barbara Smoker, President of the National Secular Society, here gives an account from recent first-hand experience.

Being called for jury service at the Old Bailey in October gave me personal experience of this swearing-in business, and I have to report that the recent theoretical reform of the law regarding secular affirmation has made little practical difference so far.

A two-page explanatory leaflet about jury service is sent to prospective jurors when they are first notified of their summons—which may be many weeks before their actual attendance at the Court—and the mention of affirmation in that leaflet, amounting only to the three words "or to affirm" put in brackets after "to take an oath", is probably the only attempt that will be made to bring the right of affirmation to their attention.

The first time that my name was called in the courtroom ballot, I made my way to the jury bench, where I found there was a printed card, with the wording of the oath for each juror. I turned my card over, thinking that the form of affirmation would be on the other side, but it was not. "Take the bible in your right hand!" I was commanded, a small black-bound book being thrust in front of me. Firmly ignoring the proffered testament, I turned to the judge and said "I wish to affirm." Before the affirmation card was located, the defending counsel called out "Challenge!" and I was told to stand down. Afterwards, a number of my fellow jury-panellists asked me what I had said and what it meant. None of them seemed to have any idea that one did not have to take a religious oath.

Of the dozens of juries that I saw sworn-in that week, almost every juror took hold of the closed book—which is surely a "closed book" indeed to most of them—and either gabbled or stumbled over the printed wording of the oath in a way that indicated it meant no more to them than an archaic ritual and they found it almost incomprehensible. Only two jurors apart from myself took a personal stand with regard to the oath—a Jew, who asked for, and was provided with, an Old Testament, and a Muslim, who said he did not wish to take a Christian oath, and was at first told he could affirm but was then challenged and asked to stand down.

Perhaps I should explain here the right of peremptory challenge. Both the defence and the prosecution are allowed to demand the replacement of up to seven of the jurors who are picked by ballot, without stating any reason. The accused or his counsel exercise this right with the word "Challenge!" and the prosecuting counsel with the pretentious phrase "Stand by for the Crown". In both cases, the challenge has to be made as the prospective juror is taking his or her place on the jury bench, and before the juror is sworn. Since there is normally nothing to go by but the appearance of the juror, it is obviously a gamble. But defending counsel seem to operate a rule-of-thumb by which they accept all young people, nearly all black and brown people, and most men, but challenge some middle-aged white men who also look middle class, and almost all middle-aged white women unless dressed in unconventional style.

Deducing this during the first day of my service on the Old Bailey jury panel, and being very reluctant to sit in judgment on anyone, I took care to keep my hair tidy, wear my most conformist clothes, and put on a severe facial expression every time I was picked in the ballot for a case. And, sure enough, it worked: I was immediately challenged by the counsel for the defence—every time except twice, and even in those two cases I was belatedly challenged.

One of those two occasions I have already mentioned: as soon as I said I wish to affirm, the challenge was made. This I found (and find) rather puzzling, for I would have thought that opting for affirmation suggested, primarily, an independent mind, and that independent minds are more likely to be favourable to the defence. However, the barrister in question apparently did not think so.

Judge Questions Affirmation

On the other occasion, I got even further before being challenged. Indeed, I had given up all hope this time of a reprieve, for the statutory period allowed for the peremptory challenge had expired by a long chalk, and in other cases I had seen judges disallow any slightly belated challenge.

What happened, however, was this. I asked, as before, to affirm. Then the judge to my astonishment, questioned me as to whether affirmation would be binding upon my conscience.

Needless to say, he had asked no such question of the ten jurors who had already been sworn-in for the case, nor did he ask it of the two who followed me. His obvious assumption, therefore, was that no one, or almost no one, would dare defy religious superstition by breaking a bible oath, whereas secular affirmation—though, for the past

two centuries, just as binding in law as the oath—might well be a trick to escape divine wrath! That an educated man of high standing could, in the last quarter of the twentieth century, have such medieval ideas is amazing; but then the whole legal profession is weighed down with just such amazing anachronistic concepts.

Medieval Attitudes

In questioning me in this way, not only was the judge letting the medieval straws in his wig show; not only was he in clear contravention of the law by failing to put affirmation on the same footing as the oath; he actually went beyond what he would have been empowered to do even before the new Act, for the only questions he was allowed to ask then (but no longer) in relation to affirmation were to ascertain whether it was religious belief or unbelief that made one unwilling to take the usual oath. He was never permitted to ask whether affirmation would be binding on one's conscience. Ever since the right of affirmation as an alternative to the oath in courts of law was first introduced in 1749 (mainly for Quakers) and extended to atheists (largely as a result of one of the National Secular Society's first big campaigns) under the Evidence Amendment Acts of 1869 and 1870, affirmation has had the same legal force as an oath, and to break the affirmation has constituted the crime of perjury, just as much as breaking the oath. Besides, to ask jurors or witnesses whether, virtually, they intend to commit perjury is as foolish as it is offensive—since anyone who has this intention would hardly jib at the far less serious falsehood of denying it!

Had the judge thought it out beforehand, he could hardly have failed to see the absurdity of his question. So it seems likely that it was a spontaneous reaction to the sudden realisation that under the new law he was no longer permitted to ask a question about religious beliefs, as he was accustomed to do, whilst feeling that he ought to ask something to justify allowing me to affirm instead of meekly taking the oath, like everyone else.

I, too, however, was caught on the hop. I had thought of the possibility of a judge being ignorant or forgetful of the new law, and, had he asked me about my religious beliefs, I was ready with my answer, referring him to the Act. But it had not occurred to me that I would be asked something else. So taken aback was I by the unexpected question that I merely answered "Yes!"—though the degree of astonished indignation in my face and tone of voice almost amounted to contempt of court. Only afterwards, unfortunately (or perhaps fortunately, since I would not have wanted to spend several days in the cells), did I think of the reply "Do you wish to put me under affirmation before I answer *that* question?!"

After my contemptuous "Yes!", the affirmation card was found and handed to me, and I began to read from it—slowly, and with meaningful emphasis, in contrast to the meaningless way in which the other jurors had mumbled the oath. I was about three-quarters way through the form of words when the sound of "Challenge!" from the body of the court pulled me up short. I look enquiringly at the judge, and he looked indecisively at the defending counsel. "That challenge was rather late", he said sternly; "the juror had already begun to affirm." The barrister said he had called "Challenge!" before, but had not been heard the first time. (A likely story!) The judge looked at me, and perhaps was thinking that I might prove a liability on the jury. Or perhaps he felt uneasy about my reaction to his erroneous question. Anyway, for whatever reason, he suddenly decided to allow the challenge, and asked me, politely, to stand down.

Trying not to show my delight, I walked up the courtroom with all the dignity I could contrive, until past the sight-lines of all the lawyers and officials, and then winked at the remainder of the jury panel awaiting the next name to be called. Knowing, of course, that my aim was to get on no jury if I could avoid it, they all grinned back at me.

The following week, my challenge record still intact, I left the Old Bailey, a free woman—exempt from jury service for the next two years.

Challenging the Jury

That near miss happened on a Friday afternoon, when most of the panellists were the rejects from one case after another throughout the week. We were nearly all white-skinned, middle-aged, and middle-class. The youngsters, the West Indians, the Asians, the brash, the down-trodden, who had been with us early in the week, were now sworn jurors, listening (or trying to look as though they were listening) to evidence that most of them probably found quite incomprehensible. If the basis on which defending lawyers reject prospective jurors has any statistical validity, then it is obvious that they should try to get their cases adjourned to start early in the week. Perhaps they do. But some, of course, must lose out on this—or, rather, their clients must. And people still refer to the administration of law as "justice"!

However, I find it difficult to understand why defending counsel should be so wary of anyone on the jury showing independence of mind by choosing to affirm, for this, I would have thought, betokened libertarian rather than authoritarian attitudes. Moreover, the criteria for a sympathetic jury surely vary much more than they are apparently assumed to vary for different kinds of cases.

For instance, in the *Gay News* blasphemy trial, in July, the defence presumably wanted to eliminate jurors with either strong prejudices against

homosexuality or strong religious feelings, or both. In my experience, people of West Indian origin take, generally speaking, a much stronger stand on both these counts than the average English man or woman, although the West Indians are generally more permissive with regard to most other social issues. Yet the way in which the defending barristers in that case exercised the right of peremptory challenge seemed to be based on the notion that West Indians would be likely to be less, not more, horrified than English people by the use of homosexual imagery in relation to the crucified saviour. After the trial, I was left with the feeling that the verdict might well have gone the opposite way if only the defence had used its jury challenges with discriminatory forethought rather than the same old rule-of-thumb.

Bradlaugh's Affirmation Campaign

But to get back to the long haul for the statutory right of affirmation. In 1861, Charles Bradlaugh, against whom a civil action had been brought, was not allowed to give evidence in his own defence because as a known atheist he was not allowed to take the oath—and the judge in the case therefore gave judgment for the plaintiff, on the ground that the case was undefended! That was no doubt the spur to Bradlaugh's campaign for extending to atheists the right of affirmation—at the time, permitting to those whose religious belief forbade the taking of oaths, but not to those without any religious belief. And when he founded the National Secular Society five years later, he promulgated through it the argument that, as long as the evidence of atheist witnesses was inadmissible in courts of law, the truth would be less likely to emerge in cases (including those of felony) where key witnesses were thus unable to give evidence. The commonsense of this argument prevailed among jurists and the Parliament of the day, and the law was changed so as to allow secular affirmation by atheists in courts of law and give it the same legal status as the religious oath. Thereafter, until this year, a declaration in court that he or she had no religious belief entitled a witness to substitute secular affirmation for the religious oath. In 1888, Bradlaugh succeeded in getting through Parliament his Bill extending this right beyond the courts—in particular, to Parliament itself, which for five years had used the oath of allegiance required of MPs to prevent Bradlaugh from taking the seat to which he had been elected.

Under the latest Act, of this year, it is no longer necessary to state the reason for wishing to affirm. This is certainly a step forward, for there is little doubt that some judges (and some juries) do not have the same respect for atheists as they do for Quakers (the main religious group that has traditionally affirmed). My own recent experience, how-

ever, shows that we cannot be content with this minor reform. We must continue to press for a complete reversal of the present system in which the oath is still the norm and affirmation is something peculiar.

In the present climate of religious scepticism there is no reason at all why secular affirmation should not be the form of wording automatically provided for jurors and witnesses, though the old religious oath could remain permissible for those who specifically requested it. Like religious worship in schools, the oath ought to be opted into, not opted out of.

Until that has become the law and the practice in our courts, secularists must not give up campaigning for it. And it is worth noting that this long-standing campaign now has the support of the progressive lawyers' association, Justice.

A committee to consider the reform of the laws governing obscenity and film censorship is to sit under the chairmanship of Professor Bernard Williams. The terms of reference of the committee are: "To review the laws concerning obscenity, indecency and violence in publications, displays and entertainments in England and Wales." Arrangements for film censorship are also included.

At the time when Professor Williams was appointed to chair the committee, the Home Secretary received a Christian parliamentary deputation, led by Mr Michael Alison, MP, protesting against the appointment because of his well-known humanist views. It would be an unhappy state of affairs if the bulk of opinion and evidence presented to the committee were of a pro-censorship nature, because of the assiduous pressure of pro-censorship groups.

Individuals and organisations are invited to write to the Williams Committee. Readers wishing to express their opposition to censorship and defence of matters of taste as a realm of personal judgment, should write to: J. C. Davey Esq, Committee on Obscenity and Film Censorship, Home Office, Queen Anne's Gate, London SW1 9AT.

BLASPHEMY IN BRITAIN

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All That Glitters

JOHN SUTCLIFFE

In an age when the monarchy's main significance is as part of the entertainment industry, the junketing of Jubilee Year will soon be forgotten. At the end of the year John Sutcliffe considers ways in which authorities including the monarchy, survive in the world because of the failure of most people to question the existing state of affairs. The words of Thomas Paine, who so radically questioned all aspects of society in his time, are used to re-inforce this criticism of the institution of monarchy.

For centuries past the dispute has been about doctrines. It is now about fact. Tom Paine.

In the modern world authority has learned to survive by controlling power in a far more subtle way than ever before. It does not, of course, openly admit that it employs this sort of influence, but it exists and its power is maintained by nationalism and its institutions. This can be shown by the example of the British monarchy and I would like to make this my personal contribution to Jubilee year.

I do not believe that the people of England have ever been fairly and candidly dealt by. They have been imposed upon by parties and by men assuming the character of leaders. Tom Paine.

It is an undeniable fact that the monarchy is accepted without question by the greater part of the British people through sentimentality rather than rational judgment. The monarchy is beyond question because by subtle manipulation of people's emotions and desires in the cult of heritage, found in education and the mass media, the impression is given that they are condescending to be seen to be acting like "ordinary people". They are made to appear, and have become accepted as being, an essential and completely necessary element in the national life and cultural identity of Britain and its individual citizens.

Hereditary succession requires the same obedience to ignorance, as to wisdom; and when once the mind can bring itself to pay this indiscriminate reverence, it descends below the stature of mental manhood. It is fit to be great only in little things. It acts a treachery upon itself, and suffocates the sensations that urge to detection. Tom Paine.

It has to be admitted that this subtle and almost totally subconscious and self-deceptive use of authoritative power reaches its quintessence in British society. But as a fact of life, to each Briton, it is absurd and is debilitating of his intelligence and self-respect. Anyone who does seriously enquire into the validity of this institution, or further, daring

much, questions its very existence, is looked upon either as mad, or is met by strained, if not patronising, forbearance for his obviously eccentric views. As a whole the unfortunate public merely look on with dumb acceptance, while the media, true to its practice of over-simplification, present hard-hitting" controversy which subjects the enquiring sceptic to the foolish rhetoric of an assortment of monarchist supporters merely to produce controversial antagonism and not in any way to discuss the facts in a reasoned debate. From Tom Paine to Willie Hamilton the legitimate questions that these men and others have tried to pose about the value of the British monarchy have either been avoided or, where this was not possible, they have been subject to uninformed criticism.

Hereditary succession is a burlesque upon monarchy. It puts it in the most ridiculous light, by presenting it as an office, which any child or idiot may fill. It requires some talents to be a common mechanic; but to be a king, requires only the animal figure of man—a sort of breathing automaton. This sort of superstition may last a few years more, but it cannot long resist the awakened reason and interest of man. Tom Paine.

The monarchy produces nothing and adds very little to the British way of life, if anything it is parasitical upon it. Royalty holds a position of privilege ostensibly without power and constitutionally controlled, but this control can only exist where one can question fundamentally the validity and nature of the monarch who is supposedly under control. But if their power is able to ensure that they are only supported by sentiment, and remains outside reasonable criticism, as an accepted norm for national and individual life, then they will have no need of the panoply of power. Men and women will quite willingly remind themselves that the authority which rules them is really beyond their question, and they will soon be happy and willing serfs. And so they will forever remain, in fact, if not in name, with their masters beyond all doubt and out of reach of any future decision of the electors.

We must shut our eyes against reason, we must basely degrade our understanding not to see the folly of what is called monarchy. Nature is orderly in all her works; but this is a mode of government that counteracts nature. It turns the progress of the human faculties upside down. It subjects age to be governed by children and wisdom by folly. Tom Paine.

Authority in Britain imposes and reflects more the absolutist views of the German philosopher Hegel, than the British democratic tradition of

Locke or Hume. It asserts that freedom can only be made real and completely guaranteed when one is committed to the ideal and thus the authority society holds to be true. This is not to say democracy does not exist in Britain today, but it is to say that this notion of authoritative "freedom" undermines the very democratic fact of individual freedom. Democracy is taking a Rousseauian turn, where the untutored general will become an individual's conscience, where democracy does not protect or allow individual expression by means of an unprejudiced system of law, but where popular prejudice is sought to condemn all that authority cites as its opposition. There is thus a division in British society that undermines the otherwise sceptical and urbane British character and its insistence on free and open debate and honest dealing by the growing dependence on an irrational desire for conformity to an ideal and a tradition that avowedly seeks to suppress these qualities. This however, is not only true of Britain, it is true of America and the office of the President (not even Nixon's fall inhibited the sentiment the presidential office evokes in the American breast), in Russia it is the Party and the secular Christ of Lenin, in China it is Mao, and so with most countries in the world; the list is as endless as the lack of individual human wit to prevent it, and that gives authority its opportunity and strength to control our loves and fears.

It is time to dismiss all these songs and toasts which are calculated to enslave, and operate to suffocate reflection. Tom Paine.

If one admits the necessity of an overriding power, whether obviously dictatorial or not, which is beyond any sanction of rational understanding, where it is governed by a system of law that guarantees its rights and privileges, then one's acceptance and the law which imposes that acceptance on everybody constitutes a barrier not only to one's own intelligence and freedom but also limits the future choice of any subsequent generation to decide for itself. As Paine once expressed it, we cannot condemn the future to the limitations of our moral and intellectual expectations, for their future can be no part of our present. But mankind for the most part continually seeks misguidedly to hand on not their freedom, but the self-limitation of their ideals, to deprive human beings of their self-discovered dignity and to mould their sentiment into the fearful acceptance of past tradition despite its repeated failure and at the cost of so much human suffering.

Mankind are not to be told they shall not think, or shall not read. Tom Paine.

There is a danger in being intolerant of those who accept so gladly the sacrifice of their freedom for the security of the tribe. As rationalists and humanists we have to show that we will not acquiesce to what they irrationally demand. But, at the same

time, we have to let them see that we do not threaten what legitimately belongs to them. Only by this method can we overcome their fear and timidity, and with reason show them that freedom to choose is a viable alternative.

THE RIGHT HAND OF THE LORD

The official church of the Corporation of London, St Lawrence Jewry, is holding a series of lunch-time talks "to refresh the spirits of those who work in the City." The theme is "Russian Communism and Christian Order" and it is clearly designed to refurbish the troubled souls of business men and bankers in the vicinity. A roll-call of the speakers has a ring of familiarity to observers of extreme Right-wing political groups. They include the managing director of Grunwick, George Ward, and representatives from George Ward's great supporters the National Association for Freedom. Other well-known, conservative, maverick figures, such as Rhodes Boyson, are to appear. There seems no problem in deciding where the Lord stands on the political spectrum.

NORWAY

Legislation to bring in abortion on demand was announced in the King's speech at the opening of Norway's newly-elected Parliament last October. King Olav said that a woman should have the opportunity to decide on an abortion when she could see no other way out of her problems. Political observers are reported to have said the legislation was likely to be carried out.

Freethinker Fund

We have received donations from the readers listed below, and offer our thanks: Anon, £8.25; Anon, £3.00; C. Anderson, £1.10; T. Atkins, £3.25; W. H. and E. Brown, 50p; Messrs B. and P. Clark, £3.25; W. H. Goodall, £1.00; E. Henry, £1.25; E. J. Hughes, £1.00; E. Hutchison, 25p; A. Kendall, 40p; W. Lazarus, £3.25; G. P. T. Lewis, 50p; K. Mack, £1.25; C. G. Newton, £1.25; Mrs P. Paris, 25p; A. J. Rawlings, £5.00; J. V. Ruffell, 25p; F. E. Saward, 25p; D. J. Smith, 70p; N. Sinnott, £2.00; C. J. Simmonds, £1.00; W. Steinhardt, £3.25; S. Watson, 35p; V. Wilson, £1.25. Total for the period 18 October to 17 November 1977: £43.80.

The "Hereford Diocesan News" records a conversation in which a parishioner affirmed her belief that there is "a special place in heaven for the wives of clergymen." To which the vicar's wife she was talking to replied, "Oh, I'd much rather stay with my husband."

RESPONSIBLE PROSECUTION?

The Director of Public Prosecutions probably thought that he had heard the last of Mr William McIlroy, secretary of The Committee Against Blasphemy Law, after his trial at Highbury Corner Magistrates' Court, London, for sending a copy of James Kirkup's "blasphemous" poem, "The Love That Dares to Speak its Name", through the post. But our former editor has refused to go away—at least any further than Brighton.

During September, when the case was heard, Mr McIlroy was in the throes of preparing for his departure from London, but he returned to the fray soon after arriving at his new abode on the Sussex coast. For it had transpired that Mrs Valerie Riches, a leading member of The Responsible Society and one of Mary Whitehouse's allies, had committed the same offence as Mr McIlroy (for different reasons) by sending a copy of the poem through the post to Mrs Jean Coggan, wife of the Archbishop of Canterbury, "suggesting that the Church should take notice."

Mr McIlroy wrote to the Director of Publications and drew his attention to the matter. He concluded: "The purpose of this letter is to ask if you intend to take proceedings against Mrs Riches."

Back came the Director's reply in which he stated quite erroneously, that Mr McIlroy had asked him to initiate proceedings against Mrs Riches. He went on to say that his intention was "to consider every case that is submitted to me of the publication or sending through the post of copies of this poem with a view to possible prosecution . . . But I shall consider each case on its merit, on the evidence which is submitted to me, taking into account the circumstances of the alleged publication or sending through the post." He did not intend to proceed against Mrs Riches.

Mr McIlroy then wrote to say that as far as he was concerned Mrs Riches or anyone else should be able to send the poem through the post without risk of prosecution. He added: "You apparently do not always hold that view. I was prosecuted and fined £50 for doing so as a personal gesture against censorship. Mrs Riches commits exactly the same offence as me in the course of her activities in defence of censorship. You decided that I had to appear before a magistrates' court; however, you 'do not intend to initiate proceedings against Mrs Riches.'

"It is clear that under the Post Office Act the question of 'merit' or 'circumstances' is quite irrelevant, since neither the intention of the sender nor the effect on the receiver is taken into account. The offence consists of simply sending an indecent or obscene article through the post, and that is all."

The DPP's six-line reply, in which he does not even attempt to deal with points raised, prompted

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Mr McIlroy to put the matter before the Attorney-General. After outlining the case he reminded Mr Silkin that the relevant section of the Post Office Act exists to protect their employees; merit or circumstances have nothing to do with the case.

Mr McIlroy added: "In the light of *R v. Straker* (1965, CLR, 239 CCA), the test of obscenity or indecency is objective, and the character of the person an article has been posted to is immaterial; in the light of *Kosmo Publications Ltd v. DPP* (1975, CLR 345, DC), the nature of the offence is determined entirely by the article, and the circumstances of the offence are relevant only in mitigation. It is difficult to see how the DPP can distinguish between one alleged offence and another . . .

"Is the protection of this pro-censorship lady more important than impartial administration of the law? In view of the Department's favourable response to complaints by supporters of such organisations as the Nationwide Festival of Light, National Viewers' and Listeners' Association, and The Responsible Society, it is difficult to escape the conclusion that this is indeed the case . . . I protest most strongly against the DPP's bias and double standards in this matter."

Mr McIlroy is not alone in his belief that the office of the Director of Public Prosecutions has one standard for pious narks and one for lesser mortals. His suspicions are shared by many who are concerned about increasing censorship, repression and threats to social reforms.

It may be a coincidence that the disgraceful prosecution of a 13-year-old child under a law dating from 1861 (see front page) took place in an area of the country where some of the most unscrupulous opponents of the 1967 Abortion Act are firmly entrenched. But it is widely suspected that in certain cases there has been connivance between reactionary, religio-political pressure groups and the Mandarins of the Home Office at Queen Anne's Gate.

SEX AND THE SYNOD

Like another Eve with another Serpent, the vexed Church is these days struggling with the question of sex. On the one hand the age-old Christian distaste for sexual pleasure, only to be overcome for the sake of procreative duty, holds firm in some quarters against "the tide of permissiveness". On

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the other hand, ever eager not to be too out of tune with the times, a new-found admission that sexuality can be a delightful experience in itself and in all its possible aspects is catching on in some quarters. So we now have, for example, on the one side the Order of Christian Unity praising chastity and the Vatican pronouncement on sexual ethics denouncing homosexuality, and on the other side liberal theologians talking of "new insights into sexual love" and the Gay Christian Group proclaiming the positive aspects of homosexual relationships.

A debate at the Church of England's General Synod last month showed this rift. A much amended motion on sexual ethics by Canon Douglas Rhymes proposed "a new look at the whole theology of Christian sexuality in the light of present theological and psychiatric understanding". As a result of the motion which was eventually passed, the Church's Board for Social Responsibility is to make a study of sexual ethics and report to a future meeting of the Synod.

Controversy had preceded the debate, since Canon D. A. J. Stevens had put forward a motion welcoming the Vatican statement on sex. But his motion was not debated since that of Canon Rhymes gained more signatures and was given a higher place on the agenda. During the debate Canon Rhymes argued that widespread use of contraceptives, new psychological understandings of attitudes towards masculinity and femininity, and an appreciation of the equality of male and female all suggested a need for re-thinking the Christian approach. Opposing the motion Canon Stevens said that it was time for a clear and positive statement that "love found its safeguard and stability in marriage", that the Church did not accept "the glamourisation of every sexual aberration or deviance", and that chastity was to be honoured.

Supporting the motion the Rev M. Saward said that the Church's attitude had always seemed to outsiders to be one of "dirty, dangerous and don't." But the debate did not detail the centuries of suffering, guilt, repression and misunderstanding which the traditional Church attitude to sexuality had caused.

At the General Synod support was also given to a "national initiative in evangelism"—and it is often seen that the evangelical wing of the Church is least able to cope with the fact of human sexuality. Nor did the Synod come any nearer to accepting

a simple idea of male-female equality and allow women to be employed as clergy. This is not surprising from a religion that has traditionally seen women as a thorn in the flesh and even responsible for the sin which brought about the downfall of man.



We very much regret that it is necessary to raise the price of *The Freethinker* to 20p from the next issue in January. Although it is appreciated that this is not a small price rise, it will not be possible to print *The Freethinker* indefinitely at the present loss, and we are sure readers wish to see this humanist publication survive, with clear voice and strong finances, into the twenty-first century. (We are most grateful to our printers David Neil & Co, not only for keeping their charges at a very reasonable level, but also for providing so helpful a service.)

The cost of postal subscriptions will remain excellent value. These will be at £2.40 for twelve copies and £1.25 for six copies (\$5.00 for twelve copies and \$2.50 for six copies). We would like to emphasize that postal subscriptions are advantageous both to readers, in order to ensure regular delivery, and to G. W. Foote & Co, in order to reduce distribution costs.

We hope all readers will continue their order. A healthy readership for the future will also be ensured by encouraging acquaintances to become new subscribers.

A book was reviewed in a Texan journal, "Bryan Eagle", with the title "How To Say No To A Baptist and Survive". Later an apology appeared. It should have read "How To Say No To A Rapist and Survive".

BOOKS

THE FALL OF SCOTLAND YARD by Barry Cox, John Shirley and Martin Short. Penguin, 80p.

The Fall of Scotland Yard is an uncomfortable book, but it is one that everyone with any sense of responsibility for the kind of place Britain is now and is going to be in 1984 and beyond should read. The main outlines of the matters it deals with will be familiar to any attentive student of the newspapers; but the cumulative effect of all the material gathered together here is shattering and horrendous. I put the book down with a sense of acute dismay, compounded by reluctant incredulity that even so assiduous a new broom as Sir Robert Mark can possibly have swept clean such a vast Augean (or should it be "orgy-an"?) stable.

Desensitisation processes are operating in too many areas of our public life: what was unthinkable yesterday is bearable today and may with ill-luck be standard practice tomorrow. The reluctance of large sections of the public—and the inability of the upper echelons of Scotland Yard—to credit the relatively minor corruptions and illegalities of Det Sgt Challenor in the early 1960s dwindled into a near-indifferent yawn at the spectacle of virtually the entire former Obscene Publications Squad, headed by Commanders Drury and Virgo and Det Chief Superintendent Moody, standing revealed at the Old Bailey in 1977 as having not merely received but actively solicited payoffs said to have amounted to £250,000 a year!

Pace Sir Robert Mark, can the effect upon public confidence in the police force be other than devastating? (This line of reasoning was of course perversely twisted to justify sustained attempts to cover up what was going on.) Of course it would be just as absurd to maintain that all policemen are villains and bastards as to believe that the old parrot-cry that our policemen are "wonderful" is all that there is to be said about them.

Sir Robert Mark, with his well-known dislike of many features of the British judicial process, concentrated—wisely and probably correctly from his point of view—in eliminating rotten apples from the Yard barrel by enforced or voluntary resignations rather than upon instigating large numbers of prosecutions. During his five-year stint as Commissioner, more than 400 men chose to resign rather than face disciplinary proceedings. As a recent *Times* article by one of the authors (significantly headed "the biggest scandal of all has yet to be uncovered") pointed out, this has merely shifted a good many of the problems and risks elsewhere, for some of those involved have gone on to top security jobs outside the police force.

One of the greatest difficulties to be surmounted

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so as to obtain a healthier situation is the urgent need to break down the stereotyped and blinkered attitudes towards the law and law enforcement which are unfortunately widespread. Perhaps in no other area of public affairs is the habit of seeing only one side of a complex question so disastrous. My personal belief is that patterns of criminal behaviour, and the quantity of corruption likely to arise in police/criminal interaction, are directly conditioned by the content of our laws and by the nature and amount of public pressure over law enforcement. While such subjective matters as pornography and "vice" remain subject to misconceived laws, and while there is a louder volume of public protest over them than at the rising tide of undetected thefts, the subornation of policemen by pornographers and prostitutes and pimps will continue, human nature being what it is. And such corruption, as *The Fall of Scotland Yard* shows, can all too easily become a "system" and give rise to a habit of mind within the police which sees it as no worse to fraternise with one type of criminal than another.

There is a crucial distinction, all too often overlooked by the raucous moral crusaders who seek to enforce moral behaviour through the agency of the law, between laws which properly punish anti-social criminal acts and protect individuals, and those which mistakenly set out to "protect" the citizen against her- or himself. While a few such "protective" laws may be required, their number should be kept by Parliament to an absolute minimum and they should always be recognised as a necessary and hopefully temporary evil if we are to have a well-governed democratic society. It is the inability of the "law and order" brigade to see this, coupled with their perverse dismissal of those of us—not all particularly left-wing, by the way—who presume to regard the police with a watchfully critical eye as a bunch of "crooks, cranks and do-gooders who unite to attack the police whenever opportunity occurs" (Mr Justice Melford Stevenson, quoted on p.127), which has contributed significantly to the deplorable state of affairs this book records.

From my vantage point as Secretary of the Homosexual Law Reform Society during the 1960s and an executive committee member of the National Council for Civil Liberties in the early 1970s, I am not so surprised by these lamentable revelations as some may be. But I am profoundly depressed by them. And I am not very optimistic that Sir Robert Mark will prove to have been as effective a reformer as he was a public relations phenomenon.

ANTONY GREY

REVIEWS

MEN OF MYSTERY: "A Celebration of the Occult".
Ed by Colin Wilson. W. H. Allen, £3.95.

This bizarre and credulous collection of essays on so-called "men of mystery" is hoped to be the basis of a TV series next year. It is presented as fact, not fiction, and rationalists must view the prospect with misgiving.

It is, of course, no reassurance that Colin Wilson, one-time biographer of that rationalist of genius, Bernard Shaw, edits this book, for his later conversion to acceptance of the occult is well-known. His Introduction, like his own essays on Rasputin and Gurdjieff, is a curious document, not the less disturbing for its pretence of basic scepticism. It is difficult to understand what he can mean by scepticism as he accepts as fact (although agreeing he does not "understand" it) that "many astrologers can tell a man's date of birth merely by looking at him." He is "inclined to believe" (on the mere word of a girl who told him so) that a person who mentally "curses" another person directly causes that person harm (there is, of course, no mention in this book of such a word as "coincidence"). He believes totally in the miraculous powers of Uri Geller; states as fact that "Father Joseph of Copertino had the curious habit of flying through the air", that "Madame Blavatsky could make a room resound with rapping noises or the sound of bells by merely raising a finger" and that Daniel Dunglass Home could "make heavy tables levitate"; and portentously asks "Are such men and women freaks? Or do they offer us a glimpse of what we might all become—indeed, of what we already are?"

The fact is that any charlatan of the séance could perform such tricks, and professional magicians most others. The only surprising thing is that neither Colin Wilson nor anyone else brings up the "miracle" of ectoplasm, that nineteenth-century phenomenon, freely provided with photographic "evidence", that had to be discarded by spiritualistic mediums when the invention of infra-red photography blew it sky high.

Ectoplasm, it should be noted, was believed in completely by Sir Oliver Lodge, that credulous scientist whose acceptance of spiritualism is still constantly brought forward by followers of the occult as proof of its infallibility, baffling to science. The fact is scientists are human beings, without knowledge of the magician's "tricks" and when faced with them are as capable of being deceived as anyone else. The puzzlement of a few scientists mentioned in this book must therefore be regarded in

this light. And the sceptical ones will ironically note Wilson's statement: "the flat truth is that science has no right whatever to pronounce on such matters."

Who (you may well ask) was Gurdjieff? What ignoramuses we all are. "He was, undoubtedly", writes Wilson, "one of the greatest men of his time, probably less of a charlatan than any other contemporary 'messiah'." Come again? Let Wilson explain: he was "founder of the Institute for the Harmonious Development of Man, the teacher whom his disciples regarded as a kind of god and whose enemies denounced him as a charlatan." Quite.

The characters covered in this book, apart from the two dealt with by Wilson, are Helena Blavatsky the theosophist ("She gave out the truth in detail about life after death" writes Christmas Humphreys with a straight unspecific face), Nikola Tesla, Aleister Crowley ("the Beast"), Sir Francis Dashwood (erroneously called "Hell Fire Dashwood"), Geller, Mesmer and Nostradamus. Of these only Tesla was a scientist, whose valuable discoveries in electricity are herein given a miraculous interpretation, not diluted by the admission that Tesla had "a highly developed sense of the dramatic." Compared with him, Newton and Einstein were "obsessive plodders."

The fact is electricity for long seemed mysterious simply because it was not fully understood what caused it or how it could be harnessed. As early as the first decade of the nineteenth century the young Shelley was frightening his little sisters with experiments, and later foreseeing when our houses could be lit "at the press of a button." And Shelley was the most rationalistic of youths and men. So was Benjamin Franklin, who earlier still invented the lightning conductor. And in the chapter on Mesmer, which contains, among much fiction, some indication that healing powers can have a scientific basis not then realised (as with Cagliostro, not dealt with in this book), we do read with interest the Marquis de Lafayette's suggestion that "Mesmer's magnetism may be a force allied to the static electricity Franklin has discovered with his kite." Lafayette was, of course, a product of the Age of Reason, much discounted and derided in this book.

In a sense, all individual genius is mysterious: Mozart, Beethoven, Shakespeare, Aeschylus—from whence comes this natural outburst of musical and poetic invention, denied to all but a few individuals in history? Even genetic study has not yet explained this. But such genius is not of the kind felt worth mention in this book. As Brian Silcock wrote reverently in *The Sunday Times*: "If people can bend metal by mind power it will mean a revolution in science and our whole way of thinking about the world more profound than anything since Newton." Wilson, needless to say, endorses this.

Geller's bending of spoons is not, of course, unique. Perhaps because of some electrical force in certain people's bodies which has not yet been analysed (we all know the electric sparks sometimes given off by underwear on contact with the skin), or some quality in the metal which responds, a number of people, including children, have demonstrated this, since Geller, on television. In my recent book, *Artists and Writers in Revolt*, I quoted a letter from the poet Swinburne to William Rossetti in which he mentioned quite casually "bending double one fork in an energetic mood at dinner." But then Swinburne was a revolutionary atheist, without a thought of exploiting this unexpected gift for gain let alone seeing anything supernatural in it.

Mountebanks like Crowley, an undoubtedly and deliberately "evil" man, are among many who have used superstition or witchcraft purely as an excuse for, and intensification of, sexual experience. Sir Francis Dashwood, with his "Monks of Medmenham" and the caves excavated in his grounds at West Wycombe Park (still open to the public by his enterprising namesake and collateral descendant) also used the satanic cover for sex activities, in which John Wilkes, later close friend of the French *philosophes*, in particular Diderot and the atheist d'Holbach, joined and on which he commented with gay disregard of superstition. Dashwood's travels had made him cognisant with many old religions from the Far East to Rome, and he was something more than Crowley and in some ways akin to Swinburne's friend, Sir Richard Burton: a scholar in such things and in pornographic literature, with much indication that the "satanism" was based on a tongue-in-the-cheek scepticism and serious architectural and archaeological interests.

The article on him here is claimed to contain "a great deal of new—and previously unpublished—research". In fact the authors have found virtually nothing new and have left out a great amount which even I researched at West Wycombe and elsewhere and published in my chapter on the "Monks" in my biography of Wilkes, published three years ago. They rightly state (which I missed) that Franklin knew Dashwood intimately at the time of Medmenham, not only in the 1770's; but they show no knowledge of the contemporary descriptions of the Church and boating among the Dashwood papers, nor that Dashwood was a man (contrary to popular legend) deeply concerned with public works such as drainage, repair of roads and building of bridges, that in 1747 he introduced a Poor Relief Bill aimed to help the unemployed, and that he sat on Commons committees on these improvements. He had, wrote a visitor to the Park in 1752, "a very great character both at High and West Wycombe for a very public spirited and generous man."

Nor (more significant in this context) do the authors note that Dashwood accompanied Franklin,

in 1774, at the opening of Theophilus Lindsey's Unitarian Chapel in London: thus consolidating the picture of a man whose self-indulgence was based not only on meticulous scholarship and a vein of eccentric imagination, but on a tendency to rational freethinking. Curiously, they also fail to note the hint of the "dualist" religion, reputedly practised by Cathars and Knights Templar, in the choice of omissions from Dashwood and Franklin's *Abridgment to the Book of Common Prayer*. They ignore the fact that an academic scholar has written a biography of Dashwood (Betty Kemp's *Sir Francis Dashwood*, 1967: mainly valuable on his parliamentary career and local works, as she perversely dismisses the "Monks" as myth and political libel); and the date Wilkes became Lord Mayor (1774) is given as 1778.

I give these details mainly as an indication of the superficial historical research and unreliability of this book. The slim Bibliography is almost totally of books on the occult (or Catherine de Medici, the same thing). It will not be unexpected after this that the last essay, on Nostradamus, stretches his so-called prophecies to fit later events of history with a breathtaking ingenuity of a kind usually associated only with the prophecies in the Bible. If read as we read the stories of Edgar Allan Poe in our youth, as fabulous fiction, this book does contain much interesting material, not all of it biographically untrue. But its purpose is revealing when summed up by Colin Wilson: "if paranormal research can prove the existence of telepathy, extra-sensory perception, precognition, poltergeists and out-of-the-body experiences, it will have taken a long step towards proving some of the basic propositions of religion."

It is a return to the "human optimism" of religious faith which this book really hopes to revive, as Wilson makes abundantly clear. Its credulities cannot be unchallenged, and a new age of superstition encouraged, when we remember that great and brave men like Reginald Scot (as early as 1584) and Thomas Ady (1655) risked their lives publishing works condemning belief in witchcraft, on the grounds of humanity and reason.

AUDREY WILLIAMSON

THE ART OF SELF-DECEPTION by Giles Auty.
Libertarian Books, £5.95.

Here we have a sustained diatribe against the most recent excesses in modern art. Addressing himself to everyone's favourite dilettante, "the intelligent layman", Giles Auty proceeds to pour hot coals on all who are currently engaged in the visual arts. No one (artists, critic, art dealer or gallery director) is spared the measure of his wrath. Though taking exception to the misuse of words like "reactionary", Mr Auty carries the aegis of a by-gone

era and its standards with all the commitment of a religious crusader. (One of his chapters is even headed, "Reactionaries of the world, unite!")

His position may be a common one, and indeed there is much to sanction in what he says so sincerely. Yet if there is nothing intrinsically artistic in symmetrically arranged bricks or blankets or nappy-liners, neither are these items, of themselves, unsuitable properties of artistic expression. To argue in favour of a "proper subject for art", as the author seems to do is to place free expression in a moralistic straitjacket—the very thing Mr Auty least wants.

A practising artist himself, he could be expected to reserve his most stringent remarks for professional critics, whose qualifications may not extend beyond specialised journalism and whose prose is often as obscure as the work they attempt to illuminate. Mr Auty would severely restrict the reliance by the public on catalogue notes at exhibitions. But then he would also look critically on the inclusion of work which did not strictly adhere to established tradition. Such eclecticism was a salient feature of T. S. Eliot's artistic criticism, and it is no surprise to learn from the dust jacket that Mr Auty was once a committed disciple of Eliot. For one who advances a more populist approach to the arts in this country, Mr Auty's views may prove as alienating as the esoteric cant he so deplors. The artistic statement confirming the absence of a "reasonable standards" is more valid than the dogged refusal to look at the world as it is. If the most offensive eyesore in some way reflects the flux, or indeed the apathy of the contemporary world, it surely *defeats* reason to attempt to supplant it with something more "tasteful".

A great deal of this book is given over to protracted discussion of the functions of interested persons. Mr Auty advocates increased participation in the arts by the general public, and this would bring about a greater public control of public resources. Though he seems to champion the artist's individual option to paint what he wants, Mr Auty's deference to popular opinion as to what should or should not be on view implies the existence of an external standard—to which the artist had better conform.

JAMES MACDONALD

THEATRE

THE DAYS OF THE COMMUNE by Bertolt Brecht.
Royal Shakespeare Company at the Aldwych Theatre.

The revolution of the *communards* in Paris in 1871 is seen in history as a naive revolution. This was the occasion when the city of Paris, following the defeat of the Franco-Prussian war, formed its own popular government and held out in resistance to Thiers and the National Government. It was a pop-

ular uprising, where the seizure of power was spontaneous and lacked any strategy for survival. It was therefore not only defeated but ended in the savage slaughter of citizens. For successive revolutionaries it became a text-book object lesson in how not to take over power. Lenin described it ambiguously as "a festival of the oppressed" and measured his own success, after taking Petrograd in 1917, by counting the number of days the Soviets could hold out longer than the Commune. Brecht, also, saw it as a lesson in politics and *Days of the Commune* is one of his least-performed and most didactic plays.

Despite its overt attempt to educate its audience politically (not usually a recipe for gripping drama) the play struck me as a forceful and vivid depiction of the Commune uprising. The excited idealism of the *communards* was very real. As they sat feasting, dancing, singing and celebrating their newfound liberties, you knew both that their hope of converting the whole country into a more just and peaceful place overnight was a pipe-dream and at the same time that such strong aspirations do exist and are a force in history. This was conveyed without idealising the rough handful of characters whose obvious human failings would have warned any observer of the difficulties of making ideals come true.

The play was also very successful in displaying the classic dilemma of revolution: how to sustain power and at the same time hold fast to the ideals of peace and justice which fired the revolt. As the *communards* sit knitting words about organising education and keeping honour, the guns are amassed outside the city. The harsh choice is between "blood-stained hands or severed hands".

Although Brecht's play with its typical shrewd and sinewy political arguments, survives well, it was not helped by Howard Davies' production at the Aldwych. The production was far too theoretical and analytical, following Brecht's approach to the theatre with too chaste and cool a stance. It was sometimes so static that, far from having one's attention concentrated on the arguments, the proceedings seemed in danger of coming to a complete halt. I feel it would have gained from more energy and earthiness, so that the white spot-lights could focus on events of sweatier and grimmer weight. Cool appraisal is fine, but the anger and joy must be represented to be considered. For instance, the songs, not unattractive as comments on the action, wanted a much more raucous approach.

The acting was consistently styled, so that the cast worked as a completely integrated team—even if a team a little too conscious of the blackboard instructions of how the game was to be played. Two particularly lively performances came from Mary Kean as a warm, tough Brechtian mother and Greg Hicks as her aggressive and randy son. They both brought touches of humour to the barricades in the moments before the inevitable slaughter. Yet

with this final stand the tone of the production again seemed to miss its mark, being too melodramatic and, with grand gestures such as the unfurled red flag, too self-conscious.

The play ended on the evening I saw it with an announcement from Richard Griffiths, who had been playing Thiers. He said that the cast wished to state their opposition to the recent imprisonment of Czechoslovak dissidents such as the playwright Václav Havel and recommended protest to the Czech Embassy. Immediately from the audience came cries of "What about Chile?", "What about the workers?", "What about the firemen?" and the counterblast "What about Kronstadt?" As people left heated political argument was in the air and I suspect Brecht would have enjoyed this postscript as the most dramatic moment of the evening.

JIM HERRICK

LETTERS

CANNIBALISM AND COMMUNION

May I offer a little more of my "nonsense" in reply to the latest Bull from my good friend Pope Nicolas? ("The Freethinker", November 1977).

I made no reference in my letter to any "inside information" on the subject of Kirkup's "disowning" of his poem. What I said is fully confirmed by the details now provided by Nicolas Walter—for which thanks.

According to the New Testament and the poem Christ was dead when taken down from the Cross. Now I read, according to Nicolas, that he was only "dying". But then who am I to say that Nicolas Walter cannot rewrite the Gospels and the poem?

And must I, as a religious humanist, teach secularism to the secularists? Of course the Communion Service is about ritual cannibalism. "Take, eat, this is my body . . ." What else?

The Church, for its Roman sins, took proper communion, i.e. convivial people taking real food and drink, and reduced it to a symbolic expression that put pseudo-divine authority (the blessing of the bread and wine) in the hands of an exclusive priesthood. It is interesting that many congregations now adjourn for coffee, i.e. real communion, after the pseudo-communion service. They are learning!

I am delighted that Nicolas, on behalf of desiccated rationalism, associates me with that real founder-figure of twentieth century humanism—D. H. Lawrence. The rest of his letter is in such bad taste that I don't need to comment.

Is our spiritual-intellectual poverty such that we are driven to dredge the gutters to find something to write about? From that bracket count me out!

PETER CADOGAN

RATIONAL LOOK AT MUSIC

Under the title "Art as the Enemy of Rationalism" George Jaeger writes: "Another art form which in many respects is a hindrance to rationalist advance is that of classical music." ("The Freethinker", October 1977.)

What arrant nonsense! To those of us, who, like

myself, prefer secular music there is a great wealth of classical music to enjoy without any sacrifice to our rationalism. For example, Mozart's "The Marriage of Figaro", "The Magic Flute", "Don Giovanni" and the superb clarinet concerto. There is also Dvůřák's cello concerto and his beautiful Eighth Symphony, which so vividly portrays the Bohemian countryside, as does Smetana's "Ma Vlast".

What about Beethoven's Pastoral Symphony and his thrilling piano concerto and sonatas? The list is almost endless. Music is the most dynamic of the arts and its enjoyment can give both an emotional and intellectual satisfaction through appreciation of beauty and structure that in no way hinders a rational appraisal of religious beliefs and their absurdities.

O. FORD

SHELLEY AND VOLTAIRE NOT RENEGADES

In the discussion after Nicolas Walter's most interesting lecture to the South Place Ethical Society on Richard Carlile, I tried to indicate that he was wrong that Shelley ever renegaded on his political or atheistic views, and as Walter's letter ("The Freethinker", November 1977) still rather suggests Shelley repudiated "Queen Mab" on these grounds, I must repeat that his reasons were, like Kirkup's, aesthetic and based on the immaturity of the poem. Considering the age at which Shelley wrote it this is hardly surprising. Nevertheless he wrote he was "amused" at an attempt to republish it, and added, "I wish to protest against all the bad poetry in it."

From Italy Shelley continued to oppose all attacks on English political and religious liberty, and his prose work, "A Philosophical View of Reform", written between 1820 and 1822 (the year of his death) and not published until a century later, makes totally clear his commitment to his earlier views but with far more mature powers of analysis. His arguments have often, and rightly, been said to have anticipated Taine, Marx and Engels, and indeed Engels and John Stuart Mill, as well as Bernard Shaw later, all proclaimed Shelley's profound influence on their thought.

Shelley's disillusion in his last years was not with his ideas, but with his almost total failure to get his later poems and prose works published in England. It was a depression of this kind that caused him, a few months before his death, to write: "If I die now I have lived to be older than my father: I am 90 years of age."

Nor did Voltaire ever renegade in thought. He was a deist, never (unlike Shelley) an atheist, who lived and wrote in exile to avoid certain persecution. It was only on his death-bed, back in France, that at the age of 84 he had some fear (as Thomas Paine did) about the disposal of his bones as a non-Christian, and to try to obtain proper burial, and also to help the Académie Française in its wish to honour him, he penned the ambiguous "Confession": "I am dying in the worship of God, loving my friends, without hatred of my enemies and with contempt for superstition. 28 February 1778. Voltaire."

It was, not surprisingly, unacceptable, and on 2 March Voltaire gave in, but even then he rallied enough to refuse the Sacrament (freethinkers with a sense of Voltaire's own sly humour will appreciate his po-faced excuse: that because of his continual haemorrhages he had no wish to mix his blood with that of God!) In the French Revolution his works were fully published, read and honoured in France for the first time; but on the restoration of the Bourbons his bones were dug up, desecrated and lost as he had feared.

AUDREY WILLIAMSON

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).
 Herbert Armstrong and His Worldwide Church of God,
 J. Bowden. 25p (10p).
 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).
 Pagan Christmas, R. J. Condon. 20p (7p).
 The Devil's Chaplain, H. Cutner. 10p (10p).
 Muslim Politics in Secular India, Hamid Dalwai. 50p
 (12p).
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Anti-Abortion Pressure

stituency, we need to follow the Catholic example and have the equivalent of the Catholic Parents' and Electors' Association. This will keep a watchful eye on issues affecting the personal freedom of humanists, and the way in which public money is siphoned off into the pockets of religious pressure groups with the connivance of Catholic councillors who are supposed to be the guardians of the public purse. The pressure group LIFE, to take a current example, is busy trying to obtain gifts of local authority houses to use for its own 'charitable' purposes. In Barnet where I live, this aim has been energetically pursued for the past two years. This demand by LIFE has been rejected so far by both the Social Services Committee and the full Council, much to its credit. If there is a shortage of accommodation in Barnet for unsupported mothers, and there well may be, why cannot the Council provide accommodation direct? Why should it be required to mediate its benevolence through an anti-feminist pressure group of which many of the ratepayers disapprove strongly on moral grounds? There is no good reason for this, but one bad one—the 'Organised Conscience' of the Roman Catholic Church makes such attempts possible."

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. Rose Hacker of the GLC: "Marriage Guidance". Sunday, 4 December, 5.30 pm. Imperial Hotel, First Avenue, Hove.

Bristol Humanist Group. "Handicapped—a look at local facilities". Sunday, 11 December, 3.00 pm. 6 Redland Park, Bristol 6. Inquiries: Derrick Hunt, tel: Bristol 504163.

Glasgow Humanist Society. "Lib-ing together?—the role of the sexes today". Discussion, Sunday, 11 December, 7.30 pm. 14a Glebe Road, Cambuslang.

Hasving and District Humanist Society. Mr I. Clegg: "The Rosicrucian Order". Tuesday, 20 December, 8.00 pm. Harold Wood Social Centre. (Corner of Squirrels Heath Road and Gubbins Lane.)

Leeds and District Humanist Group. Dr Colin Campbell: "The Future of Humanism". Tuesday, 13 December, 7.45 pm. Swarthmore Education Centre, Woodhouse Square, Leeds.

Lewisham Humanist Group. Saturnalian Party. Thursday, 15 December, 7.45 pm. Unitarian Meeting House, 41 Bromley Road, Catford.

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

London Young Humanists. Helen Buckingham, of PLAN (Prostitution Laws are Nonsense): "Prostitution and Humanism". Sunday, 18 December, 7.30 pm. 13 Prince of Wales Terrace, London W8.

Merseyside Humanist Group. Yuletide Social. Wednesday, 21 December, 7.30 pm. 248 Woodchurch Road, Birkenhead. Inquiries: Anne Coombes, tel: 051-608 3835 or Marion Clowes, tel: 051-342 2562.

Muswell Hill Humanist Group. Roland Fenton: "Carlisle and his Circle". Wednesday, 14 December, 8.30 pm. 15 Woodberry Crescent, N10.

South Place Ethical Society. Sunday Morning Meetings. 11.00 am. 11 December, Tony McWalter: "The Spuriousness of the Fact/Value Distinction". 18 December, Peter Cadogan: "All Religions are One—Blake". Sunday Forum. 11 December, Jonathan Tyler: "Do we need an ecology party?". Tuesday Discussions. 7.00 pm. 13 December, Geoffrey Stern: "The Future of East/West Relations". 20 December, Linda Woolf: "Health and Fitness in Retirement".

Sutton Humanist Group. Mr E. George, Careers Officer: "Problems of Youth Unemployment". Wednesday, 7 December, 7.30 pm. Friends' House, Cedar Road, Sutton.

Tyneside Humanist Society. W. Bell: "Paleolithic Cultures". Wednesday, 7 December, 7.30 pm. Friends Meeting House, 1 Archbold Terrace, Newcastle-upon-Tyne.

West Glamorgan Humanist Group. Christmas Party. Friday, 16 December. Inquiries: W. Grainger, 24 Glanrafon Gardens, Sketty, Swansea. Tel: 22673.

THE FREETHINKER

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