

BABIES NOT FOR BURNING— ALLEGATIONS WITHDRAWN IN COURT

The authors Michael Litchfield and Susan Kentish withdrew the allegations, which were made in their book "Babies for Burning" and were understood to refer to the British Pregnancy Advisory Service, and apologised for any distress and damage which the allegations had caused, in High Court on 18 January 1978. The book, which has been used as the Bible of the anti-abortion lobby, included amongst its allegations the suggestion that pregnancy testing agencies told people that they were pregnant when they were not.

Mr Litchfield and Mrs Kentish now wish to make it clear that numerous generalised accusations about the conduct outside the National Health Service of doctors, abortion referral agencies, pregnancy testing agencies and private clinics were not intended to refer to BPAS. It was also admitted that suggestions that a BPAS clinic, Wiston in Brighton, was "an international centre for abortion" and made efforts to attract girls from all over the world "on special abortion junkets" was based on insufficient evidence.

Babies for Burning was reviewed in *The Freethinker* in 1975 when it first appeared. The reviewer cast doubt on the impartiality of the motive of the authors and questioned a number of the allegations. Later a letter was received from the authors' solicitors threatening a libel action. Following this a front page article in *The Freethinker* wrote of the distress the book could cause, and claimed *The Freethinker* would not be muzzled. No writ was issued. In the meantime, a *Sunday Times* report entitled "Abortion Horror Tales Revealed as Fantasies" shook the credibility of the book and its authors.

BPAS were confident that their action would have been successful had it been pursued in the courts. But they took the difficult decision of accepting the withdrawal and apology in view of the high

legal costs of continuing the case, and the likelihood that the authors and publishers (already having gone into liquidation) would, even if ordered to pay costs, have no money to do so.

The statement in court further vindicates those who have criticised the book, and further demonstrates the gullibility of those anti-abortionists who latched on to this book's evidence. Mr Litchfield claimed on 14 April 1975 that "Our investigation was 100 per cent accurate and we have the documentation to prove it"; but now this withdrawal in open court makes the statement look hollow.

The book's damage has now been done. It was of prime importance in encouraging parliamentary support for James White's Abortion (Amendment) Bill. Jill Knight, MP, for instance, said, "I know these authors and they are not scaremongers . . . They set out to investigate the rackets in abortion and in my view they succeeded." Diane Munday, Press Officer for BPAS, was one of those who set out to investigate the reliability of *Babies for Burning*, and believes had the BPAS action come to trial it would have proved how fictional are many of the book's allegations.

Religious Groups Foster Myths

Religious anti-abortion groups have quoted and sanctioned the book as gospel, with little regard for the mischief that resulted. For instance, even in the summer of 1977, the Festival of Light broadsheet said "The Nationwide Festival of Light has consistently backed these two young journalists and brought the books to the attention of the Christian public. Its almost unbelievable stories of the abortion racket show the dearth of moral fibre in Britain today." It is now clear that even the authors realize that a jury could have found the stories quite unbelievable.

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Suzie Hayman writes, concerning the implications of the High Court statement: "The Great Lie" doubtless existed as a propaganda technique long before the 1950s, but it took McCarthy to perfect it. "I have a list!" he would cry, from the floor of the Senate "of x hundred homosexuals/communists/men with red hair, who work in the defence department/FBI/the local grocery store . . ." and while everyone ran round in a panic howling for blood, nobody bothered to ask the senator to produce his list. McCarthy showed that if you tell a big enough lie loudly enough, often enough, with confidence and the assurance of proof, nobody is going to challenge you effectively and most people will believe you. The more outrageous the lie the better; for how could you dare assert anything quite that extreme unless it were true? When in February 1974, the *News of the World* carried the extraordinary series that was to be published as *Babies for Burning* at the end of the year, Kentish and Litchfield's claim that "Every quote we reproduce was tape-recorded by us" was sufficient for those with no memory of America in the 'fifties.

Wasted Parliamentary Time

The book led directly to a chain of events that has affected and will continue to affect every woman seeking an abortion in Britain today. James White, MP, had read the book in proof before he drafted his Abortion (Amendment) Bill and has stated that his chief source of knowledge was *Babies for Burning*. Many MPs stated publicly and privately that their support for a second reading of this Bill (the first Bill attacking the 1967 Act to get a second reading) was heavily influenced by reading this book, which had been circulated among MPs. Litchfield and Kentish were the *only* individuals called by the Select Committee to give oral evidence on the Abortion Amendment Bill. Benyon's Bill was based on the recommendations of this committee—a committee that started off being heavily biased against abortion and whose final recommendations were actually produced by a truncated committee when the six pro-abortionists resigned in disgust.

Throughout this sequence of events the Department of Health and Social Security has had to spend thousands of man-hours investigating and sifting evidence, preparing for parliamentary debates and committee discussions, Parliament itself has lost weeks of valuable time considering "abuses"—that either never existed or had been eliminated months or years previously. Indeed, the only extant abuses of the 1967 Act are the inequalities of the National Health Service provision and the fact that many women still present late, due to ignorance, fear or deliberate delay on the part of some doctors. It is arguable that if the DHSS, Parliament and public opinion had not been so hobbled over the last three years, these abuses would not still exist.

These then are some of the effects of this tract. What of the implications of this, the third and most important legal action to result in a defeat for Litchfield and Kentish?

In a sense, the withdrawal of the allegations against the British Pregnancy Advisory Service should be enormously important in that it throws significant doubt on *all* the allegations made in the book. Litchfield claimed that he and his accomplice submitted BPAS to the same "tests" as all other organizations, and had proof to back his claims. Among the tapes some are inaudible, some have been "lost" and those that do exist, when independently transcribed, show that the quotations used, where genuine, are selective in the extreme.

Despite the facts produced by the DHSS, despite the weight of public opinion, despite the complete lack of evidence to support allegations of "abuse", criticism by a vocal minority continues.

But is it abortion abuses these critics deplore—or abortion itself? Surely the argument really revolves around ideology: you either believe abortion is always wrong and the rights of the foetus equal or supersede those of the mother, or you recognise the necessity to accept priorities and individual circumstances. If you hold the former view, the brutal fact is that you are in a minority in our society. The only way you can impose your views is to whip up an emotional reaction, not *for* your argument, but *against* your opponents. You must hide the problems of unwanted children behind a smokescreen of the supposed or exaggerated evils of abortion.

The Stories Go On

This is why *Babies for Burning* was and still is such an important document, despite its discrediting. As Diane Munday, Press Officer of BPAS, points out "The sources are lost, but the stories go on." The Great Lie has been spread. Provincial newspapers *still* continue to print letters parroting the more extreme nonsense contained in the book . . . but nobody ever thinks it necessary to quote sources: a popular mythology has taken over. It is worth noting, for instance, that only *The Times*, the *Guardian*, the *Daily Telegraph*, and the *Sunday Times* printed the withdrawal of allegations, although more carried the original scandal.

BPAS are still coping with the after-effects of the book. An early morning cleaning team has to erase the night's graffiti "Babies burned here . . . This way for the Gas Ovens . . ." etc, before the arrival of clients, already distraught, already in the throes of a traumatic experience. Counsellors are now used to having to answer anxieties, fears and guilts directly attributable to stories from this pernicious book: "Is it a 'baby'? . . . will it cry when you burn it? . . . can it feel anything?" As Diane

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No First Use

DAVID TRIBE

The Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament, whose remarkable rise and fall has not yet been fully charted, was a deeply-felt, if unsuccessful, response to the world growth of nuclear weapons. But the proliferation of nuclear arms continues apace today, and efforts to counter the dangers to world peace which this involves continue as well. Here David Tribe, who was himself a CND supporter, describes the movement "No First Use", which aims to limit the dangers of nuclear power.

for with it the whole dream of disarmament largely faded.

Not entirely so. CND has survived organisationally, and its UK National Committee, Scottish National Committee, NW Region and London Region are among signatories to the "No-First-Use" pledge. So too is Women for World Disarmament under its indefatigable Founder President and distinguished secularist, Mrs Kathleen Tacchi-Morris. They have kept alive the concept of disarmament when it was in danger of becoming a dirty or discarded word. And it is vitally important it should be kept alive.

Now, I don't suppose the world has ever been in a state of total disarmament, or that too many idealists expect it ever will be. Few people walk down a dark laneway without a thought as to whether their shoes are tightly fastened, their bag or umbrella tightly clasped, or their hand within reach of makeshift defence. Nations likewise walk down many dark laneways and feel an instinctive need for protection and preparedness. But it is one thing to turn at a footstep behind one or tense at a figure before one, and another to lurch at every passer-by and put a judo hold on every hand raised in salutation, on the off chance that all but oneself are cutthroats. Indeed, if everyone were to go about his or her daily duties obsessed by the "pre-emptive strike", individual neurosis and collective disorder would quickly follow.

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By September 1977 13 members of the House of Lords, 78 members of the House of Commons, 24 general secretaries or presidents of national trades unions and ten internationally distinguished scientists were among supporters of the "No-First-Use" campaign. What has the Bishop of Birmingham in common with Margaret Drabble? Both are signatories to the "No-First-Use" Pledge. What do organisations in Canada, Britain, the United States, East and West Germany, New Zealand, Japan, Greece, Poland, Nigeria, Guyana and the Soviet Union not want to use first? Nuclear weapons.

Though protest movements have their fashions like everything else, one of the most interesting post-war phenomena was the meteoric rise and comet-like collapse of the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament. That CND made no real progress in its heyday against the counter-pressure of nationalist politicians, munitions cartels, Muscular Christians, job-sensitive trades unionists, professional soldiers and scientists engaged in weapons development (half the world's total) is hardly surprising. What is, on the face of it, surprising is the sudden withdrawal of support for the cause by students, radicals and beleaguered taxpayers. Perhaps there was a feeling that CND was politically naive or militarily unrealistic or morally priggish. Perhaps there was a growing belief that the Great Deterrent was actually deterring. The real reasons for the decline of CND may never be known, and are less important than the decline itself;



Secularists March for Peace

Legitimate Grounds for Changing the Law

DULAN BARBER

The Christian tradition of hatred towards sex outside marriage has contributed to the stigma of illegitimacy. In this article Dulan Barber, a writer and author of "Unmarried Fathers", describes the feeling and experiences of being illegitimate and outlines reasons for changing the law. The National Council for One Parent Families is this year launching a campaign to abolish the status of illegitimacy and has presented evidence to the Law Commission Working Party on Illegitimacy, which is expected to report later this year.

I first came into contact with the National Council for One Parent Families (then called the National Council for the Unmarried Mother and Her Child) when I was writing a book called *Unmarried Fathers*. The Council's Director, Mrs Margaret Bramall was the first person outside my immediate family and a few friends to whom I was able to admit that one of my motives for wanting to write the book was my own illegitimacy.

I see now that I felt at home with the staff of the Council. I felt, in a curious way, that I belonged. That is a very rare thing for an illegitimate person to feel. Contact with the Council in a continuing work situation encouraged me to try to come to terms with my illegitimacy. The process had already begun when prompted by a very guilty conscience, I belatedly told my wife. After that I was able to discuss it with a friend, who is also illegitimate. But I made the mistake of thinking that that was it. It doesn't stop there. It is not simply a question of admitting the fact. You have to accept how it has affected your life and your personality. I am not sure, even now, that I have done so completely, but a climax was definitely reached in October 1977 when I publicly spoke about my illegitimacy at a press conference organised by the Council.

I took part in the press conference because it was called to announce the Council's proposals to the Law Commission's Working Party on Illegitimacy.* The most fundamental of these proposals is an unabashed call for the abolition of the status of illegitimacy in English Law.

That word "status" still strikes me as a semantic insult. Indeed, it is only used in connection with the very laws that deprive me and my fellow illegitimates of status. As is so often the case, the law has it both ways: it confers upon thousands of people

**Abolishing Illegitimacy*, a summary of the proposals, can be obtained, price 25p, from the National Council for One Parent Families, 255 Kentish Town Road, NW5 2LX.

the status of no-status.

But to change the law one must play the legal game and these excellent proposals, which have been drawn up by Jenny Levin, Senior Lecturer in Laws at Queen Mary College, are as sensitive as they are sensible. In essence they seek to establish a child's right to know his father, to have his own and rightful name, to be supported financially, to inherit from relatives other than his parents and to inherit British Nationality through either parent, regardless of the place of birth.

On the whole, the proposals have been favourably received, but people do voice doubts and fears. Some unmarried mothers feel that these changes, if made, will foist the father of the child on them. Some men are rather dubious about the assumptions of paternity outlined in the proposals.

It is important to understand, therefore, that these proposals seek to extend the rights of the individual, but do not take away any of those already established at law. The extant redresses, for both men and women, will remain open to them, but it is possible that the new proposals could reduce their take-up.

A man who admits paternity or accepts the Courts' assumption thereof, would have the rights and responsibilities of a father, if he wished. A woman could get better and more secure support for her child, but with no compulsion to endure a relationship she does not want.

False Thinking About Illegitimacy

Frankly, these worries make me angry. They are symptomatic of the whole pattern of thinking about illegitimacy which is based, I believe, on an assumption of conflict. The mother is wronged and duns the reluctant father through the Courts. The father is not encouraged to care, even to the extent of giving his name to his child. In fact, he is presumed not to care, as those unmarried men who have tried to become involved can testify. Yet I have never met a woman who did not suffer great distress from having to acquire a paternity order in a Criminal Court, nor a man who did not resent being forced to pay, without benefit of rights.

I believe, in fact, that these objections vanish if we develop the habit of thinking about and for the good of *the child*. Because I think we must approach the question from this standpoint, I am most annoyed and insulted by those who say of these proposals "Are they really necessary? Does it actually matter?"

It is extremely difficult to explain to such people that even if it were true that society is now so enlightened and tolerant that it makes no dis-

tion, not even to the raising of an eyebrow, between legitimate and illegitimate persons, it would still matter. It would because so many of us would still have the label hung around our necks and would continue to have less rights than the majority of citizens.

For example an intelligent and sensible friend of mine chose to have a baby and not to marry the father. She has made an enviable life for herself and her daughter against considerable odds. Yet because of the accidental and unavoidable fact that the baby was born, due to her mother's work, in America, she is denied British Nationality and a British Passport. Can that ever be just? I have both, as of right, because my mother happened to bear me, albeit illegitimately, in England.

In general terms these proposals matter because we must do what little we can to alleviate the emotional difficulties most illegitimate people encounter. No law, no dramatic shift in social attitudes can actually protect us from these problems, but the worst and most common—the identity crisis—would be eased if we had, at least, the right to a paternal name, and a complete and accurate birth certificate.

Right to Full Knowledge

Personally, I feel we should have the right to a full and proper knowledge of how and why we came to be born. I would like to see a right to the truth of one's conception and birth, but this is not a practical area of legal concern. But I do hope that abolition of illegitimacy will encourage lone parents and their relatives to accept a form of accountability to their children.

I feel this so strongly because it is the root of my particular problem. I spent the first 27 years of my life in a web of lies. I was raised on a fantasy of a tragically killed father. Then, in anger, I was told the truth. The truth was recanted. Somehow—I think children nearly always do—I recognised the truth and felt no stigma or trauma. But I was taught to be ashamed. I must never mention this truth because it would rebound on my mother.

I obeyed instructions so slavishly that, as I've already mentioned, I could not even tell the woman I married. I think the most embarrassing moment of my life occurred on my wedding day when I repeated the fantasy to the Registrar. A year later, I obtained a copy of my birth certificate—a document which had been scrupulously kept from me all my life. On it I found not only an additional christian name, about which I had been entirely ignorant, but a non-existent father as well.

I was more fortunate than many because I knew my father, but he is not mentioned on my birth certificate. I then realised that I had married and made a will in a name which was not, as far as I knew, legally mine. Fortunately, the law accepts

that one's name is legal if one is commonly and generally known by it, so I was not guilty of an inadvertent crime. But for a while I felt that I might be and, worse, that I did not exist at all.

The farrago that is my birth certificate underlines Jenny Levin's point that we do not take these important documents seriously enough. One of her legal concerns is to tighten up the registration of births, primarily to help the child but also to provide accurate and responsible records.

Now the Council has held out to me the possibility of becoming, before I die, non-illegitimate, as I would have been long ago had I been born in Sweden or New Zealand. How does it feel? Exciting, if I'm honest. I don't think that I will feel any different. I know that it won't remove the damage, both personal and in terms of family relationships that the handling of the circumstances of my birth has caused, but I will feel better. I shall feel that the often painful and sometimes terrifying process of trying to come to terms with my illegitimacy will have been worthwhile. There is a gut-reaction to all this, and perhaps not a very nice one, but I do feel that I deserve something for the emotional mess I have been for much of my life.

Above all, I don't ever want it to happen again. Utopian as it may sound, I want a society in which no child will ever again be damaged and embarrassed by his or her illegitimacy. I do not want them to feel lost or shamefully "different" because of their parents' marital status.

For that reason alone I feel justified in asking everyone to consider these proposals carefully, with the child in mind, and to support them. I would ask everyone to think about something Margaret Bramall said at the press conference: "Of the three great accidents of birth—race, sex and the marital status of the parents—only discrimination against those born outside marriage—the so-called illegitimate—remains legal."

Stigma from Christianity

It was the Christian Church, of course, that first visited the stigma of illegitimacy upon us. In its fanatical concerns to regulate the sexual impulse, it insisted on marriage and those who did not comply, by accident or design, were not only condemned but had their "sins" embodied in their bastards. And the law, here as elsewhere, followed the Church's dictates.

Fortunately, we can escape the Church—I cannot see how, without hypocrisy, it can welcome me, having dubbed me illegitimate in the first place—but not the law. I doubt that we can change the Church but I'm certain that laws were made to be reviewed and altered, especially when basic human rights are concerned. These proposals give us all a unique opportunity to stop penalising the victims of the third great accident of birth.

Len Ebury—A Warrior Lost

"We have lost a warrior—Len Ebury died in his sleep on 19 December 1977", writes Eva Ebury. Len Ebury was an outstanding outdoor speaker, and secularism and socialism were the major interests of a lifetime's public speaking. He had been a familiar and admired figure as an open-air speaker since the 'twenties, and was still in harness at Tower Hill and Marble Arch in his last year.

His father, George Ebury, fought for economic justice and his mother for women's rights. Len Ebury followed this example with a lifetime devoted to enlightening people. He possessed the unusual ability of holding an audience and raising a laugh, while never losing sight of his purpose of making people think for themselves. As a self-educated man his knowledge was wide and deep, spanning philosophy, church history, literature and science: he could quote Shelley or Shakespeare or explain scientific materialism with equal ease.

"There are many people set thinking by him", writes Gordon Atfield, who heard him speak many times. "He was a firm defender of freedom of speech, and believed deeply in the value of making people think for themselves. His socialist principles were related to his hatred of exploitation and deception."

In the past Len Ebury took an important part on the National Secular Society platform, and he was a leading figure in the London Secular Group.

A cremation took place at Kensal Green (where

Richard Carlile is buried) quietly, with no service, and the "Internationale" was played.

Eva Ebury writes: "Len's great battle was for mental liberation. *Ecrasez l'infâme* meant to him all religions, all superstitions. If the mind is clear of hopes and fears of rewards and punishments in the hereafter then man could rationalise about his present. He never ceased his efforts. He never wavered.

"His breed is dying out and the world is poorer. He was a great orator—simple, direct, with humour and charm; he could get his message over as results have shown during his 54 years of service to the 'Best of Causes'. But his voice was only one against vested interests, political, clerical and imperialistic. He was satisfied that he had at least cleared some minds in bondage from mental slavery.

"That voice is now still; and what can we say of that humble soldier in the army of mental liberation? Perhaps, as Lindsay Vachell wrote of Peter Altgeld, Governor of Illinois and fighter for freedom:

'Sleep softly—eagle forgotten under the stone,
Time has its way with you there, and the day
has its own.

Sleep on, O brave hearted, O wise man that
kindled the flame,

To live in mankind is far more than to live
in a name,

To live in mankind, far, far more—than to
live in a name'."

No First Use

On the cover of a valuable little pamphlet freely available from the Institute for World Order (1140 Avenue of the Americas, New York, NY 10036) and entitled "Ten Minutes for Peace" is the simple message: "You have to begin peace within yourself." You need not be a peace-at-any-price pacifist or a turn-the-other-cheek sentimentalist to recognise that co-operativeness and bellicosity are both contagious, particularly bellicosity. Treating someone as a friend will not necessarily make a friend; but treating someone as an enemy will assuredly make an enemy. Not everyone who asks you for the time in a dark alley is a mugger seeking to catch you unawares. Strangers often do want to know the time. It may be unwise to wander down byways in a mystical trance or philosophical reverie and with both one's arms in splints, but belligerent strutting is the worst way to avoid trouble and a friendly confident smile the best.

The arms race has prospered because people are frightened that any slowing down by one side will invite attack or economic stagnation. And so the

race has accelerated, and the result is economic stagflation and the risk of a bigger attack. Most social malaises spring from psychological malaises, from pernicious or avaricious expectations. Throughout the world the challenge today is to expect peace rather than war and reconstruction rather than rearmament. We seem to have missed the chance of making the United Nations a genuine peace-enforcing body or the community of scientists a genuine peace-promoting brotherhood. It seems inevitable that every nation will continue to want to keep its powder dry. But every individual has a responsibility to curb the proliferation of powder and to resolve not to use it first, just as he has the assurance that anti-ballistic missile systems have emasculated the nuclear pre-emptive strike. There is thus sense as well as sensibility in supporting the "No-First-Use" campaign. I commend it to all freethinkers.

"Blasphemy in Britain"—a pamphlet by Nicolas Walter. 25p plus 10p packing and postage. Available from G. W. Foote & Co, 702 Holloway Rd, N19 3NL.

JOTTINGS

WILLIAM McILROY

Soliciting support for a petition or a public statement is a form of activity that is slightly suspect. And not without good reason, for in the past a number of groups, notably MRA, have used people's names to promote various causes and finished up with egg on their faces when such support was denied.

When The Committee Against Blasphemy Law asked me to undertake the collection of signatures to a statement condemning the trial of Denis Lemon and urging that the anachronistic common law offence of blasphemy be consigned to oblivion, I determined that all concerned should have the opportunity to read and give full consideration to the statement. Duplicated copies were distributed, and the names only of those who signed and returned them appeared in the published version.

There were a few surprises when the signed statements were, or were not, returned. We had been hopeful about controversial Christians like Dr John A. T. Robinson and Dr Una Kroll, but the support of Professor G. W. H. Lampe, who is widely regarded as the doyen of Anglican theologians, was particularly encouraging. And it became evident that people who usually hold fiercely opposing views are in agreement on the specific issue of blasphemy law.

Anyway, the full list of signatories appeared in the January *Freethinker*, so as a supplement I will now deal only with those who refused to sign or simply ignored the invitation to do so.

The latter category includes Lord Ritchie-Calder, tame humanist spokesman in many a public discussion, Dr Harry Stopes-Roe, Chairman of the British Humanist Association, Lord Soper, President of the Christian Socialist Movement, Sir Karl Popper and Left-wing MPs Robin Corbett, Lena Jeger and Ian Mikardo.

Refusals came from Professor G. A. Wells and Professor Antony Flew, who is now so far to the Right that he is in danger of falling off the edge. Professor Wells wrote: "I am not prepared to sign the statement . . . When the blasphemy law is invoked to prevent serious discussion of anything, I shall take a different view. At the moment, the whole agitation is linked with a poem I have not seen and am not interested in seeing. Propaganda about a poem which is widely regarded as offensive is not the way to attract people into humanism, nor to keep those in the movement who are already in it."

No doubt James Kirkup's poem did give offence to some people, as did some of Shelley's work. But

Kirkup was not prosecuted by the authorities for writing an offensive poem; Denis Lemon and Gay News Limited were prosecuted by an individual for publishing a religious poem she did not like. The Editor of a West London weekly newspaper was rather more perceptive than those who remain aloof from the campaign when he wrote: "The actual text of the poem . . . is immaterial in this argument, a fact that is often forgotten as the emotional reaction against the piece confuses assessment of the machinery which makes it criminal."

It may be the case that campaigning against religious zealots and censors will not attract some people to humanism and may even frighten off a few who are already in the movement. But it is just as likely that others will be put off humanism by Professor Wells' condemnation of a poem he has not read. Such prejudice could be expected from the secretary of a women's institute tea club, but not from a humanist academic and Vice-President of the Rationalist Press Association.

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Two years ago Mary Whitehouse launched her Save Religious Education crusade. It was intended to be an antidote to the mounting pressure against school religion which, she averred, had "very deep political implications." (Mrs Whitehouse is herself a "non-political" lady who has been, in her own words, "associated with Moral Re-Armament for many years.") A national petition was hawked around and signed by many people who would not themselves dream of starting the day by participating in a corporate act of worship or even with private prayer. But just as the dissemination of Right-wing politics is exalted as a patriotic duty, indoctrination is euphemistically described as the promotion of spiritual and moral welfare by religious authoritarians.

Mrs Whitehouse is not alone in her determination to protect Christianity's statutory position in the education system and to hold on to captive audiences in the nation's classrooms. Organisations like the Festival of Light, Order of Christian Unity and the Responsible Society constantly proclaim their anxiety to protect children from the excesses of non-Christian religious teachings, radical politics and, horrors, sex education.

In view of their touching concern for children's welfare we could have reasonably expected such groups to come down like a ton of bricks on the National Front for its widely publicised campaign to distribute its poisonous, racist propaganda in schools, particularly in areas where there is a substantial proportion of coloured people in the population. But I have yet to hear a word of protest that has emanated from these self-appointed guardians of juvenile virtue and morality against the activities

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BLASPHEMY MEETING

"The present campaign is probably the final stage in the fight against blasphemy laws that has been going on for nearly 200 years." This was the claim of Bill McIlroy, Hon Secretary of the Committee Against Blasphemy Law, when he introduced a public meeting on "Blasphemy Law and the 'Gay News' Case." The meeting took place at the Marlborough Hotel, Brighton, on Sunday 22 January 1978, and was organised by the Committee Against Blasphemy Law. The speakers were Nicolas Walter, Editor of "New Humanist", Michael Mason, News Editor of "Gay News", and Francis Bennion, barrister and Executive Committee Member of the Defence of Literature and the Arts Society.

Mr McIlroy also said: "There are elements in the Director of Public Prosecutions' and the Attorney General's departments who support censorship and repression. And it was evident to those who attended the *Gay News* trial last July that Mary Whitehouse has friends not only in high places, but in the highest places.

"Mrs Whitehouse believes that God is on her side. But she doesn't need supernatural assistance so long as she can depend on bewigged Establishment puppets to do her dirty work for her."

Nicolas Walter said that the case was significant not only because of its connection with the gay community and blasphemy law, but also for the wider principle of free speech. Religion, he said, was a taboo subject, like sex and the state. The law about what you can say in these areas has always been unclear. No-one has ever been certain what blasphemy is, and its use in the law courts has always been peculiar and unexpected; so it was impossible to predict whether a piece of writing was blasphemous or not. The Appeal judges were likely to show themselves just as confused about the state of blasphemy law as anyone else.

In the case of James Kirkup's poem, it was clearly the explicit homosexual aspect which had disturbed people, since the poem was the reverse of being anti-religious. It had just the right mixture of sex and religion to cause confusion. A straight attack on religion in, say *The Freethinker*, would not be prosecuted.

He concluded by stressing the importance of the poem remaining available. "Mrs Whitehouse must be shown that she cannot stop the poem being read." However, freedom does not come from public meetings and lobbying MPs. It has to be taken, not asked for. This should be done by circulating the poem.

Michael Mason referred to himself as someone who had been in the firing line at the time of the trial since he worked for *Gay News*. While mentioning his own enthusiasm for football, he commented: "If only Mary Whitehouse had the good manners

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of your average football hooligan. Her team discredited her side by their action."

It is very dangerous to protect people from being offended. We must expect to give and take a little offence in social intercourse. There could be no possibility of legislating for belief.

The case had placed Christians in a dilemma, for the poem accepted basic Christian ideas such as Jesus as the son of God, resurrection, and the doctrine of atonement. "The Authorized Version of Christ that emerged from the Old Bailey was the well-behaved Jesus of the Tupperware party, promising to save his flock from nothing more serious than income tax." *Gay News* was caught in the cross-fire of evangelical politics, in the conflict between the tambourine wavers and the "over-liberal" churchmen. Gay Christians, he said, had come out worst from the trial. The opportunity to get rid of the law should now be taken. It was very important for those who might fall foul of the law in the future.

Francis Bennion, speaking as a lawyer, commented on the legal aspects of blasphemy law as it had been used in the past and in the *Gay News* case. No-one would enact such a law now. A disturbing feature of the case was the way the normal committal proceedings were by-passed. Another strange aspect of the trial was that expert evidence was not allowed.

A change in the law was important, said Francis Bennion, and a relevant Bill was being introduced into the House of Lords by Lord Willis in the near future. Extracts of the poem were read by Mr Bennion on the grounds that people had a right to know what the poem was about. "This antique law" he said, "is an unwarrantable interference with free speech and communication."

QUEST—ION

Anyone who watches commercial TV can hardly have avoided seeing all those ads for a new glossy magazine, *Quest*, from (where else?) the United States. It purports to be a general-interest magazine, with the emphasis on good news, on excellence, on optimism. It is therefore surprising to find that it is financed by the Ambassador International Cultural Association—the multi-national organisation founded by doorstep salesman Herbert W. Armstrong, who, having made his pile selling funda-

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mentalist religion, groomed his photogenic son, Garner Ted, as its chief salesman. Their faces are familiar from the give-away (and post-free) magazine, *Plain Truth*, the English edition of which, together with innumerable doctrinal pamphlets, emanates from "Ambassador College" in St Albans. But optimism is hardly the keynote of *Plain Truth*, which is mainly concerned with Armageddon—prophesied as imminent, through a nuclear holocaust.

For optimism you pay 50p; doom comes free of charge. What Herbert and Garner believe themselves—apart from omnipotence of the dollar—is anybody's guess. But their appeal to industrialists, of course, is that, one way or the other, the Armstrongs' publishing empire succeeds in keeping the proles content with their lot, making them honest, and putting up their productivity, by conning them that they can leave thinking to the experts.

The International Humanist and Ethical Union Conference is to be held on 31 July to 4 August 1978. It will be held at the London School of Economics, Houghton Street, London WC2. (Please note change of venue.) Accommodation will be available at a nearby hotel. Details and booking forms from BHA, 13 Prince of Wales Terrace, London W8 5PG.

Freethinker Fund

Thanks are offered to the following kind contributors to the fund: Anon, £10; Anon, £1; J. L. Allison, 60p; I. Bertin, £1.60; S. Birkin, £1.60; J. H. Budd, £3.60; J. G. Burdon, 50p; A. C. F. Chamber, 60p; P. R. Chapman, £1; P. Crommelin, 60p; A. A. H. Douglas, 60p; Mrs H. Eckersley, £1; A. Foster, £1.60; In memory of Bert Folley, £1; E. A. Goodman, £1; L. S. Harvey, £3; E. J. Hughes, £1; J. Hudson, 60p; N. Inkpen, £3; F. C. Jennings, 60p; E. H. Kirby, 60p; P. J. McCormick, 25p; J. M. McCorriskin, 50p; Mrs M. G. McIver, £2.60; F. Muskett, £3; E. A. Napper, £2; P. Neilson, £2; A. Oldham, £4; P. J. Payne, 60p; G. Raphael, 60p; R. J. Sandlands, £1.10; W. Shuttleworth, £2.40; Barbara Smoker, £4.15; D. C. Taylor, £3; E. Westman, 23p; C. Wilshaw, £3.60; Miss E. B. Woolstone, 85p; D. Wright, £2; G. N. Wright, 35p; J. S. Wright, £2; I. Yетtram, £1. Total for the period 16 December 1977 to 19 January 1978: £71.33.

ROSE BUSH

Rose Bush has died at the age of 79, following complications resulting from a motor accident. She was closely associated with the humanist movement, and a member of the National Secular Society.

She was born in Coventry and came from a religious background. For a period in her youth she was, like her father, an active member of the Evangelical Bible Students Association. Doubts led her to search for an alternative to religion and she was influenced by the writings of Bertrand Russell and Julian Huxley.

Rose Bush was closely involved with the Humanist Housing Association from the time of its foundation in the fifties. For many years she acted as Secretary to the Housing Association and was its Chairman up to her death. She was always concerned that there be a close link between the tenants and the committee. Rose Bush Court in Hampstead is a fitting memorial to her work.

Her funeral was conducted by Peter Cadogan, who spoke of her particularly close association with the South Place Ethical Society. He has written of her "extraordinary sensitivity" and her "capacity for caring, self-effacement and forgiveness".

MR M. CYMBALIST

Mr Mark Cymbalist has died at his home in Inverness aged 84 years. He was a member of the National Secular Society and reader of *The Freethinker* for many years. In Inverness he was well known for his active part in the continuing struggle against organised religion. He was cremated in Aberdeen.

MR O. JAMIESON, Snr

After a long illness, Mr Ogilvie Jamieson has died at his home in Renfrewshire. As a lifelong supporter of *The Freethinker*, atheist and socialist, he has left food for thought in a community where he was well loved and respected. He was cremated after a secular service at Woodside Crematorium, Paisley, and is survived by two sons and a daughter.

The appeal in the "Gay News" case will take place at the Royal Courts of Justice, Strand, London, on 13 February. A demonstration is being organised by the National Gay News Defence Committee. This will take place on Saturday 11 February, starting at 1.00 pm at Temple Underground Station and ending with a rally in Trafalgar Square. A contingent from the National Secular Society will support the demonstration. There will also be a picket outside the Royal Courts of Justice on Monday 13. Demonstrators will meet at Leicester Square at 7.00 pm on the day the result is announced.

THE PASSIONATE SHEPHERDESS: Aphra Behn 1640-89 by Maureen Duffy. Jonathan Cape, £7.50.

Reading *The Passionate Shepherdess* is rather as it might be—I guess—to be present at the opening up of some splendid new tomb. Stumbling into the air, all you can fairly say is: “There seem to be some extraordinary things down there”. I mean, all I can fairly say: because in fact the book is half of a process, the second half of which has to be the reading of Aphra Behn’s own work. In one respect, it’s half of a process that has small hope at the moment of completion. That’s because Aphra Behn was a playwright as well as a poet and early novelist. Maureen Duffy is convinced that some, certainly, of her plays could be put on tomorrow, and be an enormous success—if the right theatrical idiom were found for them. It might strike a reader that one function of the National Theatre ought to be to brush the dust—or, as it might be, scrub the grime—off neglected dramatic modes. How but on the stage could Maureen Duffy’s claims for Mrs Behn be measured against, say, the readiness of Veronica Wedgwood to dismiss her work for the theatre as “numerous tedious and pretentious dramas”?

The claims Miss Duffy makes are, in general, large ones, and they are keenly made, backed up by appropriately passionate argument and (as most readers will be grateful to find) a fair amount of quotation. I told an acquaintance I was reading about Mrs Behn: he’s a university lecturer in English, with an interest in the seventeenth century, and he smiled moonily, vaguely, at her name. Vagueness or the tone of an unfavourable school report (“slapdash, a thoughtless hack with occasional flashes of talent”, wrote Victoria Sackville-West) seem to be the mark of comment on her down the centuries. The fact is that no less a judge than Defoe thought immensely highly of her, including her among the “giants of wit and sense” of the generation before his own. A reader of Miss Duffy’s book may conclude that she deserves to be very much better known, read and performed, if only because she was the first Englishwoman to earn her living as a writer: or because of her achievement as one of the earliest English novelists, who plainly influenced her immediate successors, and was, to boot, an inventor of the anti-hero: or for the story of her life, which Maureen Duffy has reconstructed despite a desperate parsimony of documents, and which included an experience of espionage.

Why has she been, not simply neglected, but buried under such phrases of stale distaste? Miss Duffy’s case is that there are at least four reasons. She was not a man: she was a professional at a time when literature was the preserve largely of gentle-

men and wits: she was a sexually emancipated woman on the brink of a long period in our history when women were supposed to find sex abhorrent: and she was a contributor to that achievement of the baroque in our literature in which we seem to have little real delight. One of her most stunning poems was of a genre to which most of us today respond with mere blankness: it was a Pindaric Poem on the Happy Coronation of His Most Sacred Majesty James II and His Illustrious Consort Queen Mary. “A magnificent achievement, superb propaganda, and a televisual recreation of the sumptuous occasion for those who couldn’t be there”, Miss Duffy says of it. Aphra Behn was a Tory, but we are reminded that “the late seventeenth century was a time in which true progress lay elsewhere than where we have since, traditionally, thought it was.” It is surely true that to that extraordinary period we are, in a curious fashion, politically and aesthetically numb: perhaps because the high formality masks from us the vital paradoxes, like that one about the cluster of ideas and interests from which, at the time, real progress sprang.

Miss Duffy’s book, a real spring clean, moves the furniture about constantly, and fills the air with interesting dust. It’s a writer’s book about a writer: in the course of it she imagines herself again and again into Aphra Behn’s condition—reflecting, for example, on the speed with which she wrote, and had to write: and how she had to learn to write in a room full of people, because there were then no rooms of one’s own. “She wrote for bread”—the point is made insistently—“but she thought about her work, its purpose and practice.” Admirers of Miss Duffy’s own work (also as poet, playwright and novelist) will not be surprised to find that among the old ideas and attitudes that she reanimates are those about sex (“Nothing so affects the individual as the sexual climate in which he finds himself”) and about “the new religion, love”—which was also a game (“The love game was played rather like Monopoly with a great deal of fake coin and a constant going back to square one”).

A lively book, of the kind that the field of literary biography needs. Field? Well, drawing room, rather: I still see Miss Duffy as sort of maverick literary char, doing outrageous things with the furniture. Does she, rescuing Aphra Behn from undervaluation, over-value her? She reminds us that other distinguished chars shook the dust off John Donne (part of the dust having been deposited by Aphra Behn’s friend John Dryden, one remembers). If we

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can now enjoy Donne's First Anniversary without anachronistically worrying about his having never known Elizabeth Drury, the dead child for whom it was written, can we not thrust aside received opinions (and in Mrs Behn's case, how *received* they have been) and failures of historical imagination, and enjoy her as Maureen Duffy believes she is capable of being enjoyed? I hope to have an answer for myself after reading *Orinooko*, and *Love Letters Between a Nobleman and His Sister*, and some plays, and some poetry. Miss Duffy's book will send many in search of these texts, not too easily obtained.

I thought it might have been a mistake to begin *The Passionate Shepherdess* with such a long account of the search for a mere identity and *curriculum vitae* for Mrs Behn: fascinating detective work, it is nevertheless crammed with names and hypotheses, and it's like tinkering with several cart-loads of bones before one ever sees them assembled into a possible body and given flesh and dress. I'm shattered to find that an informality I'm theoretically devoted to, the use of I'm instead of I am, and don't instead of do not, worries me when it's used throughout a scholarly book, like this one. The conversational effect somehow doesn't seem quite suitable. Does not seem quite suitable. Oh dear. But such quibbles, as I hope will be clear, can't really spoil a book so consistently interesting, and original, about a woman who—whatever final verdict a reader might come to—was as intelligent as she was beautiful, a gifted pioneer—whose unlikely name, it has occurred to me from time to time, might have been as much against her as anything else.

EDWARD BLISHEN

THE POLITICS OF THE JUDICIARY by J. A. G. Griffith. Fontana, £1.25.
THE POLITICS OF THE MEDIA by John Whale. Fontana £1.

Conventions may sometimes be useful; myths twist truth. Among the hard-dying myths are that practising Christians are always more loving and less self-seeking than unbelievers, that British is Best, that all our policemen are wonderful, that to disagree with the Conservative Party is unpatriotic, and that the Monarchy and the Judges are above politics.

Professor Griffith gives a lethal blow to the last-mentioned piece of fiction in his brilliant little book, which is all the more powerful for being closely and

soberly argued and is no mere polemic. Starting from a survey of the educational and social background of our senior judges (which is predictably elitist), he reviews their activities in and characteristic attitudes towards a number of areas—civil liberties, industrial and race relations, immigration, official secrets, property rights, moral issues, conspiracy, students and trade unions—and concludes, unsurprisingly, that their conscious assumption of "impartiality" is vitiated by their unconscious in-built biases. Why, for instance, do they make light of breaches of natural justice when these are perpetrated by an educational institution against a student but censure them severely when the lapse is by a trade union against one of its members?

"To expect a judge to advocate radical change, albeit legally, is as absurd as it would be to expect an anarchist to speak up in favour of an authoritarian society," says Professor Griffith. And we live, he points out, in an increasingly authoritarian society. Politically, judges are parasitic, simply because they are a part of the oligarchy which still governs us. Like the other members of this group, judges show themselves alert to protect the existing social order from threats to its stability.

They do so by regarding themselves as the guardians of a homogeneous "public interest"—a concept which seems self-evident to them but which many of us besides the Marxists increasingly call into question. (This conservative judicial role as upholders of the *status quo* is, incidentally, as pronounced in Communist countries as in capitalist ones.) "The judicial conception of public interest . . . is threefold. It concerns, first, the interests of the State (including its moral welfare) and the preservation of law and order, broadly interpreted; secondly the protection of property rights; and thirdly the promotion of certain political views normally associated with the Conservative Party." Whether intentionally or not, the higher courts are normally much more vigilant and critical of Labour governments than of Conservative ones.

"One of the greatest political myths is that the courts in this country are alert to protect the individual against the power of the State . . . minority groups, especially if they demonstrate or protest in ways which cause difficulty or embarrassment, are not likely to find that the courts support their claims to free speech or free assembly." In the *Hosenball* case, Lord Denning expressed the astounding opinion that, where national security and individual liberty clashed, successive Home Secretaries since the war have always discharged their functions "to the complete satisfaction of the people at large".

The judges, in fact, have frequently abrogated their self-proclaimed role as protectors of the individual. Their principal function is not the enlargement of liberty but the preservation of legal rights.

And the suspicion with which they have long been regarded by organised labour has hardened into positive distrust as a result of the activities of the ill-fated Industrial Relations Court whose creation, in Professor Griffith's view, demonstrated lamentable political folly on the part of the Tories and great political naivety on the part of the judges—none of whom protested at the time. I agree with his conclusion that, while our judges are usually at pains to be fair, they can never be "neutral" as between existing institutions and those who challenge them. However they perceive themselves, they are in the last resort agents of the State.

Mr Whale's book, though excellent in its own way, unfortunately does not follow Professor Griffith's example and scrutinise the political stances and biases of the media—though he does point out that newspapers (like judges) are a *socially* conservative force. His book should, in fact, have been more accurately entitled "Politics and the Media". It is a lively and concise account of the frequently strained relations between politicians and the press and broadcasting since the war. The various official inquiries—Ross, Shawcross and McGregor on the press, Beveridge, Pilkington and Annan on broadcasting—are recalled and analysed, and the party squabbles over commercial TV and radio catalogued. It is all interesting and useful stuff. But I should have liked to have gleaned more from Mr Whale about the political opinions and activities of those who work in—and sometimes, perhaps, manipulate—the media. Because, as he says, "even if journalism does not determine what people think . . . it clearly guides what they think about": a view which does not altogether tally with his cynical observation that "most people's minds are lazy, capricious, shy of abstract ideas, mildly prurient and soon bored."

If subsequent titles in this new Fontana series "Political Issues of Modern Britain" live up to the high standard of information and argument attained in these first two titles, the General Editors, Professor Bernard Crick and Patrick Seyd, will have good cause to congratulate themselves. Are they planning a contribution on *The Politics of Religious Belief*, I wonder?

ANTONY GREY

CIVIL LIBERTY—the NCCL Guide to Your Rights. Penguin, £1.75.

This 600-page reference book is bang up to date. (It includes details of changes brought about by the Criminal Law Act of 1977, relating to Conspiracy and Trespass, to sentence and trial by jury.) It is invaluable for those who wish to know their legal rights in all situations, not just those who fall foul of the law. If you are questioned or arrested, knowledge of sections concerning the powers of the police and your rights in criminal courts would be

most useful. Sections relating to the worker and the law, consumer rights, the motorist, privacy, education, medical rights, etc, would be of great interest to all citizens. For those involved in civil liberties issues, sections concerning public order, censorship and secrecy, and the European Convention of Human Rights offer fascinating information.

The book has an excellent index and a list of useful addresses. It should be on the bookshelf of every informed citizen, and no public or school library should be without it. £1.75 may seem expensive for a paperback—but where could you get cheaper legal information?

Now available on book-list from G. W. Foote & Co. 702 Holloway Road, London N19 3NL. (P & P. 26p)

THEATRE

AN INSPECTOR CALLS by J. B. Priestley. Shaw Theatre.

Members of an audience at *An Inspector Calls* may be forgiven for not immediately seizing upon the notion that J. B. Priestley set out to write "a history of the last 30 years or so." Thus it was described in the programme notes to the present revival of Priestley's famed intellectual teaser.

A play of course may be taken at many different levels, and with this one we are given a choice between morality play, political allegory or, quite simply, "whodunit". It may be as well to consider the last possibility first.

On a fine evening in the spring of 1912, a quiet family gathering is interrupted by the appearance of a police inspector making inquiries into a crime that has just taken place. Each member of the family, it seems, is implicated in the crime, but just how and why remains to be discovered. Straight away there are complications. What possible connexion could there be between this prosperous Midlands industrialist and his family and the horrible suicide of a down-at-heel beauty? The family are, understandably, indignant. They are pillars of the community, after all. The patriarch is on the verge of a knighthood; his wife heads the local charity. What right has this inspector to burst in on them and fire accusations like tracer bullets? How do they know the crime actually took place? And who is this inspector anyway? Is he genuine even?

These are the questions thrown up by the plot. To the extent that the play is, ostensibly, a cliff-hanger, a certain amount of suspense is maintained in withholding the ending. But this is Priestley, remember, not Dame Agatha, and we are assured of a moral statement behind all the cloak-and-dagger. and in the end, perhaps it does not really matter that the audience have stayed glued to their seats by the plot. For those who are already familiar with the play (or who remember the film starring

Alastair Sim in the title role), the appeal of the present revival may be more in its period flavour or in watching the certainty with which Priestley holds to his dialectic.

The play never seriously attempts to be a debating of moral issues. We are each, it tells us, responsible one to another, and anyone who doubts this will not be convinced by the argument. The opposition are straw men, waiting to be knocked down. They are given no ammunition with which to fight. Britain is not on the brink of a world war, says the industrialist, and the Titanic, due to set sail in a week's time, is "unsinkable". He is given equally fatuous comments denouncing Shaw and Wells and the rest of the Socialist rabble.

At the time it was written (1946), the play was presumably meant to refer to Britain's foreign policy as much as to our attitude at home; to quell cries of "make Germany pay" as well as heal a war-torn society. Interestingly enough, it received its first performance in Russia and was subsequently staged before a mining community in Monmouthshire to enthusiastic audiences.

The production at the Shaw perhaps requires an enthusiastic response, and on the night I saw the play, the theatre was half-filled. The cast occasionally fluffed their lines and waited nervously for laughs that were not forthcoming. Richard Moore as Inspector Goole was neither commanding nor, I thought, old enough to carry the part, and the play really needs this strong central performance in order to work. Only Shaughan Seymour was appropriately convincing, as the daughter's well-to-do fiancé. Failing the inspector's unflinching determination to swagget at the truth, Seymour's development from swaggeter to guilt-ridden humility seemed uncalled for. It left us doubting the inspector's identity, and Priestley, I am sure, never meant us finally to question the central dilemma.

JAMES MACDONALD

LETTERS

POLICE CORRUPTION

Antony Grey's review of the book "The Fall of Scotland Yard" (December "Freethinker") emphasises the magnitude of the corruption revealed last year in the Obscene Publications Squad by referring to "the relatively minor corruptions and illegalities of Det Sgt Challenor in the early 1960s." But Challenor's misdeeds were far from minor. His downfall came about when he planted eight half-bricks among the possessions taken from the pockets of eight young men (four demonstrators and four passers-by) arrested during a non-violent protest in July 1963, and one of them, Donald Room, had a laboratory test carried out on the pockets of his jacket to prove that the dust they contained included no brick-dust.

For several years, it later transpired, Challenor had made a habit of planting offensive weapons, stolen goods, housebreaking implements, etc, on innocent

people, whom he had arrested for no other reason than his dislike for their faces or their foreign (usually Italian) accents. At least 13 of these people served prison sentences of up to two years as a result. Surely this is worse than taking bribes, however large the sums involved.

Oh, yes: Challenor was said to be "insane" and "unfit to plead". This conveniently avoided the necessity of bringing him to trial, when awkward questions might have been raised as to how it was that his superior officers knew nothing of his methods (if, indeed, that was so) and why none of his many trainee detectives (about 25 at any one time) who observed and were made to participate in his malpractices saw fit to report him.

The strange coincidence, so many of Challenor's prisoners claiming in court that he had planted the evidence on them, was ignored by the Home Office and every other relevant authority. It was the penniless, under-staffed National Council for Civil Liberties that undertook research into these cases and finally, through press publicity and parliamentary questions, forced the Home Office to investigate the matter. But it was in vain that the NCCL urged the Home Secretary (Brooke) to release these prisoners while the slow investigation proceeded, so most of them had actually completed their prison sentences before their convictions were quashed by the court of appeal.

The reason why I remember the scandal so clearly, when Antony's Grey's memory of it, no doubt in common with most other people's, has grown hazy, is that I happened to be the "legal secretary" of the London Committee of 100 at the time, and was therefore present in court when the half-brick cases first came up. After interviewing some of the prisoners and their parents, I reported my findings to the NCCL the same day, and mentioned them in an article I wrote for the following issue of "Peace News".

Ultimately, in addition to the secret inquiries conducted by the police themselves, a full-scale public inquiry was set up—the first of its kind, under the Police Act 1964—and conducted by the Recorder of Derby, A. E. James, QC. But when his report was finally published, in 1965, it proved to be nothing but a police white-wash job. (See my report in "The British Journal of Criminology", January 1966.) Mr Jame's promotion to the Bench was announced shortly afterwards. And the myth of the "wonderful" British police remained intact. Though more massive police corruption has come to light in the past few years, and this, disquieting as it is, is to my mind far less so than Challenor's licensed villainy. After lying low until the furore about him had died down, he began, whether "insane" or not, to work once more for the CID—though he presumably remained "unfit to plead", since he was never brought to trial.

BARBARA SMOKER

DELUGE MYTHS

Mr W. H. Pemberton complains that my "Nu's Ark" is one-sided. True, but then it is well-known that the Babylonian Deluge myths were the immediate sources of the story in Genesis. To keep the article to a reasonable length, they were omitted in favour of Egyptian material which is not at all widely known but, as he agrees, could have played a part. The Jews, after all, were familiar with Egypt as well as Babylonia.

It is still a matter of opinion as to which was the earlier civilisation. Both the Encyclopaedia Britannica and the Larousse Encyclopaedia date the Babylonian from the third millennium BC and the Egyptian from the fourth. The Encyclopaedia Biblica puts them both in the fourth millennium, but denies that Egypt took

its mythology from Babylonia. On the whole I think Egypt has priority.

The mythical flood had nothing to do with conditions on earth, but was astronomical from the first. The Nile floods were a blessing, certainly, but in heaven "the boat of Ra is in fear of the whirlwind and the storm" ("Book of the Dead", chap 136b). This was the vessel of which Nu was captain. In Babylonia the flood was partly astronomical, for we read that "in heaven the gods feared the tempest and sought refuge". It remained for the Genesis writers to complete the process of development and present the matter as wholly terrestrial.

According to Mr Pemberton I should have written Nun rather than Nu, yet these are identical in every authority I have consulted. Nu is a conventional way of writing Nnu, which is only Nun transposed. The Egyptians often varied gods' names in this way. Other examples are Anpu for Anup and Atmu for Atum.

To say that Herodotus is notorious for misinterpreting myths is beside the point unless it can be shown that he has done so in those under discussion. And why is it far-fetched to link words of different tongues but of similar sounds and meanings? The world's languages have not developed in isolation. In English alone many hundreds of words may be traced beyond the Latin and Greek at which our dictionaries invariably stop. We owe far more to Egypt than is generally realised.

R. J. CONDON

KIRKUP, SHELLEY AND VOLTAIRE

I am sorry to take up more of your space to reply to two letters ("The Freethinker", December 1977).

In reply to Peter Cadogan, he's a fine one to call me a pope, when he's the professional pontificator of the humanist movement. He had implied that I had told him something new about James Kirkup's poem; I had in fact told him what had already appeared in the "New Humanist". He says I have tried to rewrite the poem and even the Gospels; I have in fact tried to tell him what the poem is about. He says it is about necrophilia, and adds that the Communion Service is indeed about ritual cannibalism; he can't in fact see the difference between being connected with something and being about something. He calls D. H. Lawrence the "real founder of twentieth century humanism"; he's welcome. He says the rest of my letter is in such bad taste that he doesn't need to comment; he can't.

In reply to Audrey Williamson, I have never suggested that Shelley or Voltaire were renegades, and I have never criticised them because under the pressure of criticism they disguised their views or denied their works; but the facts remain.

Shelley's attitude to religion is more complex than she suggests. He began as some kind of deist and ended as some kind of pantheist; in between he inclined towards what he calls atheism because of his hatred of Christianity and the influence of his friend Hogg, but he was hardly what we would call an atheist. When they were planning "The Necessity of Atheism" in 1811, Shelley told him he believed in "the soul of the universe, the intelligent and necessarily beneficent actuating principle" and believed that "some vast intellect animates infinity". "The Necessity of Atheism" is itself not so much atheist as what was later called agnostic. When it was incorporated into the notes to "Queen Mab" in 1813, the additions included an opening paragraph insisting that its denial applied only to "a creative deity" and not to "a pervading spirit co-eternal with the universe". The later essays on the subject, "A Refutation of Deism"

and the "Essay on Christianity", assumes that "God and the universe are synonymous" and that they are "the universal being". This attitude, resembling that of Spinoza and Einstein, could be called religious humanism.

Shelley's repudiation of "Queen Mab" is also more complex than she suggests. When he wrote it in 1813, he repeatedly mentioned its literary defects but was still "determined to give it to the world"; his wife Harriet said "it must not be published . . . because it is too much against every existing establishment". Even the privately published edition caused him trouble in 1817, when after her suicide it was used to deprive him of their children. Yet he still gave copies to his friends and defended its merits. His reaction to Clark's pirated edition in 1821 was based not on aesthetic feelings but on the practical fear that the republication of this early work would make the publication of his later works even more difficult. He described it publicly as "perfectly worthless" and privately as "villainous trash", and he even tried to get an injunction to suppress it, but he knew it was nothing of the kind and he still gave copies to his friends and defended its merits. All the same, he did moderate his political views to some extent, and the late essays, "A Proposal for Putting Reform to the Vote Throughout the Kingdom" and "A Philosophical View of Reform", were less extreme than most radical literature of that time.

And Voltaire's behaviour is much more complex than she suggests. The disingenuous confessions extracted from him on his deathbed (hardly "back in France", by the way, since he had been living in France for 20 years) are less relevant than the disingenuous game of hide-and-seek he played with both enemies and friends during the previous 60 years. Long after there was any danger of the persecution he suffered in his youth, as well as falsifying his age, his parentage and his name, he disguised his vast output behind a vast barrage of deception. As the greatest Voltaire scholar, Theodore Besterman, put it, "Most of Voltaire's works were printed clandestinely, under about 150 pseudonyms or entirely anonymously, with false dates and false imprints, under the names of imaginary publishers and printers, or with no name at all, in two or more places simultaneously, not always in the same country." The works thus treated include nearly all those on which his reputation rests today. I don't think either Shelley or Voltaire was wrong to do such things, but I do think that we would be wrong to pretend they didn't do them, and this was all I said in my previous letter.

NICOLAS WALTER

JUROR'S RESPONSIBILITY

I agree with Miss Smoker's views on affirmation (December 1977) but think it misguided of her to have dodged jury service because of being "very reluctant to sit in judgement on anyone." Someone has to decide the guilt or innocence of persons accused of crime, and there is surely no fairer method than the jury system.

Miss Smoker remarks that most of the jurors she watched at the Old Bailey probably found the evidence "quite incomprehensible". She sneers at people who still refer to the administration of law as "justice". Would she not have served the ends of justice better by lending her educated intelligence to the efforts of less capable people striving to reach just conclusions in the cases committed to their charge?

This strikes me as a rather reprehensible abdication of social responsibility—a modern variant of "trahison des clercs" perhaps.

FRANCIS BENNION

PAEDOPHILIA MISUNDERSTOOD

"The Freethinker" journal, by virtue of its nature, is dutybound, as I see it, to air controversial subjects so that readers may judge them in a dispassionate and rational manner and form their own conclusions.

I am therefore astonished that Stanley James Mace ("The Freethinker", January 1978) should come down so firmly on the side of blind prejudice. In criticising "The Freethinker" for publishing Antony Grey's article on paedophilia, he creates the impression that he is all in favour of maintaining the conspiracy of silence that has shrouded the subject for far too long, and that he would like "The Freethinker" to collaborate with this and aligned conspiracies by censoring itself whenever an unpopular or distasteful subject is raised.

Has he forgotten that not too long ago the discussion of abortion and homosexuality, for example, was taboo? If he were around in the earliest days of the "Freethinker" when it dared to rip away the mantle of hypocrisy and prejudice that sought to prevent many subjects from being openly discussed, would he have raised similar objections?

Although I do not intend entering a debate on paedophilia, as I know very little about the subject, may I make what I think is a commonsense observation? Mr Mace is convinced that a child cannot be the initiator of sexual activity with an adult, and that sexual activity between an adult and child automatically constitutes "molestation" or "assault" on the part of the adult. I believe him to be wrong on both counts.

Children are intensely curious—particularly in regard to sexual matters. No-one would deny that they indulge in some or other form of pre-pubescent activity with one another. This is a natural, non-harmful expression of that curiosity. Why then should it be assumed that if a child applies the same curiosity to an adult and this leads to a childish—that is to say a non-penetrative sexual encounter—the child will suffer physical or mental damage? And why should terms like "molestation" or "assault" be used when the child is clearly a willing partner?

Nevertheless, my own feeling is that whether an adult was the initiator or not, adult-child sexual relationships are essentially unsound and ought to be discouraged. Having said that, however, I should add that I do not feel that jail sentences serve any purpose whatsoever in cases free from violence or abduction.

What we desperately need is a greater understanding of the whole subject, and this can only be achieved through uninhibited discussion and open investigation—two things to which Mr Mace appears to be so strongly opposed.

BARRY DUKE

I think it was unfair of Stanley James Mace ("The Freethinker", January 1978) to condemn you for printing an article on paedophilia. I think that this and all sexual matters need further debate and less hysteria. I have heard of clergymen (some Anglican, some Catholic) who have had sexual relationships with children and I think it is disgraceful that these and other cases have been tried in an open court and in some cases harsh sentences given.

Recently in the North East a man who appeared to be mentally unbalanced exposed himself to women and was shown no understanding by the magistrate, who made him pay a huge fine.

I think humanists should continue to be humane and show concern and understanding for fellow human beings.

JOHN WATSON

Jottings

of cretinous jobs who have been assiduously stirring up hatred and contempt among white pupils against their coloured classmates.

Such reticence is not really surprising, for there is often an identity of interest between ultra-rightists and fundamentalist Christians who are prepared to turn a blind eye to racist doctrines.

I am convinced that, whatever her other faults, Mary Whitehouse is no racist. But she is no chicken either, and will probably withdraw from the public arena within the next decade. There are some exceedingly nasty pieces of work who are ready to take her place as the uncrowned monarch of the censors, prudes and narks; an alliance between the puritan Right and the racist Right is a distinct possibility.

We have received an appeal from the Atheist Centre in India. News of the devastation caused by a cyclone in the Andhra Pradesh region has been widespread. The Atheist Centre bore the brunt of the cyclone and was almost completely wiped out. The Atheist Centre has been active in social change work for four decades, and the institution was built up with great effort by Gora. Help is needed to repair the loss and continue the work. We will forward contributions sent to NSS, 702 Holloway Road, London N19 3NL.

Babies Not For Burning

Munday has pointed out, "To argue on the political level is fair game, but to put worries and fears into the minds of women who *need* to have abortions, an already traumatic experience, is absolutely wicked."

Leo Abse has said (*Spectator*, 18 January 1975) that Kentish and Litchfield "approached the problem as virginal and pristine as only young journalists can be." With Litchfield, at the age of 38, described by David Steel as "a man careless of the truth" and the father of Kentish's illegitimate child, it would seem that the description is hardly valid. And while the abortion scene might not have been very clear when Kentish and Litchfield approached it four years ago, they have left it muddy and confused. Did they stir up the dirt—or import it?

The recent statement in court would seem to answer that question—the only problem now is how long will it take for the mud to clear?

The British Pregnancy Advisory Service are appealing for help to recoup some of the £25,000 it cost to fight the accusations. Donations should be sent to The Babies NOT for Burning Appeal Fund, BPAS, Austy Manor, Wootton Wawen, Solihull, West Midlands, B95 6DA.

NATIONAL SECULAR SOCIETY

ANNUAL DINNER

Saturday, 18 March, 1978

6.30 for 7.00 pm

Pavious Arms, Westminster, London
(Page Street, SW1)

DENIS LEMON will be the Guest of Honour at the Annual Dinner. Denis Lemon, the Editor of *Gay News*, was the first person to be successfully prosecuted for blasphemous libel for 50 years; and he courageously stood his ground when faced with a private prosecution by Mrs Whitehouse. Denis Lemon has been Editor of *Gay News* since its beginning, and it is now highly regarded as a responsible paper concerning homosexual issues.

MAUREEN DUFFY will also speak. Maureen Duffy is a novelist, poet and biographer. Her most recent work is a biography of the outstanding seventeenth century woman dramatist Aphra Behn (see p.26). Her contributions to *The Freethinker* have included "The Ballad of the Blasphemy Trial", last year.

BILL McILROY, Hon Secretary of the Committee Against Blasphemy Law, will propose the toast to the Society. Bill McIlroy, former Secretary of the National Secular Society and ex-Editor of *The Freethinker*, is admired as a tireless secularist campaigner.

G. N. DEODHEKAR, Hon Treasurer of the NSS, will respond on behalf of the Society.

BARBARA SMOKER, President of the NSS, will introduce the evening.

Cost £3.75 Vegetarians catered for

Cheques with reservations to:

The National Secular Society

702 Holloway Road, London N19 3NL

EVENTS

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

Brighton and Hove Humanist Group. Dr Peter Draper: "International Humanism". Sunday, 5 March, 5.30 pm, Imperial Hotel, First Avenue, Hove.

Lewisham Humanist Group. S. E. Parker: "Max Stirner and the Case Against Humanism". Thursday, 23 February, 7.45 pm, Unitarian Meeting House, 41 Bromley Road, SE6.

London Young Humanists. David Porter, Hampshire Gay Alliance: "Effeminacy". Sunday, 19 February, 7.30 pm, 12 Prince of Wales Terrace, W8.

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

Merseyside Humanist Group. Details from Secretary: Ann Coombes, tel 051-608 3835 or Public Relations Officer: Marion Clowes, tel 051-342 2562.

Muswell Hill Humanist Group. Nicolas Walter: "Religion in Schools". Thursday, 16 February, 8.30 pm, 40 Chandos Road, N2.

South Place Ethical Society. Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, WC1. Sunday morning meetings, 11.00 am: 12 February, Robert Skidelsky: "Psycho-History". 19 February, Christopher Macy: "Emotion, Humanism and Reason". 26 February, W. H. Liddell: "Abelard's Medieval Humanism".

Tyneside Humanist Society. Prof G. N. Jenkins: "A New Look at Freewill". Wednesday, 22 February, 7.30 pm, Friends' Meeting House, 1 Archbold Terrace, Newcastle-upon-Tyne.

Humanist Holidays. Easter 24-28 March. Comfortable hotel near Great Malvern station. Hills, theatre. Breakfast and evening meal, approx £35-£39. August 5-12-19. Hotel by Derwentwater at Keswick, Lake District. £55-£59 per week, excluding lunch. Apply to secretary, Marjorie Mepham, 29 Fairview Road, Sutton, Surrey, telephone 01-642 8796. Also if interested to join small party at a Welsh cottage one spring week-end for walking and talking. Communal cooking, small charge. Another possibility is family camping on North Wales coast in school holidays.

THE FREETHINKER

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