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## LORD HOUGHTON DENOUNCES CHILD PROTECTION BILL AS "A NONSENSE"

Lord Houghton of Sowerby has criticised the Protection of Children Bill as a Bill which was "conceived in hysteria and came to a Parliament which was smitten by a degree of political cowardice". In a House of Lords debate on 20 June 1978, the debate on the report stage of the Bill designed to outlaw child pornography, Lord Houghton proposed a number of amendments to the Bill and repeated his criticism of "a bad Bill". The Protection of Children Bill was introduced as a Private Member's Bill by Mr Cyril Townsend, MP, on 10 February, following a wave of publicity about child pornography.

Lest this front page article be misunderstood let it immediately be said that *The Freethinker* does not favour exploiting children for pornographic photographs or sexual relationships with adults. But nor do we favour the creation of poorly conceived and unnecessary laws. Lord Houghton is to be congratulated, therefore, for raising a voice of reason on a topic that is so emotional that almost no public figure has dared to say anything sensible about it at all.

Lord Houghton said in the House of Lords: "What I regret is that Members of both Houses who have criticised the Bill as a nonsense and as a danger have not got up to say so. I was the only noble Lord during the Second Reading debate who expressed himself forcefully and implacably against this Bill. I do so again . . ."

"I hope I can get some support for taking some of the nonsense out of the Bill. When lawyer friends of mine looked at the original Bill they said, 'This Bill is a nonsense'. The Bill is, of course, very different from its original state; it has been almost rewritten; certainly it has been substantially amended. But it is still a nonsense and, what is more, people in authority know it to be a nonsense. I want to take out of the Bill some of those things which, in my opinion, will be a disgrace to Parliament if they are left in . . ."

The Bill was criticised by Lord Houghton because "it is full of the possibility of blackmail and corruption. Pornography in this country has corrupted far more policemen than it has children or adults. The corruption of the protection racket has been a scandal in London for years, and we have seen the prosecutions that have taken place in the last twelve months among the Porn Squad."

### Amendments Proposed

The amendments which Lord Houghton put forward were designed to reduce confusion from loose wording about what "distribution" of an indecent photograph meant, and to reduce the length of time which people could remain under the threat of prosecution by ensuring that a prosecution was brought by the Director of Public Prosecutions within a limited time. He pointed out that justice depended on not allowing "people languishing in prison for two, two and a half years and three years before they are brought to trial." "The DPP, is not an institution but a body of lawyers and we must bear in mind that it is subject to all the human frailties of lawyers, including their capacity for thinking about some matter for a very long time before they can make up their minds." Both amendments were lost.

During the same debate the Earl of Longford moved an amendment to remove the possibility of legitimate defence for possession of indecent material. This it was objected would prevent responsible research into pornography or investigation into the subject by people as noble as their lordships. This amendment was withdrawn.

Lord Houghton made a number of references to the unsubstantiated claims of campaigners who had prepared the publicity for the Bill. It is worth looking at how the publicity for the Protection of Children Bill was blown up. The summer before the Pri-

(Continued over)

vate Member's Bill was launched a campaign called ABUSE was started from the private address of Mrs Mary Whitehouse, near Colchester. This was followed by a petition about child porn which the National Viewers' and Listeners' Association (secretary Mrs Whitehouse) initiated. An article in the *Sunday Times* (12 February), entitled "How One Woman Routs Forces of Darkness", described how lacking in substantial membership the National Viewers' and Listeners' Association is, and the techniques used to excite public concern. Although there was no evidence to suggest that child pornography was showing a marked increase (no doubt interest has increased since the campaign) Mrs Whitehouse sent letters to 270 provincial and religious papers inviting people to help stamp out "kiddie porn". It was made clear by the Home Office in November that "the Home Secretary has no evidence of the existence of any significant problem which the law is at present inadequate to cope with" (quoted Nationwide Festival of Light Broadcast, Winter 1978). But once the campaign was under way no-one would look at evidence with a clear head and at the existing laws with a cool mind: emotion was given sway.

#### "Unspeakable Police Chief"

On the day before the Bill was brought before the House of Commons the chief of police for Manchester, Mr Anderton, a lay Methodist preacher, was said to have commented upon the increase in child pornography. But Mr Brynmor John, Minister of State, Home Office, said in the Commons debate: "Over recent months the Home Office have had consultation with many police forces: one was the Greater Manchester force. At no time until Mr Anderton appeared in the press yesterday have we received the sort of advice from him which was attributed to the police yesterday. It is a pity, if that was so, that this advice was not tendered earlier."

He continued that pornography showing children, sometimes very young ones, being used sexually by adults or in sexual activity with one another was almost exclusively manufactured abroad. "The Chief Constable of Manchester disagreed with the unknown attribution in *The Times* yesterday that three quarters of this type of pornography was home produced."

In the subsequent House of Lords Debate (report stage) Lord Houghton referred to "that unspeakable chief constable of the Greater Manchester area, who puts out information about the proportion of child pornography in the raids which have been conducted by his Porn Squad officers, which he could not sustain when asked by the Minister of State to produce evidence."

Publicity was given recently to a supposed case

in Manchester in which a girl aged eight was alleged to have been on an American list of young people available for unlawful sexual activities. "There was" Lord Houghton said "great consternation in Britain. A great whiff of hysteria spread across the land." But on investigation it appeared that there was no evidence of the child's involvement in any illegal activity. This is the kind of thing which is preventing the rational consideration of a Bill which involves some of the first principles of British jurisprudence."

#### Wild Talk

There has been a similar tendency for wild talk of the danger of child pornography, "like an outbreak of rabies" (Mrs Whitehouse), to evaporate upon research for evidence. There was speculation at the time the Bill was first brought that a new law in the USA tightening up on the sale of child pornography would lead to porn merchants flooding Britain in a search for lucrative new markets—while at the same time any evidence about the availability of such pornography quoted Europe as the main source. There was little mention of the considerable Customs and Excise powers existing to deal with this situation.

There was also an attempt to imply that increase in child pornography would lead to an increase in assault of children—again a purely speculative connection. There was also an attempt to link child porn with paedophilia and to repeat attacks on the Paedophile Information Exchange.

And, of course, there was no lack of rhetoric. "We have a duty to look into the sewers of our society" said Mr Townsend. And in an extraordinary attempt to blur and blend together every conceivable suggestion and speculation about sexual law reform, Mr Eldon Griffiths, MP, attacked those "who progressively and in the name of liberty had been pulling out some of the props from under the rule of decency."

The words of Macaulay writing in the *Edinburgh Review* as long ago as June 1830 seem apposite: "We know no spectacle so ridiculous as the British public in one of its periodic fits of morality".

The trouble with this ridiculous spectacle is that it can lead to laws which are so hastily and clumsily worded that they may be misused; and also they may be unnecessary. Already there exists the Obscene Publications Act 1959, the Indecency with Children Act 1960, and the Sexual Offences Act 1956. It does not lead to respect for the law or the lawmakers if superfluous and unclear laws are created.

Baroness Gaitskell pointed out in the House of Lords Debate (20 June): I am not a great expert on

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# Voltaire Bi-Centenary Meeting

On 31 May 1978, the exact two hundredth anniversary of the death of Voltaire, a meeting was held in the Library of Conway Hall to commemorate the life of this remarkable man. In his introduction to the meeting Peter Cadogan, the General Secretary of South Place Ethical Society, drew attention to a bust of the head of Voltaire in the Library, which had been spot-lit for the occasion (see illustration). Voltaire was a man of the enlightenment and Peter Cadogan suggested that we had yet to emerge from the melting-pot into which the enlightenment, and the romantic reaction against it, had thrown us.

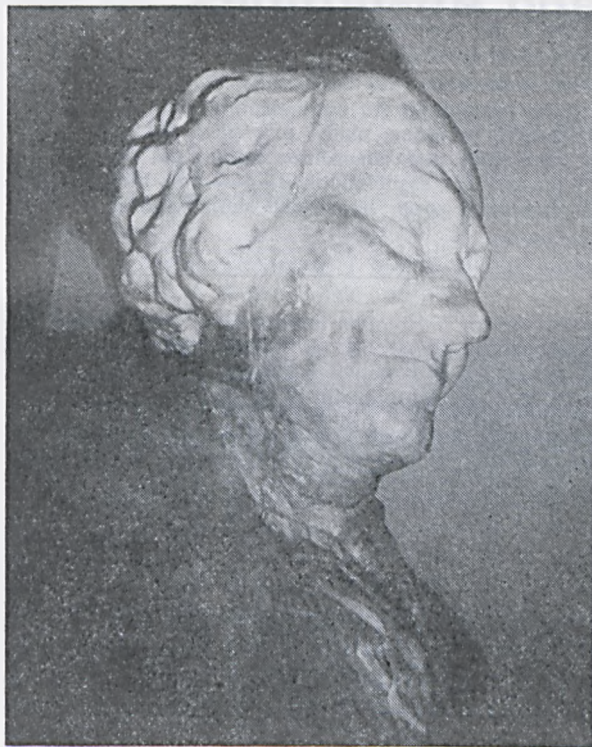
Nicolas Walter, editor of the *New Humanist*, described the life of Voltaire, whose place in European culture would have been assured by any one of his contributions to literature. He was the equivalent of Pope in poetry, of Bernard Shaw in drama, of Macaulay in historical writing and of Swift in satire. He was also a prolific letter writer. Nicolas Walter summarised the events of his life, described a number of cases of injustice which he fought, and commented upon his literary and polemical achievements.

## Prodigious Activities

Throughout his prodigious activities Voltaire retained a lightness of touch, a tongue-in-cheek humour, and an incisive wit. It was therefore appropriate that Barbara Smoker, President of the National Secular Society, brought laughter to the meeting with her readings of extracts from Voltaire's works. For instance she quoted a letter which Voltaire had written to Lord Chesterfield, towards the end of his life in 1771:

"Lord Huntingdon tells me that, of the five senses common to us all, you have only lost one, and that you have a good digestion: that is well worth a pair of ears.

"I, rather than you, should be the person to decide whether it is worse to be deaf or blind or to have a weak digestion. I can judge these three conditions from personal experience: only for a long time I have not dared to come to decisions on trifles, much less on subjects so important. I confine myself to the belief that, if you get the sun in the fine house you have built yourself, you will have very bearable moments. That is all that we can hope for at our ages, and, in fact, at any age. Cicero wrote a beautiful treatise on old age, but facts did not confirm his theories, and his last years were very miserable. You have lived longer and more happily than he did. You have not had to deal with perpetual dictators or triumvirs. Your lot has been, and still is, one of the most desirable in this great lottery, where the prizes are so rare, and the



Bust of Voltaire from Conway Hall

biggest one—lasting happiness—has never yet been gained by anybody.

"Your philosophy has never been misled by the wild dreams which have confused heads otherwise strong enough. You have never been, in any sort, either an impostor or the dupe of impostors, and I count that as one of the most uncommon advantages of this brief life."

## Follies of our Time

James Hemming, President of the British Humanist Association, spoke about "The Living Spirit of Voltaire". (To be published in full in the *New Humanist*, June-July 1978, together with the text of a radio programme by Maurice Cranston about Voltaire.) He pointed out that Voltaire was a champion of tolerance but also of frank speaking, and suggested that it was necessary not to be complacent or mealy-mouthed about the "arrant follies and injustices of our own time." Among these he mentioned the "world impoverishing race to perfect weapons of destruction", the vast stock-pile of food in a world where over 500 million human beings are on the edge of starvation, the destruction

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# The Lothians: Religious Curiosities and Absurdities

I. S. LOW

The history of the Lothians, surrounding Edinburgh, provides many examples of religious curiosities and absurdities throughout the centuries. The associations of the area include a rheumatic pope, a satirical cleric, and feuding friars.

The Lothians, of course, are the three counties—East, Mid-, and West—round and including Edinburgh. They are called Lothian, allegedly, after a sixth century King Loth. This gentleman, who may have existed, was supposed to be the grandfather of Kentigern or St Mungo who founded the monastery around which Glasgow developed.

Whether Loth was grandfather of Mungo or not, religion has been an important issue in the Lothians, John Knox, the famous Reformer, came from this region (though there is some dispute whether he was born at Haddington, the county town of East Lothian or a nearby village called Gifford). Knox's fellow reformers, according to a document in the Vatican Library, destroyed a church called Whitekirk near Dunbar. The same document says that in about 1294 a holy well existed at what is now Whitekirk and its water cured people of illnesses. In 1309 a shrine was built near the well. A hundred years later 15,653 pilgrims came to it. But in 1435 Aeneas Silvius Piccolomini (later Pope Pius II) came—and caught cold! According to Ian Finlay's book *The Lothians*, Aeneas had rheumatism for the rest of his life, and blamed it on his pilgrimage to Whitekirk with its sacred healing shrine.

Aeneas probably landed at Dunbar, where in 1650 a famous battle was fought, between Oliver Cromwell and the Scottish Covenanters. This introduces another Lothian theme—the tendency of Scottish clerics to give bad advice about military tactics. General Leslie, the Covenanters' commander, had seized a strong position on top of a place called Doon Hill. This manoeuvre reduced Cromwell to impotence (military anyway). But the ministers of the Kirk wanted to see "the Moabites" destroyed and they compelled Leslie to come down from his strong position and to attack Cromwell. As a result Cromwell was able to destroy the Scottish army. In fairness to the ministers, it is possible that bad weather would have made Leslie come down from the hill anyway. But the ministers certainly supported the policy that led to disaster.

It wasn't only Covenanters who did this sort of thing. According to John Knox, the Abbot of Dunfermline (presumably a Catholic) had a century

earlier done something similar. At the Battle of Pinkie in 1547 (Pinkie is about four miles east of Edinburgh—and near the coast), the Abbot and a gentleman named Hew Rigg were responsible for the Scottish army leaving its strong position above the Esk. As a result it came under the double fire of Somerset's army on Fawside Hill and the English ships in the mouth of the Esk river, and was destroyed.

Near Pinkie is a village called Inveresk. In the mid-eighteenth century the parish minister was a man called Alexander Carlyle (nicknamed "Jupiter" Carlyle). This gentleman was a rebel. He was a leader of the Moderates—clergymen who thought it acceptable to enjoy life (within limits) and to take an interest in matters other than religion. Carlyle wrote satirically about people who disapproved of playing cards on Sunday and he went, with other ministers in 1756, to see a play *Douglas* by the Rev John Home. The Presbytery of Edinburgh thundered! It issued a ukase that "all within its bounds discouraged the illegal and dangerous entertainments of the stage and restrain those under their influence from frequenting such seminaries of vice and folly". But Carlyle continued in his wicked ways, and many famous literary men came to his manse including the historian Robertson, Tobias Smollett, Dugald Stewart and David Hume.

## Puritanism and Catholicism

Carlyle's career spotlights the narrow-minded outlook of the Calvinist and Presbyterian clergy. They have been criticised for their puritanism, by Roman Catholics among others. So to keep a balanced outlook, let us look at the behaviour of some Catholic clergy during the age of faith.

A valley called Wedale runs from the south of the Lothians to Tweed-dale. In the Middle Ages there was a bitter feud between the farmers of this valley and the monks of Melrose Abbey about "rights of pannage and pasturage on those hills". King William the Lion imposed the Peace of Wedale in 1184, but "... the doughty friars of the abbey were soon at it again" (Finlay). They invaded Wedale and killed a priest there.

Scotland is the land of abbeys. In Lothian one of the best ecclesiastical buildings is the Church at Haddington. It was called "the Lamp of Lothian" and had eleven altars (only one now). St Giles, Edinburgh, is quite a beautiful cathedral but rather dark inside. But I prefer the secular architecture of the Lothians—for instance, Tantallon Castle, the headquarters of the Douglasses in their many re-

bellions against the Scottish kings; Sir Walter Scott's remarks about their "loyalty" in "Marmion" are misleading.

And the Lothians are significant as well as for religious antics, for industry based on shale oil, paper mills and, of course, coal. In his book *The Lothians*, I. Finlay says "As far below the corn-

fields of Dalkeith as the Cuillin peaks soar above the surface of Coruisk (in Skye) lie layers of the richest coals . . ." I must say—I think it's most appropriate to compare a coal mine to the Black Cuillins of the Isle of Skye; I think these overrated mountains are like a lot of old pit-heads. And some will say that is the most frightful blasphemy of all.

## Death of the Nun Who Lived Again

Phyllis Graham, the outspoken critic of Christianity, and author of the book *The Jesus Hoax* has died at her home in Worthing. She was aged 73 and she was not in full health. At an inquest in Worthing it was recorded that she had taken her own life by an overdose of valium. She had always said she might take her own life if she felt her health was failing.

A secular funeral took place on 8 June 1978 at Worthing crematorium, conducted by William McIlroy former editor of *The Freethinker*. Phyllis Graham was a writer who continued to provide articles and reviews for *The Freethinker* and *New Humanist* up to the end of her life. (A review of *The Long Search* was published in *The Freethinker* of April 1978.) Mr McIlroy said at the ceremony "Although Phyllis was 73 and her health was not too good, we hoped that she would continue with her literary work for a few more years. But she decided otherwise."

Her conversion to Catholicism in her teens, her subsequent career as a Catholic nun, and her eventual complete rejection of religion were described in an autobiographical pamphlet *The Nun Who Lived Again*. She there describes her early pre-occupation with supernaturalism: "... I was haunted from the beginning by the magico-poetic mask that Christianity turns towards the innocent."

Shortly after her 21st birthday, she entered as a postulant in the Order of Our Lady of Carmel. This was very much against the pleading of her family and took much courage—even if it was later to seem to her a misguided choice.

During the next 20 years Phyllis Graham lived in what she later described as "the concentration camp of Holy Mother Church". But even the mentally stultifying atmosphere of a convent could not suppress her spirit of enquiry. She had the courage to question and doubt. In due course she asked to be released from her vows and "began to reverse the process of 20 years ago and learn to live once again in a strange world".

For another seven years she remained in the Catholic fold teaching at a convent school. But in due course she rejected Catholicism and Christianity in its entirety. She remembered, in her pamphlet, her reaction to the cynical remark of a chap-

lain: "And at that moment I had a sort of swift intellectual vision of the Roman Church as a political institution. I understood something of her true nature, and turned from it with astonishment and horror, and afterwards loathing." She commented upon this reaction: "At that time an emotional rejection, it developed latter into an intellectual realisation of the complete illogicality of the whole Christian set-up; but this of course was a gradual process."

### Great Courage

William McIlroy commented at her funeral: "It requires courage of a high order to admit that beliefs held deeply and sincerely for many years are mistaken and untrue. It took great courage to face the world after being sheltered behind convent walls for 20 years.

"In middle age, Phyllis had to face the problem of earning a living; being criticised and ostracised by former friends; even worse, being pestered by religious zealots to return to the Church. But she overcame these problems."

As her "growth in Humanist ways of thought" continued, she embarked upon a long association with *The Freethinker* and the National Secular Society. As a result of this association she gave a toast to the Society at their Annual Dinner in 1975, saying "It's a long, long way from a Carmelite cell to an atheists' dinner party".

She had written many works, including an autobiography and a number of novels, which were, alas, never published and this was a sadness to her. But she wrote to the editor of *The Freethinker* shortly before her death that she always considered it a privilege and pleasure to write for this journal. Her writing was not only meticulous and exact, but also showed her vivid observation and passionate concern. In her later years she lived a quiet life in Worthing, but ranged great distances in her reading and writing; she was an enthusiastic member of the National Secular Society, the Rationalist Press Association and supporter of the Committee Against Blasphemy Law.

She will be remembered by her sister and friends in Worthing; and also by the many who will continue to read her works, for she possessed an ability



to express in her writings real intellectual excitement. An example is these words from *The Jesus Hoax*, which were quoted at her funeral: ". . . despite the many years of my life absorbed in religious devotion, I have found no 'desolation of a godless void' in my experience as a non-believer. Once the new outlook is accepted by joint agreement of reason, intellect and will, there is little room left for the complaints of emotion or the ache of nostalgia. And what there is vanishes entirely in the vastness of mental freedom, before an immensity of thought-revelation that delights and astonishes the mind."

*Barbara Smoker writes:*

Like many other secularists, I first got to know Phyllis Graham from reading her autobiographical NSS pamphlet, *The Nun Who Lived Again*, about her teenage conversion to Catholicism and her 20 years in a Carmelite Convent as a member of the strictest religious order of them all.

Although I was to meet her later on several occasions—visiting her at home, presiding over the NSS Annual Dinner when she was one of the speakers, and seeing her at meetings—I feel that it was through the written word that I knew her best. And not least through her letters.

Monica Baldwin, in *I Leap Over the Wall*, related how an ex-nun, after years of the noiseless convent discipline, is disconcerting to people in the outside world until she learns to emphasise her presence by deliberately moving more noisily. Phyllis never managed to learn this. She always seemed quiet to the point of being mousy, and almost painfully diffident, in face-to-face encounters—but not when she had her typewriter as a go-between. On the typewriter she could communicate her ideas lucidly and forcibly—and they could be hard-hitting ideas, too.

### Doctrine of Hell

Her book *The Jesus Hoax* (now unhappily out-of-print) expanded the theme of the NSS pamphlet and showed that it was primarily the iniquitous doctrine of Hell that had always worried her as a Christian and finally impelled her to campaign against the creed to which she had devoted the first half of her adult life. The publisher of that book, Leslie Frewin, commissioned a full autobiography from her, and she was persuaded to write it—but it has never seen print, because the firm went out of business before it appeared. Four months ago I passed it on to another publisher, but they were unable to find a place for it in their schedule, and, as far as I know, she did not try anyone else.

Last time I saw her, in January, I was horrified when she told me that she had been destroying her unpublished novels—including the one that she her-

self considered the best thing she had ever written. In retrospect, it now seems to me that this was itself a mini-suicidal act. She was always, in a way, self-destructive, from the time she decided to cut herself off from the family she loved in order to enter Carmel as a "bride of Christ".

I still have a few of her letters—her long, frequent, impeccably typed, exuberant, chatty letters, which were her chief means of self-expression. These few, I must admit, I have kept mainly for their eulogy of my booklet of verses, *Good God!*—of which she bought copies for all her acquaintances, from the local vicar upwards. "I keep re-reading and re-reading it", she wrote, "enjoying it more every time. I shall eventually learn it by heart . . . Good God at his ultimate worst (ugh!) just as I picture him myself . . . The way the theme of 'finding out' the villain recurs throughout, and in such memorable and attractive rhythm and rhyme—it's quite irresistible, and of course gives a firm backbone to the whole structure. You were inspired! . . . Hurrah! I hope it goes far and wide and stirs up things everywhere. (Has Mary White-wash been sent a copy?) . . ." And so on.

### To Hell with God

Having come across the phrase "To Hell with God!" in Koestler's *The Age of Longing*, Phyllis asked me how it struck me as a title for a new book she was intending to write; and I told her I thought it a super title. This, she said, encouraged her to start on the book. But she cannot have got very far with it.

If only she had appreciated the very real worth of her life and the work still in her, she might have obtained adequate pain-killers instead of taking the ultimate step quite so soon.

In one way I probably understood her better than most people, for I too was once going to become a Carmelite nun, and we shared an ineradicable hatred for the Jesus who had jilted us by his non-existence, the god in whom we could no longer believe.

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# JOTTINGS

WILLIAM McILROY

*I have been most grossly libelled by the foolish race of mortals.—The Devil's Case (Robert Buchanan)*

After a period of neglect and sooty obscurity Satan has made a sensational come-back.

Gratitude has never been a notable characteristic of the Christian faithful, but the manner in which they have not given the Devil his due is quite scandalous. Just think about it: without Satan there would have been no Fall and consequently no need for redemption and salvation. He has provided jobs on a scale that would make any government seethe with envy. Without him there would have been no need for churches, cathedrals or monasteries. There would have been no holy relics industry. (True, there would have been no population explosion, but there would have been no population either.)

How have the Christians repaid their chief benefactor? They have heaped abuse, hatred and calumny on his horny head. They have made him a scapegoat for the advance of scientific knowledge and the development of such fiendish weapons as the printing press. Worst of all, some of their smarty-boots theologians are now denying his existence.

It may be expecting too much of Christians to change their attitude to Satan. But the recent exorcism trial in Germany has ensured that they cannot ignore one whom Pope Paul has declared to be "The Prince of the world". (And that, he added for good measure, is "dogmatic fact".)

Other Church leaders have re-affirmed the traditional Christian belief in the existence of Satan. The German Bishops' Conference declared that his existence is "a truth that cannot be abandoned". Cardinal Josef Hoffner, Archbishop of Cologne, Bishop Klaus Hemmerle and Bishop Rudolf Graber have made similar statements which were summarised by the Archbishop of Vienna: "It remains the teaching and belief of the Church that Evil exists in the form of a personalised power".

Satan is an embarrassment to many modern Christians, as is the question of his underground abode and its heating system. All kinds of explanations are advanced to show that throughout history millions of people (including all the great Christian teachers and writers) misunderstood biblical references to hell and eternal punishment. One clerical

correspondent has assured me: "Hell has long been interpreted in terms of remorse and a conscience awakened to guilt . . ."

Pope Paul recently poured cold water, in a manner of speaking, on such Christian faint-hearts, by declaring that Hell literally exists. Another dogmatic fact, no doubt.

\* \* \*

A Scottish clergyman believes that the reason for his country's disastrous performance in the World Cup Finals was a judgement from God because of the nation's idolatry. Pastor Jack Glass, of Glasgow's Sovereign Grace Baptist Church, declared: "I believe that God had to do something to show that our football idols had feet of clay, and that the real victory is his". (The reverend gentleman's logic is rather curious; other countries which did well in the World Cup competition are even dottier than Scotland about football.)

Pastor Glass, who is Scotland's best known evangelical nut, is an exponent of that mindless, born-again, fundamentalist Protestantism that blights the political, social and sporting life of the country. Religious bigotry and hatred have often turned the terraces into a battleground. The drink-sodden, Orange/Catholic louts who follow Scottish teams are the most unwelcome guests at football matches in other parts of the country. Until recently Glasgow Rangers had the dubious distinction of being the only football team in the world which insisted that all its members were of one religion (Protestant).

However, Pastor Glass' pronouncement will bring some comfort to Ally Macleod and his squad. The directors of the Scottish team can hardly blame the manager and players for not bringing home the cup when The One Above was acting as the divine (if unseen) striker for all the opposing teams.

A survey has revealed that 85 per cent of the people of Scotland believe in the Christian god. After this betrayal of their team in Argentina, we suggest that they banish the old boy to the Fourth Division.

\* \* \*

Stephen Bradley, a spokesman for the Church of England in South Africa, has been complaining in the columns of a religious weekly that the British press has been constantly misrepresenting the situation in that Christian land. Mr Bradley, in true ecumenical spirit, took the opportunity to inform readers that "The Dutch Reformed Church . . . is a very great church, which has developed an excellent Bible Society and has produced many great men of God . . . The Prime Minister of South Africa is known as a godly, praying man, deeply sympathetic towards the Lord's work."



Two British men have been publicly flogged for illegally making and selling alcohol in Saudi Arabia. Saudi Arabian Law is heavily influenced by a fundamentalist Islam tradition, in which very severe punishments are meted out. Other Britons now imprisoned face a similar punishment for the offence of distributing or drinking alcohol. According to strict interpretation of Quoranic Law, possible punishments for other offences include amputation of a limb for theft, castration for rape and stoning for adultery. An increasing number of penalties of this nature are being inflicted in Muslim countries.

Saudi Arabia is the country in which the severest of these sentences have been carried out. The rulers are from a strict puritanical sect, the Wahabis, who have been described as something like the Plymouth Brethren. The country has been one of the most isolated in the Near East, and consequently one of the countries least influenced by reformist aspects of Islam. As guardians of the sacred Islam centres of pilgrimage, Mecca and Medina, the rulers are acutely aware of what they see as their religious responsibilities. Since the oil boom, and the resulting increase of wealth and prestige, a vast economic and social modernisation scheme has been begun by King Khalid and the Crown Prince Fahd. There is, in the face of the profound social effects of such an upheaval upon traditional life, a determination to assert the old religious laws.

Other countries where Islamic law at its strictest is again being enforced are Pakistan, Libya and Egypt. Incidents of public flogging and amputation are now regular news items in the foreign news columns of daily newspapers. Princess Misha was executed in Saudi Arabia for taking a lover—the punishment was said to be merciful because she was not stoned.

The Quoran says: "O you who believe, intoxicants and games of chance . . . are only an uncleanness, the devil's work; so shun it that you may succeed. The devil desires only to create enmity and hatred among you by means of intoxicants and games of chance, and to keep you back from the remembrance of Allah and from prayer." Despite strong punishments, it is common knowledge that foreign employees in Arab states make pure alcohol in illicit stills. It is also common knowledge that black market drink is obtained by Arabs. Nor do Arabs avoid the ban on gambling: Prince Tabal bin Abdul Aziz al-Saud, a member of the Saudi-Arabian ruling family, is alleged to owe vast gambling debts to Ladbrokes. And Saudis are a familiar sight at the casinos of Europe. The history of religions leads us to expect hypocrisies of this kind—one is reminded of the mistresses and "nephews" of some of the medieval popes.

The strict interpretation of the *Sharia* (Muslim code of law) is a matter of controversy amongst Muslims themselves. There are Muslim theologians who argue for a more liberal interpretation on the grounds that the *Sharia* should only be strictly enforced in a fully just society—where, for example, theft is not motivated by hunger or hardship.

The resurgence of fundamentalist Islam is a disturbing reminder that religion has been a potent force for barbarism throughout history. The reasons for the revival of fundamentalist Islam are partly related to the newfound wealth of the Arab oil states. Aid from rich oil states to poorer countries like Pakistan is given with strings attached, related to moral codes. Another reason is disillusion with both Marxism and what is seen as the decadence of the capitalist West: fundamentalist Islam provides an alternative ideology. Also in countries undergoing rapid change there may be a need to hold fast to a traditional identity, and memories of the Islam Empire provide an appealing glow of glory and certainty.

## METHODISTS TAPED

A continuing overall decline in membership of the Methodist Church has been reported. There are now 1,370,515 members—which is 40,000 fewer than at the last head count in 1974. This decline has meant that 359 churches have closed during this period, and the total of ministers has dropped by 230.

However, the Methodists are taking heart from the fact that the rate of decline is slowing down. The figures show the lowest decrease in ten years and an increase in new members. "The signs are there that a new spirit is abroad" comments the *Methodist Recorder*. With evangelical noises from all the churches and a large-scale evangelical upsurge taking place in the United States of America, is there some truth in this hope? Or will religion subside into an unimportant minority leisure interest?

The Methodist Church is meanwhile doing its best to ensure that its surviving loyal flock are not lost. In rural areas where there is a shortage of mobile preachers, a new style of sermon has been introduced. A tape-recorder is placed on the edge of the pulpit and a recorded sermon then delivered. The tapes are recorded for the benefit of tiny rural congregations sometimes as small as four or five in number. There are no reports of recording congregations to swell the ranks with loud "Amen's".



# AND NOTES

## RCs OPPOSED

Even where laws change, the Catholic Church continues to fight a rearguard action to prevent them from being effective. On 6 June 1978 practically free abortion on request for the first 90 days of pregnancy became legal in Italy. The following day the Roman Catholic Church issued fearful warnings. Pope Paul VI and individual cardinals have made it clear that outright excommunication could be the penalty for all Catholics performing or co-operating in abortions.

The Pope warned "Do not Kill" and urged Catholic doctors and nurses to register as conscientious objectors. Catholic hospitals, which account for a quarter of the nation's hospitals, immediately announced that they would not perform abortions. The majority of nursing staff in Italy are nuns and religious orders connected with medical services have warned that they will withdraw from private hospitals and from maternity wards in public hospitals performing abortions. This would seriously jeopardise the efficiency of the hospital service. A conscience clause allows doctors to refuse to perform abortion, and it seems likely that the Catholic Church will persuade sufficient doctors to opt out to make it very difficult for a woman to obtain an abortion—even though it is legal.

The Catholic "Movement for Life" was collecting signatures for a referendum to repeal the new law before it came into effect. Many, under the sway of the local priest, do not dare to refuse to sign: it has been reported that priests watch after Mass to see who does not sign. This is in a country where networks for illegal abortion were legion, and package trips for abortion have been operating abroad.

In Ireland the hierarchy of the Catholic Church is also doing its best to limit the effectiveness of social reform. Four bishops have seen Charles Haughey, Minister for Health, to demand that if sale of contraceptives becomes legal, they should only be available to married couples. At present sales are banned, but it is well-known that they are imported and that doctors prescribe the pill under the guise of menstrual cycle regulators.

The Catholic Church thus puts its full weight against realistic and humane considerations.

## WOULD YOU?

The Capital Radio god-slot has changed its title from "A Question of Faith" to "Would You Believe It?"

# WORLDWIDE

## SPAIN

A Cortes Commission debating Spain's new democratic Constitution has voted to separate the Spanish state from the Roman Catholic Church.

This would reverse the position established by Franco, who made Roman Catholicism the official State religion and granted the RC Church vast privileges. As the official State Church Roman Catholicism had set the moral standards of the nation. The Catholic Church, of course, opposed social reform relating to the legalisation of divorce and the legality of abortion.

The draft article for the Constitution reads: "No religion will have State status. The public powers will take into account the religious beliefs of Spanish society and will maintain the consequential relations of co-operation with the Catholic Church and other churches." There was some opposition to including any reference to the Catholic Church. The Constitution will be submitted to a referendum.

## SAN FRANCISCO

A new way to deal with an uncaught rapist, in the area of Berkeley, is being tried. A coven of witches are to gather at midnight at the time of "the dark of the moon" to call for punishment of the man, who is known as "Stinky".

Two groups are to perform the invocations: the neo-pagans and the feminists (who have only female deities). Newspapers and television channels in the San Francisco Bay area have appealed to the public to help create the required "psychic energy".

A student of the occult, Isaac Bonewits, who in 1970 became the first man in America to graduate from a major university (Berkeley) with a bachelor's degree in magic, estimates that there is no more than a 40 per cent chance of dealing with the rapist if the area's witches create the ceremony alone. "But if the public participates and there were, say 200,000, then I estimate the chances of destroying Stinky are 99 per cent." He added "The goddess will deal with him as she feels fit. He could drop dead of heart failure, get caught by the police, surrender or just stop his activities."

### THE NUN WHO LIVED AGAIN

by PHYLLIS K. GRAHAM

5p plus 7p postage

From G. W. Foote & Co  
702 Holloway Road, London N19 3NL



IN DEFENCE OF FREEDOM, Edited by Dr K. W. Watkins. Cassell, £2.50.

With the Conservatives claiming to be the true heirs of the liberal democratic tradition, parading "freedom" as a main ingredient in their pre-election pie, and with Mrs Thatcher talking po-faced about the uniqueness of the individual and the moral case for freedom (which with unbatting eyelids she promptly links with the upholding of "Christian values" and the repudiation of "trendy theories"), this timely and important book demands careful scrutiny by all committed libertarians. From the National Association for Freedom stable—nine of its eleven contributors are prominent members of NAFF, and some of them are close to Mrs Thatcher—it presents a distillation of the thought of what purports to be the libertarian Right.

What preoccupies the authors? It's a sort of overdog's guide to freedom. Constantly recurring *bêtes noires* are Soviet Russia, communism (which most of the authors use, Russian-fashion, as an interchangeable term for socialism, on the dubious assumption that the two are in practice identical), collectivism, trades unions, nationalisation, state schools, state medicine, "permissiveness" (a boobyword for freedoms one dislikes), the rising tide of pornography (surely a prime example of free enterprise at its most enterprising?) and Godlessness.

First we have Viscount De Lisle, lamenting the shortcomings of our Constitution. Like Lord Hailsham, he sees the House of Commons—at any rate when Labour is in office—as an elective dictatorship, and advocates a stronger Second Chamber elected by proportional representation. But, again like Lord Hailsham, he rejects a fairer voting system for the Commons because he believes the electorate should choose a Government by exercising "a sharp choice between alternatives" (presumably the same old ones). He wants more power for the legislature as against the executive, and enforceable guarantees for human rights.

Second, John Gouriet—campaign director of NAFF and already well esconced in the constitutional law reports—extolling the virtues of the market economy "with all its imperfections". The battle lines (he claims) are drawn between "liberal democrats or conservatives with a small 'c'" and the heirs of Marx and Engels. Under capitalism, says Mr Gouriet, the rich and the poor both get richer in spite of, rather than because of, left-wing activities. "The Marxist, like the ultra-reactionary, has a certain nostalgia for squalor."

Next, Dr Stephen Haseler deploying criticisms of trades unions' activities and attitudes, much of which he characterises as stuck in the late nineteenth

century and a positive hindrance to the economic growth which is "the very seed-corn of working-class affluence in the future". Then Norris McWhirter on "Freedom of Choice"—the survival of which depends, according to him, on the survival of capitalism. The "foremost apostles of individual freedom" are Solzhenitsyn and Bukovsky; and "the greatest censored scientific truth is that all men are born unequal". Those concerned about basic freedoms "have to contend not only with the closed shop but with the closed mind".

This promptly appears in the shape of Lady Morrison of Lambeth, whose jeremiad on "Freedom and the Family" is quite the oddest contribution to this book. "The family structure of man, woman and their children is biologically inherent in man's nature", she declares. To protect it, nature has implanted strong maternal and paternal instincts which are so deeply rooted that "only fools, or worse, could attempt to deny their existence or seek to eradicate them". The pretence that the family is a human invention designed to bind mankind to some form of economic organisation is "surely one of the ugliest lies of our time". It follows that the only family rights which count are parents' rights—or rather husbands' rights: Lady Morrison quotes approvingly from St Paul to the Colossians, chapter 3:

"Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as it is fit in the Lord. Husbands, love your wives and be not bitter against them. Children, obey your parents in all things: for this is well pleasing unto the Lord."

Lady Morrison rails at high-rise flats (which she blames on local authorities' building monopoly), the whittling down of freedom of (parental) choice in education, "red" students, womens' liberation and "militant groups of homosexuals" who are making "determined efforts to enter schools" with their propaganda. "The smog of inflation and economic instability weaves its way through family life . . . choking its wellbeing". Marriage and home life is seriously threatened by incest, promiscuity, adultery, child molestation, prostitution and homosexual practices, all of which are "deviant patterns which distort and demean human sexuality". Parents' authority is being "eroded by harmful literature, television programmes and certain teachers who fail to recognise the value of self-discipline". "Sick pop artists" are "represented as gods to delirious teenagers". Standards of censorship slip lower and lower. "There is no doubt that the more laws are relaxed,



# R REVIEWS

the more the young will be exploited by sex perversion and pornography." The Home Office and its advisers "demonstrably lack the will to coax the country back to higher moral levels". Lady M is obviously suffering an acute attack of the white-houses. Incongruously, in a symposium dedicated to the merits of free enterprise, she castigates "the materialistic attitude of society which aims to capture the teenage market with offers of bigger and better goods to be paid for later". She cries out for a Leader (Churchill-style, of course) to save the nation, and takes her leave of the family as it gallops "on towards the cliff edge, bent on their superficial standard of living, pursuing *la dolce vita*" . . .

Recoiling from the brink, we recover our breath with a thoughtful and intelligent essay by Russell Lewis on "Freedom of Speech and Publication". He is rightly concerned by the unofficial censorship increasingly being exercised by trades unions, students and others. He examines the ultimate paradox of freedom—that it can only be preserved by curtailing in the last resort the freedom of those who wish to destroy it—and concludes that Voltaire's maxim "I disapprove of what you say, but I will defend to the death your right to say it" looks pretty sick if its proponents immediately go down in a hail of machine-gun bullets. Society—unfortunately for disciples of J. S. Mill such as myself—is not, Mr Lewis points out, a debating club; "not all questions in society are open questions". But a pluralist society is the best guarantee of free speech.

Winston Churchill, MP, on "Freedom and National Security" is predictable. Narindar Saroop on "Freedom and Race" maintains that both Marxists and fascists use racialist politics for the same reason, if from different angles; and that neither have the genuine welfare of immigrants at heart. Dr K. W. Watkins and Robert Moss refight the battle of "free" rightist ideas against the "totalitarian" left along familiar lines, pointing out that freedom is meaningless without its accompanying responsibilities. NAFF's 15-point Charter of Rights and Liberties contrasts interestingly with the preoccupations of un-Tory libertarian groups, such as the National Council for Civil Liberties. Mr Moss ends by equating freedom and pluralism with Christianity.

Winding up is Professor Antony Flew on "The Philosophy of Freedom"—another of the more thoughtful contributions. Political freedom, he points out, is negative—citing Hobbes: "A free man is he that . . . is not hindered to do what he hath

the will to do". There are people, Professor Flew notes (including, I think he will agree, some of his fellow contributors), who want to restrict the word "liberty" to those freedoms which *they* approve of. Any such usage, he rightly says, must be rejected totally: nor can people (*à la* Rousseau or Lenin) be *forced* to be free.

"Freedom", like "democracy", is a potent plus-word. And it is too often purloined and perverted by its enemies ("Power for the people", says Professor Flew, "means power for the people who shout 'Power for the People!'" ) Freedom, as Flew concludes, is "a precondition of everything which is distinctively human and most worthwhile". Denied it, says Winston Churchill, "The human spirit is stifled and in danger of suffocation". As Sir Isaiah Berlin has explained, it is both positive and negative: "freedom to" and "freedom from". It is the latter which obsesses most of the contributors to *In Defence of Freedom*. But what of the positive freedoms they ignore or deny—the freedoms of poor people, black people, gay people, irreligious people and many others, who need "freedom to" at least as much as "freedom from"? How would *they* fare in a Thatcher/Joseph/NAFF society? Like Little Jack Horner, they would put in their thumbs and pull out—what?

ANTONY GREY

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**PALACE WITHOUT CHAIRS** by Brigid Brophy. Hamish Hamilton, £4.95.

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Even royalty have bottoms and welcome somewhere to put them, as the prince Sempronius points out. The lack of chairs in the Winter Palace brings the royal family down to earth. And royalty, in the imaginary kingdom of Evarchia, a state placed precariously between Eastern and Western Europe, is a very down-to-earth affair. By the end of the tale many of its members have gone to dust and ashes; but the ending of the monarchy is not a lugubrious affair in a novel which sparkles along its course.

*Palace Without Chairs* is aptly sub-titled "a baroque novel", and for me it was the skilful story-telling, the style, the humour, the ornamentation which provided such an enjoyable read, rather than any allegorical content. The eldest royal son, the Crown Prince Ulrich, is summoned from afar to the presumed death-bed of his father, King Cosmo III. All the other royal siblings come to the dying man: Balthasar, constantly concerned both with the pronunciation of his name and his possible future exercise of regal power; Sempronius, radiating his blonde nimbus of charm; Urban, solitary self-consumer of his own melancholy body (literally as well as metaphorically); Heather, whose buoyant boisterousness is destined to bounce her into the arms of future female lovers.



They all chafe in their various ways at regal and parental authority, and there are strong elements of a Freudian tale in which the young break away from their parents. "The royal family is everyone's—family", says the king. And the novel is generously laced with comments pointing to this theme, such as that of a psycho-therapist, who says of dreams which raise human and animal images—"they do postulate a common ancestry for humans and the other animals, especially when they represent royal families or gods, because royal families and gods are themselves the parents of their people"; or the thoughts of the queen, while comparing her beloved pigeons (which she takes as much delight in nurturing as she takes in construing Thucydides) with the gaudybirds on the offshore islands, that "she owed a greater duty to the pigeons for the reason that parents owed a greater duty to their own than other people's children: they were allowed to do more for them". The theme of conflict between children and parents however, is muted by the gentle and commonsensical qualities of the parents and by the progress of the children into death and exile, rather than fruitful adulthood.

Death plays a capricious role in the novel: the king is so long a-dying that the queen and the sons Sempronius, Urban and Balthasar beat him through death's door by such unexpected routes as assassination, cliff-erosion and suicide. A multiplicity of royal deaths necessitates a secular performance of the Mozart Requiem in memory of the royal dead. The king, who takes religion seriously but vaguely, has his feelings hurt "by even so much secularism". It is not long before he, too, takes his leave of the world, in an appropriately quiet exit, since the many recoveries which he has made throughout the novel have been received as progressively less and less miraculous.

Our belief in the imaginary country of Evarchia is helped by the exactness with which it is imagined. From the buildings of the Winter Palace, with its seventeenth-century wing and the "thick block that had been cobbled onto it in 1869 in imitation, presumably, of a castle keep" to the Summer Palace, "an archipelago of small kiosks dotted about a garden", the buildings and topography of the country are very clearly delineated. The genius loci of the offshore islands, where mainlanders enjoy and endure the summer heat, is especially strongly present, even to its distinctive smell attributed to either the local brand of tobacco or to the freesias that grow wild.

Brigid Brophy's precision extends to the elegance of her sentences which seem, like the Crown Prince Ulrich's snowflake obsidian, to have been lovingly polished. Frequently I found myself pausing to admire the unexpected *mot juste*: for instance—"shepherdessed at last, by an employee of the Airport, to-

wards the Arrivals Lounge". Should I have written "*an unexpected mot juste*"?—even the definite and indefinite article do not escape the author's close attention. Just before the Chairman (by now ex-) of the Evarchian Communist Party dies in a military palace coup, he hears an old opponent declare "Look! the tank" and "It seemed to him doubly insulting that she misused the definite article, after so persistently failing to use it at all". Another comment on language is revealing: Missy Six, the sixth of the queen's string of ex-Girton or ex-Newnham instructresses in Greek, says "I find it hard to be as permissive about language as about life". Readers can be thankful that Brigid Brophy has permitted her own imagination to roam so freely, while pinning down its product with such control.

Above all, the pleasure of the novel lies in its narrative skill: the varied pace, now measured now accelerating (I particularly liked the way the many strands of the Summer Ball were woven together). The subsidiary plots, such as that concerning the hapless leader of the Communist Party of Evarchia, elaborate the central line of the story like a mordent or trill. The description of the committee meeting to look into the need for more chairs in the palace rang very true to me, as someone who attends many committee meetings, down to the phallic doodlings and being "simultaneously fascinated and bored out of his wits".

In case it is felt by *Freethinker* readers that an imagined kingdom, such as Evarchia, is impossibly fey and remote, the princess Heather does point out that apart from the king the family are all militant atheists. It may come as a surprise to those aware of Brigid Brophy's serious political concern, as an atheist and campaigner for the rights of writers and other-than-human animals, to encounter such light and humorous writing. I look forward to re-reading *Palace Without Chairs* as I am sure there are further flavours to be revealed a second time.

JIM HERRICK

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HIPPOCRATIC WRITINGS. Penguin, £1.95.

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A "point about women: if they have intercourse with men their health is better than if they do not". This statement from the Hippocratic writings—so described as they come from a number of writings from about 430-330 BC—seems fairly good sense, both in terms of medical ideas today, and the work of anthropologists. This does not mean that this book is a manual of useful medical knowledge; indeed, it contains, a great deal that would be considered nonsense today. For example, the passage of the sperm is traced from the spinal marrow through the kidneys, the testicles, and a separate passage from the urinary tract. And, thankfully, it



adds "erotic dreams and the nature and effects of the whole complaint, and why it is a precursor of insanity, are no part of my present subject". There is also an amusing description of a young prostitute jumping up and down to release the sperm and avoid conception—maybe a good way? Elsewhere one reads that "a woman is never ambidextrous". This statement seems to suffer from the same lack of observation as Aristotle's alleged assertion that women have fewer teeth than men.

Nevertheless, despite such lapses of simple observation, the main body of Hippocratic writings are established on a rational basis: "It is my opinion that all that has been written by doctors or sophists on Nature has more to do with painting than medicine. I do not believe that any clear knowledge of nature can be obtained from any source other than a study of medicine . . .". Some of these sophists described medicine as "the lowest dregs of physics". The need for medical science stems from illness, and emphasis is placed upon the part played by diet, and geographical location, under "Airs, Waters and Places", in preventing, as well as curing diseases. Epilepsy was referred to in mysterious tones as the "sacred disease"; the Hippocratic writings refute this, "perhaps these claims are not true and it is men in search of a living who invent all these fancy tales about this particular disease". A point still worth noting today.

Anyone at all familiar with the name Hippocrates, and the other doctors associated with him in these writings, will have heard of the Hippocratic Oath. This is printed in this volume, and note made that a version of it was still subscribed to by medical undergraduates of Scottish universities in 1973. Assisting in abortion, euthanasia, sexual contacts with patients and even cutting are all prohibited to those who sign this Oath. Though within these writings there are descriptions of surgery and the methods employed to mend broken bones. One curious passage reads ominously: "what drugs will not cure, the knife will; what the knife will not cure, the cautery will; what the cautery will not cure must be considered incurable."

Even in the days of Hippocrates, doctors were pleased to receive acclaim for healing the slightly ill "in whose treatment even the biggest mistakes would have no serious consequences". This book is published in the Pelican classics series—other titles include the works of Paine, Darwin and Mill. Owing to its specialised medical detail, one cannot think it will appeal to the same reader as these other volumes in the series.

DENIS COBELL

## THEATRE

**SENTENCED TO LIFE** by Malcolm Muggeridge and Alan Thornhill. Westminster Theatre.

Coming in on the coat-tails of another play about euthanasia, *Sentenced to Life* is bound to be compared with *Whose Life Is It Anyway?* (reviewed in *The Freethinker*, April 1978, now transferred to the Savoy Theatre). It need not suffer from over-exposure of theme, for the authors admit that euthanasia is "the next great moral controversy to be fought in our time". After Brian Clark's sympathetic treatment of the problem, in fact, one looked forward to a spirited attack from the pen of so noted a Christian as Malcolm Muggeridge. But, having watched the effort he and his colleague attempt at giving both sides "a fair swing", I prefer, I must say, his open hostility. It might at least have made for more interesting drama. And that is really the point. Whereas *Whose Life Is It Anyway?* was all the better for its concentrated focus on the plight of one individual, *Sentenced to Life* suffers, as drama, from a lack of focus and through trying to present "the balanced view".

We never know where we are with the play. It is almost, indeed, as though we were watching two separate pieces—one long exposition and its truncated sequel—with only the characters and overall topic in common. How are we meant to react? The first section seems to be treating the subject as a case of hypocrisy, contrasting public appearance with private reality. The second turns it into an object lesson of guilt and redemption. The result is an interesting beginning that goes nowhere and a conclusion that arrives from a play down the road.

The authors invite this problem by presenting the two central characters not in conflict, but in isolation. The first act is dominated by the paralysed wife, tormented by her continual reliance on her husband and others, and slowly disintegrating into a grotesque parody of a loving and talented wife. Physically she is no longer a person; emotionally, too, she is seen to collapse. Her responses deteriorate to one long harangue against humanity at large and her husband specifically. Her disability prevents her from expressing her love all but verbally and now even that comes out as abuse. This distortion of love threatens to distort his love of her in the process. She recognises this and plays upon it by transforming her husband into an automaton, challenging him to confront her with human resistance. Alas, as she becomes increasingly desperate with her immobility, his responses are deadened. He ceases even to hear her until one day at last she gets through: she wishes to die and she wants him to kill her—that is the final duty she will ever ask him to perform. And he is stunned into life again. His reaction is only too human.

NATIONAL SECULAR SOCIETY

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The hypocrisy of this first act is that the husband (an Oxford don) has always asserted reason over emotion. Interviewed on television, he espouses liberal causes like euthanasia, and his views on that subject are all the more pointed bearing in mind his wife's condition. Why, when he has adopted the role of a spokesman, does he refuse to live up to his principles when they are put to the test? With wearied reluctance, he capitulates and delivers the fatal dose. The rest of the play is given over to his personal guilt once his wife dies and he is left to struggle on alone.

If the authors had managed a more convincing portrait of the husband from the outset—if they had made him the central character throughout—the play might have been stronger as a clearly defined, Christian response to the debate. As it is, the husband emerges as either an intellectual coward or a “born again” Christian whose private anguish is neither convincing nor worthy of much respect. The wife, on the other hand, is much the more rounded character (not merely a mouthpiece for the secular view). Taking into account her conspicuous absence after the interval, the husband's torment seems wholly self-centred and self-pitying.

Mr Muggeridge (I assume) is responsible for the largely irrelevant broadside at the media, and the action is shot through with superfluous attempts at levity. Character roles are provided for the subordinates, and the actors make almost too much of them, given the weight of these characters in the play. It is not her fault, for instance, that Susan Colverd all but spoils the evening by turning in an excellent début performance as the German au pair. The part should never have been allowed such importance in the first place. Equally, Ruth Goring and John Byron in the central performances do everything their authors intend of the characters they play. It is a pleasure to imagine what they would have done with a better play. I almost shudder to think how powerful the Christian attack might have been.

JAMES MACDONALD

## LETTERS

Francis Bennion chooses to rebuke Maureen Duffy (in the June “Freethinker”) for describing herself and other NSS members as atheists. Since he asserts that atheism involves “dogmatism” and “faith”, he is evidently under the impression that atheists necessarily claim that no god exists.

In fact the Oxford definition of “atheist” is “one who denies OR” (my emphasis) “disbelieves the existence of a God.” To disbelieve in a god requires neither dogmatism nor faith. To profess oneself an atheist in this sense is merely to make a psychological statement about oneself.

The “a” at the beginning of “atheist” is the Greek privative, which has much the force of “without”.

Etymologically an atheist need be saying no more than that he does without a god. In essence the word “atheist” is a translation into posh (that is, Greek-derived) language of the slightly older English word “godless”.

Before attacking on a point of pedantry it is wise to make sure one knows the facts oneself.

BRIGID BROPHY

I am sorry that Francis Bennion resented my “we atheists” speech. My psychological intention was one of solidarity and fraternity, to make it quite clear that I was speaking on this occasion not as a notorious (i.e. announced as such in the pages of the “Daily Mirror”) homosexual but as a paid-up member of the NSS. The OED defines the term “atheist” as “one who denies or disbelieves the existence of a God”. Many such there must have been present, together with some who prefer to define themselves as “one who holds that the existence of anything beyond material phenomena . . . cannot be known” (OED “agnostic”) or as a follower of “the religion of humanity”, the nearest the OED comes to a “humanist”.

There is room for all three in the NSS but I find it strange that Francis Bennion is prepared to belong to a society whose rules (as he calls its aims) he insists on discounting. It's precisely because of its “rules”, and in particular its commitment to the a-religious idea of man the animal, expressed in the concept of extending the moral law to other animals, that many of us find our secular home in the NSS rather than elsewhere.

In his last paragraph Francis Bennion calls for singlemindedness among secularists and accuses me (and I take it Brigid Brophy as well) of intolerance and bigotry. I find it hard to see how he can have misconstrued my whole speech by fastening on one word in it or indeed her symbolic act which he so graciously describes as “antics”. Clearly my attempt at fraternity was misplaced in one quarter at least.

MAUREEN DUFFY

I agree with Brigid Brophy that in the matter of experiments which cause the death of pigs the crucial question is “What is the value of this pig's life to the pig?” And I agree with her answer: “invaluable, because unique and irreplaceable”.

May I, through you, sir, ask Brigid Brophy “What is the value of an unborn child to that unborn child?” Is it not also “invaluable, because unique and irreplaceable?”

CHARLES OXLEY

You are quite right to upbraid me for carelessness in replying to Ms Smoker's letter. (See “The Freethinker” June 1978, News and Notes.) There is no excuse for inaccuracies, like allowing non-existent or erroneous titles to creep in, though, as I am sure you will understand the reason is pressure of time.

I do not believe, however, that the substance of what I said is affected. The two atheists who debated in “Cross Question” should have been identified as Gore Vidal and Clive James. I should have mentioned Malcolm Muggeridge and James Cameron as contributors from a pro-Christian and a non-Christian viewpoint to recent religious output. Atheists' views are well represented on the air. However, the Church of England is the Established Church in this country and its membership among our listeners is sufficiently large to justify the religious broadcasting we offer. Nor do I believe for reasons given in my last letter,



that the Archbishop (of York) intended to insult anyone.

Surely the nature of debate and the search for truth is to tolerate and explore the well argued views of others.

PATRICIA HODGSON  
Senior Assistant, Secretariat

*(Freethinkers will doubt whether "atheists' views are well represented on the air" is an accurate statement. Only the Archbishop of York can say what his motives were, but however well-meaning, in our view he might have taken care not to make remarks which could come over as insulting. Editor.)*

### *Voltaire Bi-centenary*

of man's environment, and the "sickening manoeuvres of the police states of the world".

The fresh vigour of Voltaire's mind was something we could learn from today; the fact that his curiosity ranged over the whole scene of his day made him, unlike many one-dimensional specialists today, see that "what is of human concern is the concern of humanity". He concluded by pointing out that Voltaire, while having nothing to do with religious dogma or absolutist presumptions of atheism, left room for the existence of something significant beyond the limits of human apprehension. This sense of an "as-yet-unexplained whole" was important to humanists, in Dr Hemming's view.

Barbara Smoker concluded the meeting with extracts from *Candide*, which she urged people to read for its ironic attack on the blind optimism of belief in the "best of all possible worlds". The meeting was very well attended by over 70 people, and had been organised by the Humanist Liaison Committee.

### *Child Protection Bill*

child pornography in this country. I dislike this Bill because it is based on the word "indecent", which seems to me a completely non-legal word—a ridiculous word. If I may say so, when Lady Faithfull showed me some of the pictures which she had that she thought were indecent, they were not very attractive. No, but they did not shock me. I do not think anyone who has reached my age and lived a long life, and knows a little bit about life, will be shocked very much."

Laws are easily passed the consequences of which are unintended but which are repealed with great difficulty. An example is the Criminal Law Amendment Act which came into effect in 1886. It was the notorious amendment of Henry Labouchere to this Act which resulted in homosexual acts between adults becoming a criminal offence. That law was concerned with the age of consent, particularly for young girls—and was swept in on a wave of pub-

licity about child prostitution, influenced by the crusading journalist W. T. Stead. It was never intended to refer to homosexuality, but the amendment's poor wording led to decades of blackmail and imprisonment for homosexuals until the reform of 1967 following the Wolfenden Report.

### **Irresponsible Campaigners**

It is amazing how often irresponsible campaigners using half-truths and playing upon genuine public concern can end up creating silly, even inhumane, laws. It is typical of some organisations, such as the National Viewers' and Listeners' Association, and some individuals, such as Mrs Whitehouse, to distort serious concern into puritanical and constraining injunctions. The Albany Trust was attacked by Mrs Whitehouse and although the allegations were never substantiated the attempt to damage reputation had been made. It was suggested that the Family Planning Association were using government funds irresponsibly by giving young people advice about contraception—but not justified and substantiated. It has been suggested that homosexuals are trying to "make converts" in schools—but it is not substantiated with evidence. The smear sticks, though the facts remain elusive.

Even the National and Local Government Officers Association (NALGO) allowed its branch in Hereford and Worcester to add weight to the campaign of Mrs Whitehouse by sending a copy of the National Viewers' and Listeners' Association's petition to its members. Is not this extraordinary behaviour for a large trade union?

It is to be hoped that Lord Houghton's courageous voice is heeded. He attempted to find out the facts about child pornography in the USA and commented: "One found there, as I am sure one would find here, that talking to a wide range of people there was little or no information whatsoever about what is supposed to be this pending danger and the swamping of this country in pornography."

Lord Houghton also said ". . . we are at risk of becoming a House of obsession about this question of sex and pornography, and all matters associated with it. There are a great many more evils in the world to be obsessional about, and in this country to be obsessional about. Let us preserve some sense of proportion . . ."

**The narrow-minded dogmatism of headmasters who refuse to countenance changes in the times is familiar to almost all ex-pupils. Now a headmaster has been forced to relent over his refusal to allow women teachers to wear trousers. When will the first battle take place over men wearing skirts to morning assembly? (Not that the local priest would count!)**



# OBITUARIES

## MRS L. M. LAYCOCK

Lilian Maud Laycock of Blackpool died after a short illness in hospital on 31 March 1978. After a long life and a long association with secularism, she remained a freethinker to the end. She had been a member of the Bradford Secular Society, and was later secretary to the Blackpool Branch of the National Secular Society until the branch became extinct. She was also a member of Fylde Humanist Group at Lytham St Annes. She leaves a son, two daughters, two grandchildren and four great-grandchildren.

## MR J. G. BURDON

John George Burdon died at his home in Lytham on 3 May 1978. He had been a secularist for over 40 years and was a good friend of Mrs Laycock, and like her he will be sadly missed. A secular funeral took place at Park Crematorium, Lytham.

# Freethinker Fund

For several months the Freethinker Fund has reached an excellent total of well over £100 per month. This is a substantial help in covering the costs of production, and it is hoped that this month's lower total is only a temporary lapse. Thanks are expressed to the following: Anon, £2; Anon, 38p; I. Barr, 40p; M. Brittain, 50p; P. Brown, 60p; A. E. Burton, £5; A. M. Chapman, 60p; E. F. Channon, £1; R. J. Condon, £2.66; Farewell to comrade Ebury, £40; T. H. Ellison, £8.60; B. Farlow, £2.60; J. Gibson, £1.60; R. J. Hale, £2.60; E. J. Hughes, £1; Mrs M. Knight, £2.60; J. Lippitt, £3; H. Lyons-Davies, £1; L. M. Moore, 61p; Max P. Morf, £2.60; A. E. Morris, £1.60; E. A. W. Morris, £1.10; F. Muskett, £3.50; R. H. Reader, 25p; E. Wakefield, £1; L. M. Wright, £2.12; D. Wright, £3. Total for the period 17 May to 19 June 1978: £89.92.

# EVENTS

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

**Havering and District Humanist Society.** Chris Pelling: "The Work and Problems of a Local Chemist". Tuesday, 18 July, 8 pm. Harold Wood Social Centre (corner of Gubbins Lane and Squirrels Heath Road).

**Leeds and District Humanist Society.** Trevor Johnson: "Race Relations in Leeds". Tuesday, 11 July, 7.45 pm. Swarthmore Education Centre, Woodhouse Square, Leeds.

**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.)

**London Young Humanists.** Louis Chase: "The Blacks in Britain Today". Sunday, 16 July, 7.30 pm. 13 Prince of Wales Terrace, London W8.

**Merseyside Humanist Group.** Carol Ball: "Remedial Education". Wednesday, 19 July, 7.45 pm. 248 Woodchurch Road, Birkenhead. Further information from Marion Clowes 051-342 2562 or Ann Coombes 051-608 3835.

**Muswell Hill Humanist Group.** Islington social worker: "Parents and Children". Wednesday, 12 July, 8.30 pm. 15 Woodberry Crescent, N10. Discussion: "How Accurate are our Zodiac Signs". Monday, 17 July, 8.30 pm. 30 Archibald Road, N7.

**South Place Ethical Society.** Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, WC1. Sundays, 11 am: 9 July, David Rubinstein: "The Housing of the People—Victorian Values and our Own". 16 July, Prof Shivash Thakur: "Hinduism and Post Industrial Society". Tuesday Discussions will continue on an informal basis at 7.00 pm.

**International Humanist and Ethical Union Congress.** 31 July to 4 August. Theme: "Work for Human Needs in a Just Society". Details from BHA, 13 Prince of Wales Terrace, London W8.

**Humanist Holidays.** 5-12-19 August. (One or two weeks.) Hotel by Derwentwater at Keswick, Lake District. Around £60 per week, excluding lunch. Apply to secretary, Marjorie Mephem, 29 Fairview Road, Sutton, Surrey, tel: 01-642 8796.

## THE FREETHINKER

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