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SLIPPERY DIVORCE SLOPE COGGAN OPPOSES CHURCH REMARRIAGES

The Church of England General Synod has voted against a proposal to allow divorcees to remarry in church. The vote was very close and clearly swayed by a weighty speech from the Archbishop of Canterbury, Dr Coggan. He placed himself firmly against the recommendation to allow second marriages in church, asking "Is this the right time for the church to take off the brake, possibly the last brake on the rush down the divorce slope?"

Thus by a heavy-handed moralising tone, which is now Dr Coggan's hallmark, the Church of England has kept itself firmly in the world of hypocrisy and topsy-turvy thinking. It was pointed out in *The Freethinker* (June 1978), in a front page article on the report *Marriage and the Church's Task*, that the church creates its own intractable problem by claiming that marriage is indissoluble in an age when something approaching 50 per cent of marriages do not last a lifetime.

The Bishop of Lichfield, chairman of the Marriage Commission, told the Synod: "The majority of the Commission . . . believe that the church should now take steps to revise its regulations so as to permit the marriage of some divorced persons in church. We . . . do not believe that such a change would harm the church's image . . . It would rather enable the church, freed from the embarrassment of its present obsession with divorce, to witness to the importance of marriage, to which we feel not only the church but also the state gives too little attention."

Too much attention is given by both church and state to pompous moralising about how people ought to live their lives, and not enough attention to helping people organise their own lives in their own way.

The Bishop of Lichfield acknowledged the precarious position in this matter in which the church found itself at present: "The procedure we have

put forward would involve the clergy in far less difficulty than they experience under the present system, and could be no more divisive than the uneasy situation we find ourselves in after decades of debate . . ." The church, always sure that it is right, takes an awful long time to decide *what* is right.

Another precarious aspect of the present situation is that there is no law preventing individual priests going against the church directions and remarrying divorcees in spite of general church policy against it. Mrs P. Cornwall-Jones of Southwark said the Bishop of Southwark, Dr Stockwood, had told his priests that he considered them free to follow their individual consciences in this question. More than 100 were now willing to do so. Will the Church of England—not for the first time in its history—develop a situation where theory and practice become quite distinct?

Flatulent Platitudes

The hypocrisy about the subject, as in many subjects, is best exemplified by the words of Dr Coggan. He claims to be able to speak seriously to the whole nation on morals and the family: he once went so far as to publicly ask for the institution of a Minister of Family (perhaps with computer data on everyone's relationships?) When he comes to make a pronouncement himself, he can offer no more than flatulent platitudes: ". . . the church is bending to the wind of laxity in married faithfulness . . . the rush down the divorce slope . . ." He referred to a potential ordinand who had been divorced as "a man whose record has been tarnished". As if a perfectly rational decision to change one's relationships were like some ghastly blot on the scutcheon in a Victorian melodrama.

The barrenness of the church's contribution to

(Continued over)

serious discussion about personal relationships could not be better illustrated than by the debate on remarriage. Divorce and changing marriage patterns and marriage expectations present real problems in our society; children do not grow easily into maturity in an atmosphere of insecurity and conflict. So society must look deeply at the reality of marriage today and consider the implications of the fact that marriage is now a less permanent institution. Some more flexible and imaginative thought is needed on matters such as the stable growth of children in one-parent families, serial families where children can retain contact with both parents after separa-

tion without an atmosphere of animosity, establishing firmer commitment in relationships before children are conceived (possible as never before, now that contraception is widely available.) But what has the Synod to say? Mr Oswald Clark criticised the report *Marriage and the Church's Task* for its "all-pervading emphasis on relationships"!

Even a churchman, the Archdeacon of Winchester, thought the present discipline was "scandalously illogical". But the churchmen have voted to remain "scandalously illogical". That has a kind of—well, if not exactly consistency—at least predictability.

WORLDWIDE

CANADA

Canadian churches have been in conflict with the Government over the Income Tax Act. A circular was issued pointing out that political activities are prohibited for charities, which include churches. Political activities were said to embrace representations to MPs, letter-writing campaigns to editors to sway public opinion, and public meetings to apply pressure on the Government. Violation could cause a charity to lose its tax-free status and the right to issue tax-exempt receipts for donations, according to the circular.

An Anglican official said the circular is inconsistent with accepted practice. Questions were raised in the Commons in which MPs quoted well-known breaches of the Act, such as groups lobbying for aboriginal rights, or fighting for change in the Abortion laws. The Government withdrew the circular for revision after Opposition members had labelled it regressive, intimidating and a violation of free speech.

ITALY

A film producer, Carlo Ponti, film director, Jorge Pan Komatos, and American writer, Robert Katz, have all been accused of defaming the memory of the late Pope Pius XII. An appeals court has now acquitted them after a lower court had sentenced Mr Katz to 14 months imprisonment and the producer and director each to six months imprisonment.

The film *Reprisal* sparked off the law suit, initiated by the Countess Elena Rossignani, a niece of the late Pope. The film was based on the book *Death in Rome*, which had as its theme the massacre of 335 Italian civilians by Nazis on 23 March 1944, as a reprisal for the bombing of 32 German soldiers by Italian partisans. The book alleges that Pius XII, who has often been accused of pro-German sympathies, was aware of the plans for massacre and did nothing to prevent it.

The appeals court decided that Mr Katz has exercised "his right to historic criticism". The case may proceed to the Italian Supreme Court.

ISRAEL

The Israel Secular Association has recently been formed. (It is a successor organisation to the Israeli Humanist Movement and the League Against Religious Coercion.) The Association's main aim is to free the Israeli citizen from the coercion of the religious system in law, education and the general pattern of life in Israel. In a statement the Israel Secular Association has said that it "is a movement for cultural and social struggle on the basis of rational thought. It places man and society in such a setting that they are responsible for their lives and fate and exclude any conscious and ordained intervention by super-natural powers in their lives."

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How Many Battalions has the Truth?

PETER CADOGAN

Today the arms race has reached new proportions, but the armed forces are losing their function. Peter Cadogan, General Secretary of South Place Ethical Society and national secretary of the Committee of One Hundred in the sixties, argues that it is time to re-assess both the doublethink which underlies the arms trade and the dilemma which faces the military.

We live in a state of permanent war preparations and we call it "peace". The situation is as ancient as civilisation itself. War has always been the health of the State, politics have always come out of the barrel of a gun. That is the scale of our dilemma—to abolish war we shall need to abolish politics and the State, to proceed beyond civilisation to something else. At that point our mortal imagination calls a halt. Until we can break through that barrier, the one within ourselves, we shall continue to be laden with wars, recoveries from past wars and preparations for the next. There will be no health in us!

Young officer cadets at Sandhurst are taught that war is the means of solving a political problem when peaceful means have failed. The assumption built into that is that military methods work and therefore constitute a viable option. The uncomfortable result of the development of weapons in our century, however, has been to cut that assumption to pieces. The Americans in Vietnam had all the nuclear hardware they needed to wipe out their enemy and were unable to use it. Had they used it the result would have been the total alienation of world opinion, an insurrectional situation at home and a high probability of World War III with the deaths of tens of millions of Americans. Such risks were not for the taking. They preferred, and accepted, defeat.

As long ago as 1957 the Americans stopped talking about "massive retaliation". They didn't change their language and their tactics out of any kindness of heart but because that was the year the Russians put their first sputnik into orbit. Today, some 600 miles up, 4550 satellites circumnavigate the Earth every day and their seeing power is as though they were two or three miles up. Any single motor car moving anywhere on the surface of the Earth can be followed from outer space. One wonders why they continue to make a fuss about spies. The reason is, of course, to sustain the very credibility of war itself. If that was lost and it dawned on the hapless tax-payer that he was the victim of

a gigantic confidence trick, what price then the future of Sandhurst, Dartmouth and Cranwell (not to mention the Kremlin and the Pentagon)?

Our masters have this appalling dilemma before them: for thousands of years their position has centred firmly on military force. The military and priestly vocations, acting in close conjunction (one to control the body and the other the mind) have constituted the way of life of the governing classes. Today with the Church discredited and the Army functionless—what are they to do? *There is no answer*—for them. There come times when whole social groups have to bow out of history and this is one of those times. It is an extraordinarily difficult situation. The Armed Forces ask themselves: what is our role? And no one can tell them, because there is nothing to say.

Functions of an Army

Of course there is always Northern Ireland, the absurd token exercise of keeping a very expensive force in Germany 33 years after the end of the war and the prospect of a little strike-breaking if Scottish dustmen or English firemen are thought to step too far out of line. None of these are the proper function of an Army, which is as expounded in Sandhurst and instanced above. Meanwhile dissatisfaction mounts slowly but surely in the Armed Forces themselves. They are, after all, entitled to be told what their job is—and no one tells them. Even their senior officers don't know. There is an internal crisis of confidence that is potentially of historic proportions.

Part of the trouble with English radical thinking is that it has been much over-governed by the old-fashioned socialist view that the Army is a conservative institution and entirely the business of the "ruling class", so that there is not much more to be said about it. People forget (or they never knew) that democracy in this country was born in the Army i.e. among the Leveller rank-and-file of the New Model in the 1640s, that the landslide victory of the Labour Party in 1945 was the product of the Forces vote, that the Portuguese Revolution was led by the Army and that it was the Army that overthrew the Colonels in Greece. It was, of course, the Petrograd Garrison that put the Revolution on the map in 1917 and it was the Long March of the Army in China that laid the foundations for 1949. What all this means as regards the future of the Armed Forces in England it is too early to say. But it is at least time to start thinking intelligently about the problem.

But if the Bomb, the satellite and the rocket have made war unwinnable between the Great Powers, and if for reasons given above our governors cannot abandon war without giving up their governing position itself—then they have to find other means to justify their militarism. And the Third World is conveniently at hand. Between 1870 and 1914 we had a Scramble for Africa; now we have a scramble for the world. It is not done this time with regiments, gunboats, flags and missionaries. There is a more complex package—military and civil “aid”, military and civil “advisers”, capital investment, consultants, secret agents, all sorts of “covers” plus, of course, Oxfam and the International Red Cross (which somehow never get to those places like Biafra and Eritrea of which their political masters disapprove).

Politicians' Contortions

The contortions our politicians get into in this situation are quite amazing. The same government appointed a Minister for Disarmament and a Head of Defence Sales to push re-armament wherever he could. Back in January 1966 Mr Healey solemnly addressed Parliament as follows:

“While the Government attach the highest importance to making progress in the field of arms control and disarmament, we must also take what practical steps we can to ensure that this country does not fail to secure its rightful share of this valuable commercial market.”

What can you do with people like that except get rid of them? The trouble is we don't get rid of them. Even telling the whole truth about them (as Anthony Sampson has done so brilliantly in *The Arms Bazaar*, Hodder and Stoughton) seems to make no difference. How many battalions has the truth? Just four months after Mr Healey's exercise in newspeak his Head of Defence Sales, Mr Raymond Brown, gave us his classic ruling: “as for the moral question, I just put it out of my mind”. But then with John Stonehouse to help him there was not likely to be any ethical question at issue. As one arms salesman put it:

“We were able to sell South Africa some helicopters because they were half-French; and they're of course the deadliest machines against natives. When the South Africans came through with an order for patrol boats we told them to re-draft the order to make it look as if they're for civilian use: (“surely you must have some *black* fishing boats that need protecting?”)

In 1976 it was the French Alouette helicopters that were used to drop tear gas on crowds; but the Russians were not to be outdone. In the same year the 12-bore Baikal shot-gun was the big seller in Johannesburg. East and West, the militarists and their industrial partners are all alike. The Americans, the British, the French, the Germans, the Russians

and Czechs, the Dutch (especially Prince Bernhard), they are all in it together and they all provide mutual justification for each other.

One of the worst villains is the Englishman Sam Cummings, the Chairman and principal shareholder of INTERARMS, whose six-storey warehouse in Manchester contains 300,000 weapons for sale. In 1967 he testified to the Senate Foreign Relations Committee:

“It is almost a perpetual motion machine. We all agree that the arms race is a disaster, and we all agree that it could lead to an ultimate conflict which would more or less destroy the civilised world as we know it. The old problem is, who is going to take the first move to really pull back?” Who indeed? In this crazy world of opposites it was the king of the arms men, Alfred Nobel, who established the Peace Prize with the loot of war and who said, in 1892, to a leading pacifist at the Peace Congress at Berne:

“My factories may end war sooner than your Congresses. The day when two army corps will be able to destroy each other in one second, all civilised nations will recoil from war in horror and disband their armies.”

If for “factories” we read Aldermaston and its fellows he was manifestly right. But today, 86 years later, despite his rightness, i.e. the end of war between the industrialised nations because none have any defence against the weapons of the others, we still haven't solved the problem. Nobel had not thought of the military possibilities of the Third World come to sovereignty, and of the scope that that might provide for the West.

When it comes to finding the next stage of the answer Anthony Sampson is disappointing: “the long-term limitation of arms sales must depend in the end on international agreement” (p.338). He had just spent all those pages showing how it could not be so.

Taking Peace

Peace is much like freedom. If you wait for someone to give it to you, you will wait for ever. The good things in life have to be taken, created, made. Passing resolutions will do no good. The world's militarism and the world's arms trade stem from Europe and North America. If they are to be stopped, they can only be stopped at source. If we in the West can find a way to live with each other without threats, and can transform our institutions, then, having no continuing need for violence at home, it will be irrelevant to export it. It seems to me that we are much nearer to that situation than most people think. A war in Europe today is just about inconceivable. The contradictions are becoming ridiculous. The Russians are one moment huffing and puffing about their Army and Navy

(Continued on back page)

Patience, Faith, Reward

SARAH LAWSON

The author was a member of Job's Daughters in Indiana in her childhood. The Job's Daughters, connected with the Masons, were a ritual-ridden group, whose pious Saturday meetings were endured by Sarah Lawson with increasing impatience. Here she amusingly describes her memories of the tedium of her experiences with the JDs.

When I was about 14, I was persuaded to join a new chapter of Job's Daughters which was being formed in our town in Indiana. Job's Daughters was connected with the Masons, and my grandfather had been a Mason in the days when it was as much an insurance company as a social or religious organisation. My mother felt that membership in Job's Daughters would be a very respectable and genteel pursuit for me. She had seen—in another town where we had lived—Job's Daughters in their white robes come to church and sing "Nearer My God To Thee" while standing in a cross formation. Nothing could have been more lady-like.

Job's Daughters

I was initiated into Job's Daughters one hot summer day along with about 30 other girls between the ages of 12 and 18. Initiation meant dressing up in our best and being taken through a ritual which would have been complicated by Vatican standards. What we lacked in antique jewels and liturgy we made up in adolescent Protestant solemnity. I became a member of the choir in the new Bethel, as a JD chapter is called. We spoke of ourselves as "JD's" now, for we were members and knew the secret handshake. We were exclusive; we all had to have a relative in the Masons. On alternate Saturdays we would say importantly to our school friends who suggested some other entertainment for the day, "I can't. I've got JD." If it sounded like a disease to others, we knew that it was practically as good as church.

Job's Daughters had been founded in 1911, when girls very well might have needed something to take their minds off their limited lives. The long white gowns we wore had to clear the floor by exactly two inches. White cords attached to the rounded but modest neckline were to be twisted together at the bosom three times (symbolising the three crucial watchwords of Job's career: Patience, Faith, and Reward), then belted twice around the waist and tied neatly in the front. The tassels still reached almost to the hem.

As we elected new officers every six months, everyone had a chance to hold office. There were

19 offices. The left-over members formed the choir. Some of the officers had nothing to do except initiate new members, but all 19 would be called on at each meeting to explain their duties. I suspect that we elected new officers so often partly because six months was as long as anyone could stand parroting her memorised job description. Spontaneity was not encouraged; every meeting was identical to every other meeting.

We filed into the Bethel room in two long lines from two doors at the west end. We sang a lady-like march which began "Open the doors of the Bethel/With joy as we sing our sweet lay" and then followed the leaders of the two lines, the Guide and Marshall, through an intricate path around the rectangular room set with an altar and chairs in a semi-circle. We "squared our corners" sharply under the exacting eye of the Worshipful Matron. As the crocodile passed the officers' seats they stopped and took up their positions. First to stop was the Honoured Queen, who wore a floor-length purple robe and a crown and sat on a throne on a dais in the east. Next came her companions on the dais, the Senior Princess and the Junior Princess, who wore short purple capes and crowns with fewer stones in them and sat on smaller thrones. The Treasurer, the Secretary, the Chaplain, the First, Second, Third, Fourth, and Fifth Messengers, the Junior and Senior Custodians, the Inner and Outer Guards—all stood by their chairs while the choir were finally escorted to their seats at one side. All this time the Musician had been playing the piano ("It is my duty to preside at the instrument", she would recite later when called upon by the Honoured Queen). When we sat we had to remember not to cross our legs. It had not been lady-like in 1911, nor was it approved of by the Job's Daughters handbook 50 years later.

Purging Ceremony

Next came the Purging Ceremony. The Guide and Marshall, who sat in the west on a small dais of their own when they weren't guiding and marshalling, stood in front of the eastern dais while every member filed past them. We all went to the same school and knew each other as well as, or better than, we cared to, but every other Saturday afternoon at the Masonic Temple we conducted the Purging Ceremony just in case there were impostors in our midst. We whispered the Secret Passwords to the Guide—"Patience, Faith, Reward"—and we delivered the Secret Handshake to the Marshall. I looked forward to the Purging Ceremony because it was a chance to move and change position—and it was a few minutes during which I did not have to remember not to cross my legs.

At some point we sang with great immodesty but clear and saintly voices:

We are, we are, we are the Daughters of Job;
We are, we are, we are the Daughters of Job—
The fairest, the fairest in all the land.

We had a prayer by the Chaplain, who opened the Bible on the altar and returned to her seat by elaborately walking backwards. We sat through a listing of the pious duties of 19 girls who, in fact, did very little. This inventory was the main business of the meeting. Everywhere there were allusions to the uplifting story of Job (surely one of the more de-praved tales in the Old Testament). Job had gone from riches to rags and back again at the whim of a sadistic God who was more like a riverboat gambler than the Creator of Heaven and Earth. We ignored the riverboat gambler aspect and concentrated on Job's patience in adversity, his faith in God in spite of everything, and the eventual reward for his steadfastness. ("Adversity" and "steadfastness" were *the* favourite words in JD.)

The Secretary read out every scrap of correspondence that came our way. It was usually bills for our outfits or parties or perhaps congratulatory messages from other Masonic branches on our founding or our anniversary or our election of new officers.

Role of the Senior Princess

I was for a time understudy to the Senior Princess, who was absent for several meetings. This meant not only that I got to wear her purple cape and crown, but that I had to read her paragraph in the small purple handbook—the *Ritual*—which laid down the form of meeting and the stilted speeches we made. I had to remember from one fortnight to the next how to pronounce "epoch" and "adversary", which occurred in the Senior Princess' speech, and which still give me a slight *frisson* of stage fright when I have to pronounce them.

The meeting was closed with another prayer by the Chaplain, a re-forming of the crocodile and finally the cross, when we sang "Nearer My God To Thee" and then decorously left the Bethel room, always conducted by the Guide and Marshall. In the dressing room we untied and untwisted our white cords, divested ourselves of our long cotton gowns and put our street clothes back on. Two hours had passed in the Bethel room, during which our more prudent and less Masonic friends had been (depending on their circumstances and the time of year) congregating to play records, hiring themselves out to rake leaves, sledding, driving tractors, ice skating, playing tennis, shopping with their mothers, swimming, or having sodas at the drugstore with their boyfriends.

In a strange way, the meeting was an illustration of its motto: we were taught patience by having

to sit through a boring and unchanging ceremony, we had faith that it would eventually end, and our immediate reward was that it did end. A longer-term reward was that we belonged to something, even if it was boring, and every six months we went to the church of the out-going Honoured Queen and did our cross at the end of the service, demurely conscious of approving looks from the congregation.

It was an organisation which existed entirely in order to have meetings. The officers existed only to tell each other what they did. If we occasionally stirred ourselves to raise money by having a bake sale, we always spent the proceeds on a party rather than charity. Job's Daughters came to seem self-contained but pointless, like the little novelty box which, when you pull a lever, opens to reveal a hand which then switches itself off by pushing the lever back.

When I suggested to another JD that the meetings were boring, she looked at me with a shocked expression. "I get something new out of every meeting", she informed me with straight-faced piety. But then I was in school with her, and I knew that she could probably have got something new out of reading the same page of a textbook over and over.

I finally quit Job's Daughters. I resigned and stopped going to meetings. (Oh, those liberated Saturdays! How I loved them! How I revelled in not having to expound my duties as the shadows lengthened on the Bethel room floor!) But I still got bills for my annual dues, which I did not pay. I toyed with the idea of addressing an immensely long essay to the Bethel all about why I thought meetings were the most boring and pointless exercises I ever hoped to endure. I pictured the Secretary pausing for a glass of water as she went on to page twelve; I thought of the members sitting on their folding chairs and not crossing their legs. Finally I was notified that, as I had not paid my dues for two years, my membership was therefore and therewith terminated. So I was ignominiously expelled two years after I had resigned. That is what it is to practice Patience and have Faith—sooner or later there will be a Reward.

CHICKENS' LIB

Thirty members of the Animal Liberation Front descended on the convent of the Passionist nuns at Daventry, Northampton, according to a report. The protesters staged a sit-in at the nuns' battery hen unit and had to be evicted by policemen.

The Reverend Mother commented later: "Our 10,000 chickens are quite happy. They sit in their cages and sing all day long."

JOTTINGS

WILLIAM McILROY

Supporters of the Labour Party—particularly those who campaigned for reforms relating to divorce, abortion and family planning—will be interested to hear that the Home Secretary has been lending an ear to some of the most vitriolic opponents of such reforming measures. Despite the great pressures and responsibilities of his office, Mr Rees found time to listen to the bleatings of The Family Group at a meeting in the House of Commons last month.

The meeting took place following an appeal by Mary Whitehouse to Prime Minister James Callaghan for an interview “to put before you evidence of . . . a corruption which puts all families at risk—and to suggest ways in which your Government could remove much of the destructive pressure on the family . . .” Sunny Jim was otherwise engaged, lucky man, and he dumped the puritan warriors into the lap of Merlyn Rees.

The delegation included Mrs Whitehouse, taking time off from watching television hopeful of being shocked, and Valerie Riches, the Huntingdon Sex Educator. Mrs Riches is an active propagandist for The Responsible Society, an organisation whose pronouncements on sex education and human sexuality are usually as hilarious as they are horrendous.

Margaret Thatcher, who aims to be the next Conservative Prime Minister, also graced the occasion. Liberal leader David Steel, to his great credit, declined an invitation to attend the meeting. Mr Steel, who played a key role in getting the 1967 Abortion Act passed, is a son of the manse and a family man. But he is shrewd enough to realise that much of the Parent Group/Responsible Society/Order of Christian Unity hoo-ha about defending the family is simply a smoke-screen behind which sex-obsessed, censorious prudes are operating to sabotage reforms already achieved and to prevent further social progress.

Mrs Whitehouse's appeal was a predictable mixture of warnings about threats to family life and “those pressures which destroy parental rights . . . and undermine law and order”.

It is unlikely, however, that she and her friends succeeded in making Mr Rees' flesh creep when they presented their “evidence of the corruption of the foundations of society”. He is a hard-boiled politician who, as Home Secretary, has encountered a considerable amount of corruption only a stone's

throw from where the meeting was taking place—at Scotland Yard to be precise. But Mrs Whitehouse, like most of her ilk, is a firm authoritarian, so it is unlikely that illegal practices by the forces of “law and order” were included in her “evidence of the corruption of the foundations of our society”.

Town Halls and board rooms are a happy hunting ground for unscrupulous speculators, land developers and property bargain-seekers. But with the High Priestess of free enterprise in attendance, it would have been too embarrassing to raise the question of corruption in the world of big business.

No one would dispute that many families live under great pressure, although it is doubtful if such pressures were identified during the discussion. Organisations like The Family Group regard realistic sex education, the extension of family planning services and liberal divorce laws as devices invented by wicked and perverse forces intent on undermining the family and society. In fact the ability to control human fertility has strengthened family life. Children are now welcomed as members of the family and not dreaded as more mouths to feed or as a danger to the mother's health. Divorce is usually an unhappy experience for parents and children, but it is preferable to a lifetime of misery, frustration and resentment.

Thousands of coloured families have to face the cruelty and injustice of racial discrimination every day of their lives. Two years ago Mary Whitehouse launched her Save Religious Education campaign to protect children from the machinations of “Humanists and Left-wing dogmatists” in the classroom. I have yet to read any condemnation by Mrs Whitehouse, or by any of the groups which back her, of the distribution of squalid racist literature in schools. Perhaps it is only “Humanists and Left-wing dogmatists”, not the National Front, who are regarded as a threat to children by the pious defenders of “sound family values”.

Immigrant families living in London's East End and elsewhere have been subjected to violence and abuse; coloured people are attacked in the streets and at least three have been killed in recent months. Exploitation, discrimination, insults and police harassment put an intolerable strain on the family life of coloured people.

Was this included in The Family Group's “evidence of . . . a corruption which puts all families at risk”?

The real pressures on family life in Britain result from rising costs, bad housing and inadequate educational, cultural and social services, particularly in urban areas. If pressures on family life and natural resources are to be overcome, not only in Britain but on a world scale, we must look to the condom, not the Cross; the pill, not the priest; sex education, not religious indoctrination.

PITY THE POOR PRINCE

Remarks made by Prince Charles to the Salvation Army about doctrinal matters have caused a right royal rumpus and much clerical consternation. As one journalist commented, it's pleasing to see that this man whose career has so far been aggressively amiable has now thoroughly put his foot in it.

He paid the Salvationists—not noted for their concern with theological subtleties—the great compliment of criticising the “folly that Christians are still arguing about doctrinal matters”, while speaking at a Salvation Army international congress. At the same time a royal wedding had just taken place, which had been so beset with doctrinal problems that his words were naturally seen as a comment on that tangle. The wedding between the Catholic Baroness Marie-Christine von Reibnitz and the Anglican Prince Michael of Kent, took place in the church of neither because of rules about remarrying a divorcee in an Anglican church and rules about Catholic education of offspring. (Potential heirs to the throne, however distant, would need to be brought up Anglican.) Well, if you want to be wed with religious mumbo-jumbo, you must expect to have to follow the rules.

Prince Charles's words provoked the Roman Catholic Archbishop of Glasgow, the most Reverend Thomas Winning, to accuse him of causing “annoyance and anger to millions of the Queen's loyal subjects who care deeply about truth, doctrine and principle.” He also objected to the Prince advocating “a woolly type of Christianity”—we know what he means. The further suggestion that it was a slight on all Catholics in the land that the Law of Succession still prevented Prince Charles from marrying a Catholic produced much consequent bickering between churchmen. (The popular press meanwhile produced many Catholic potential girl-friends with whom the Prince was alleged to be friendly.) Mr St John Stevas, MP, later said that it was no longer sensible that the future king was not free to marry as he wished: no one made the more important point that it would be sensible for the head of the Church of England and the head of state to be separate people.

Atheists will be concerned about other remarks of the Prince, which received less publicity since they were less prone to provoke doctrinal kerfuffles. He said that what was more important than doctrinal matters was whether people were going to be atheists, and whether they knew what was right and wrong, and had an awareness of the infinite beauty of nature.

In a press statement, Barbara Smoker, President of the National Secular Society, declared:

“Pity the poor Prince! It is something of a feat to antagonise simultaneously Catholics, Protestants and atheists—but that is what Prince Charles has

NEWS A

succeeded in doing, with a few ill-considered phrases. As a young man with no more religious fervour or understanding than most of his future subjects, he obviously strayed into the area of sectarian church diplomacy quite unwittingly. In doing so, he exposed the flimsy foundation of ecumenism, which merely papers over the historical divisions in Christianity. He also exposed the absurdity of the headship of the established church being an inherited post. There may have been medieval popes who did not really believe that Catholicism was the one true faith, but at least they knew better than to say so.

“Had Prince Charles combined rational thinking with his tolerant attitude and advocated a truly open society with every viewpoint allowed equal expression, he would have had the support both of secular humanists and of progressive religionists; but he not only asked for meaningless religious consensus rather than honest argument, he also went out of his way to disparage atheism.

“Christians, he said, ought to worry about people being atheists, instead of ‘arguing about doctrinal matters’. In other words, any sort of supernatural belief is better than none; and, since it doesn't matter what you believe so long as you believe something, it is not worth arguing about, nor, presumably, using as a basis for your policies or behaviour.

“He even suggested, most strangely, that atheists cannot appreciate ‘the infinite beauty of nature’! Representing atheist opinion in this country, the National Secular Society, whilst reluctant to add to the discomfiture of the blundering prince, would suggest that he begins to sort out his own ideas about existence, preferably after a bit of reading, before he makes any more well-meaning pronouncements of this kind.”

EXAMINING INDECENCIES

“I believe such books will do irreparable harm to children of impressionable age.” Parents in Belfast have been urged to sign a declaration including these words to register their disgust at “the violation of teenage school children”. A motion has been passed condemning the inclusion of such books in CSE examination reading lists.

Councillor Ted Ashby is the guiding light who has exposed such indecencies to the Reverend Ian Paisley's Democratic Unionist Party Conference. Ted Ashby has assiduously prepared lists of obscene,

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offensive and blasphemous material for the edification of the conference.

And what are *such* books, which cause all this indignation? Well, at least the latest from the lurid imagination of Harold Robbins, or the surfacing of a long-banned work of literary lustfulness, or a poem from *Gay News*, or the wrong chapters of *Leviticus* even, you might think. But no, the strong fit of righteousness has been provoked by modern classics such as Stan Barstow's *A Kind of Loving*, Alan Sillitoe's *The Loneliness of the Long-Distance Runner* and John Steinbeck's *Of Mice and Men*.

Readers who would prefer to avert their eyes from examples of this heinous filth, do *not* read on. Here is an example from page 46 of the New Windmill abridged version of *Of Mice and Men*: "God Almighty, that dog stinks." If you are still reading, take a deep breath, for page 82 reads: "You gotta husband. You got no call fooling around with other guys causing trouble."

B'Jesus, the Paisleyites had better be careful fooling around with troublesome items like that.

BLASPHEMY PETITION

On July 4, the anniversary of the beginning of the trial of *Gay News* for blasphemous libel, copies of a petition were sent to the Home Office by individuals who had collected signatures. The petition had been initiated by the Committee Against Blasphemy Law and deplored the Court of Criminal Appeal's decision to uphold the conviction for blasphemy of the Editor and publishers of *Gay News*.

The petition was organised particularly with the concern that other litigious individuals might be encouraged by this case to use an outmoded law as a means of restricting artistic freedom. The petition also expressed concern about the possibility of extending blasphemy law to cover other religions than Christianity, as has been publicly suggested since the *Gay News* trial.

The Law Commission is currently studying all laws relating to religion. The Commission is reviewing various aspects of the criminal law with the aim of codification. This codification necessarily involves eventual abolition of all offences at common law, and will therefore have to consider blasphemy law. (Why not let them know your views, Law Commission, Conquest House, 37-38 John Street, Theobald's Road, London WC1.)

Meanwhile, a new organisation has surfaced. The

United Order of Blasphemers was founded in 1844 and it has been re-formed in 1978. Its aim is to publish and distribute works which have resulted in blasphemy prosecution. A leaflet has reprinted, with inaccuracies, the poem "The Love That Dares to Speak Its Name". Future plans, according to the leaflet, include a benefit disco at a North London comprehensive school. The organisation reports that it is necessary to "go underground so as not to present ourselves as sitting targets for despicable Christian informers like Mary Whitehouse and Kenneth Kavanagh."

The United Order of Blasphemers claimed that it was sending the leaflet to Mary Whitehouse, Judge King-Hamilton and others. The original order was founded at a time of numerous successful prosecutions against freethinkers; the organisation contrived to distribute blasphemous literature despite continuous prosecutions. In G. J. Holyoake's paper *The Movement* of 13 January 1844, it was announced that a bookshop run by Matilda Roalfe had been taken over, while she was in prison, by William Baker "of the United Order of Blasphemers".

The poem has now been republished in at least half a dozen political papers and several student journals. It has also been republished by the Free Speech Movement, which has produced thousands of copies of the poem, some being signed by more than 100 well-known individuals. But the Free Speech Movement has only sent copies of the poem to those who ask for it. In a letter in the *Church Times* about blasphemy, Nicolas Walter let it be known that copies of the poem were available from the Free Speech Movement at his Harrow address. He has since said that he was asked for a copy of the poem by more people as a result of this information being published in the *Church Times* than anywhere else. Clerics are obviously queuing up to read the poem for themselves. Mrs Whitehouse was obviously not happy about the publication of this information, since a letter from her solicitors quickly appeared in the *Church Times* pointing out that to obtain the poem through the post could be a breach of the Post Office Act.

Mrs Whitehouse also wrote a letter to the *Church Times*, which rather contradicts her much-vaunted claim to have no prejudice against homosexuals. It concluded: "The Bible teaches that homosexual practices are sinful. If we re-write it to make life more comfortable, where does that process stop?" Presumably the Bible is not to be re-written so that other injunctions, of which it is crammed full, are invalidated: there is punishment for heinous acts, such as death for approaching the holy candlestick (Num xviii), death for entering the holy place without linen breeches (Ex xxviii), and death for picking up sticks on Sunday (Num xi).

BOOKS

THE TOWER, 1078-1978 by Derek Wilson. Hamish Hamilton, £6.50.

The nine hundredth anniversary of the building of the Tower of London by the Norman invaders as a fortress against insurrection is being celebrated this year, but its history is not one for congratulation. For this was an instrument of despotism, used by monarchy, state and religion, and Derek Wilson gives us a frightening and comprehensively detailed picture. It is also not without its fascinating items: the ill-fated but entertaining plot of the notorious ruffian (and possible double agent) Colonel Blood to steal the crown jewels; the first woman prisoner, Lady Baddlesmere, in 1322; the escape of the Earl of Nithsdale (more successful than many attempts) disguised as a woman and ingeniously aided by his wife.

On all that appertains to actual Tower history and its development and rebuilding, Mr Wilson maintains both interest and credibility. But covering so wide an area it is inevitable that his historical sources, on the prisoners and various revolts against the state, are superficial and often incorrect. He attempts with open-mindedness to be fair on the most notorious episode, the supposed murder of the "Princes in the Tower" by Richard III, and rightly dismisses the "confession" of Sir James Tyrell (after Tower execution on another Yorkist matter by Henry VII) as pure myth; but his hasty reading leads him into curious errors, including the surprising belief that Elizabeth Woodville, Edward IV's queen—who fled to sanctuary and then staggeringly made friends with Richard III, her small sons' "murderer"—actually escaped to France.

Equally disputable, because written from hostile sources, are his accounts of the Wat Tyler rebellion and the Gordon Riots (which have long been proved by Professor George Rudé to have been at least as much political as anti-Catholic, and have been shown from the records in the courts to have involved no killings by the rioters whatsoever). Christopher Hill and Tony Wedgwood Benn are unlikely, too, to agree with Mr Wilson that the Levelers were "dangerous", at least in the sense in which I think he uses the word. But if the individual histories are suspect, that of the Tower itself is exhaustive and interesting, in particular with regard to religious and political persecution. Dissent against the official religion has always until recently been as virulently persecuted by the English state and English monarchs as dissent against forms of government, for state and church have combined across the ages to hold the commons in thrall, and accrue wealth and power to themselves.

If anything, this is the main lesson of the Tower and its sanguinary history. Some particularly in-

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teresting associations emerge, among them evidence that the Templars, so virulently persecuted in the Tower, denied, centuries before the Unitarians and Thomas Paine, the Divinity of Christ. (Later, in Elizabethan and early Stuart times, the mathematician Thomas Harriot already claimed to be a Deist, and taught his creed to Sir Walter Raleigh, who was believed to belong to an atheist circle and ended up, as we know, in the Tower.) It is encouraging to learn that the Lieutenant of the Tower during the first period (early fourteenth century) was humane enough to resist the constant demands of the Inquisition that he should put his Templar prisoners to the torture, and that the English common people, then and later, were enlightened enough openly to show their support of the prisoners and their aspirations. Prisoners of conscience always had their brave and vociferous followers, even on the way to the scaffold, and in this history, on the whole, the commons come out more creditably than the monarchy, church and state.

It is intriguing to learn that as early as 1422 a "Thomas Payne" gained his freedom in a breakout from the Tower. It was only by accident (and through an offer before his trial for seditious libel to serve in the French National Convention) that his great eighteenth century namesake escaped similar reference in Tower records. Could he have been a descendant?

If the Tower is more museum than prison today (and it was also at one time simultaneously a royal palace with an exotic menagerie) it is sobering to remember that even during the present century Roger Casement left it only for execution. The shadow is still there, and without wariness could again deepen and lengthen.

AUDREY WILLIAMSON

SORRY, DAD by Edward Blishen. Hamish Hamilton, £5.50.

A few years ago Edward Blishen entertained us and interested us with *A Cackhanded War*, an account of his wartime experiences on the land as a conscientious objector. It is noticeable that in a *Cackhanded War* he never mentions his family, although for part of his time on the land he was actually living at home. In *Sorry, Dad* the reason for the earlier omission is made clear—to publish a truthful account of his childhood and education during the lifetime of his parents would have been a cruelty impossible to Edward Blishen.

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His father was ambitious for him, in the sense that he wanted him to go to the grammar school and pass examinations, as a passport to a secure office job, yet he was hostile to any kind of intellectual interest, hated to see the boy reading, firmly held the view that no one could actually take pleasure in serious music, and to appear to do so could only be a snobbish pose, and was sure that no one could be motivated by anything other than self-interest. His relationship with neighbours was invariably dreadful. He found them either sloppy and contemptible or "trying to impress". His mother, a simple, kindly woman, was torn between her incomprehensible son and the irritable husband she was trying constantly to placate.

The grammar school which provided the other influence on young Edward was a hard-hearted, snobbish institution, where the teaching was mostly uninspired. Only one master seems to have stimulated intellectual curiosity.

Both Edward's parents were the products of families with brutal, drunken fathers, the difference between the families being the mothers. His paternal grandmother was a bitter, shrewish woman, while his maternal grandmother was a woman with a passion for neatness. She spent the last 25 years of her life in a mental hospital.

Perhaps it was natural that such a couple as Blishen senior's parents should produce such a child. Speaking of the death of his father's mother, Edward Blishen says: "She had been the root of so much pain and enmity that I did not know how to be sorry. At the same time her going made me wonder deeply about her. We had settled for our own story about the sort of human being she was. But where did it all begin? When she was a girl, what event had determined that the worst and not the best of her should rule throughout her life? We knew only the woman, incorrigible; what about the child she'd been? And wasn't there in her some chemistry that had made quarrelsomeness and black egotistical humours the family mark?"

The faults of Edward Blishen's father can well be accounted for by his parents and brothers—such a home might well convince him that altruism and social conscience were non-existent. It is less easy to account for the virtues and talents of our author himself. Here indeed is proof of the fact that the individual is not simply the passive result of his environment—he brings something of his own into the world. External circumstances may help or hinder his growth, but his reaction, good or bad, is his

own. Full marks to Edward Blishen for the person he has made himself.

Yet Blishen never ceases to love his father, to see the pathos of his life, to remember the good moments of childhood, times when the family was happy together—seaside holidays and the annual fair, when for a short time his father showed another side of his nature, and was able to forget the normal constant necessity to count every penny. Edward is aware that his father, too, suffered from the total incompatibility of taste and temperament between the two of them.

Books dealing with a child's earliest impressions of the world are always fascinating—and salutary reading for parents and teachers. Edward's first impressions of school for instance: "I could not have imagined ceilings so far above my head: corridors so long and echoing: such a maze of rooms and doors and ways and ways out . . . There was a bruising nosiness.

"The playground was worse. The playground was unshrinkable. In it, so far as I could make out, children were done to death."

Later, when he was being groomed for the scholarship, his father insisted on taking a hand in his education, by his rages rendering Edward incapable of doing sums which he could do easily at school, and invariably ending with both the boy and his mother in tears.

Adults tend to forget what childhood is like—how bewildering the world is, and how vulnerable the child feels in it. How much childish misery goes into the formation of an anti-social adult!

Sorry, Dad can be heartily recommended—as a picture of social life between the wars, as a reminder to adults what it feels like to be a child and an adolescent, and simply as a good read.

MARGARET McILROY

MEMORIES I & II by Julian Huxley. Penguin, 90p, 85p.

Sir Julian Huxley was born on 22 June 1887 and died at the ripe old age of 87 in February 1975. Readers of *The Freethinker* are no doubt familiar with his book *Religion Without Revelation* and remember his long association with the Rationalist Press Association and the British Humanist Association. But Huxley was first and foremost a biologist. A distinguished descendant of the Huxley and Trevelyan families, he went on to become a Professor at Oxford and London, Secretary of the Zoological Society, a member of the Brains Trust, perhaps reaching the zenith of his career as the first Director-General of UNESCO. His involvement in conservation and wild life preservation took him all over the world. All these multifarious activities are reflected in this two volume autobiography.

For less than a couple of pounds one goes on numerous safaris into Africa, India, South-East Asia,

the Fertile Crescent, the Americas, China, Russia and so on. Indeed, it is difficult to think of any part of the world Huxley did not visit. These travels, with so distinguished a guide, are perhaps the most enjoyable part of the book. Inevitably one meets Bertrand Russell, Nehru, Jomo Kenyatta and a host of other personalities, exalted and humble. Naturally, too, one visits museums and temples, whether Inca, Maya or Aztec, whether in India or Ceylon. Indeed, an average tourist might occasionally play truant; but no government could possibly allow the Director-General of UNESCO to escape without seeing all their best sights. And he was always willing! Among culture-vultures and culture-gnats, Julian Huxley must surely rank as the supreme golden eagle.

Observations on birds, insects and other living creatures abound, from the delightful mating displays of birds to the not so delightful mating habits of the praying mantis. As befits a student of animal behaviour, Huxley makes a passing reference to his own auto-erotic and homo-erotic phases.

The whole narrative, full of public service to science, education and conservation is punctuated by the recurring bouts of depression from which Huxley suffered, the tragic suicide of his younger brother and the death of Aldous Huxley. It is truly amazing that Julian Huxley managed to achieve so much in his life despite the crippling periods of depression. It seems highly inappropriate that the Penguin Editor should introduce him on the very first page of the book not as himself but as the brother of the late Aldous Huxley and grandson of Thomas Henry Huxley. He was an equally remarkable man.

G. N. DEODHEKAR

BOOK STOCK

THE EUROPEAN WITCH-CRAZE OF THE 16th AND 17th CENTURIES by H. R. Trevor-Roper. Penguin paperback, £1.50, (143pp).

The witch-craze was not a medieval but a renaissance phenomenon. H. R. Trevor-Roper describes the rise and decline of the craze for witch-hunting and attempts to explain why it arose as the dark underside of the renaissance. His explanation, in terms of a collective psychosis comparable to the hunting of Jews in Nazi Germany, has been controversial, but this reprint contains fascinating historical material. The notes alone point to some masterly nineteenth century works of rationalist historians, and the work is studded with incisive sentences, such as: "There are times when the intellectual fantasies of the clergy seem more bizarre than the psychopathic delusions of the madhouse out of which they have, too often, been ex-cogitated."

THE LIFE OF BERTRAND RUSSELL by Ronald W. Clark. Penguin paperback, £2.95, (980pp).

This biography is by no means faultless (see Dora Russell's review in *The Freethinker*, December, 1975); but, read with caution, it is a valuable reprint, since it contains an enormous amount of biographical information and is very readable. It covers Bertrand Russell's life as (in the words of the blurb) "eminent philosopher, and mathematician, popular sage, political activist, teacher, social reformer, educationalist, writer and lover . . ."

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

THEATRE

THE LADY'S NOT FOR BURNING by Christopher Fry. Old Vic. Prospect Productions. In Repertory.

It is curious to think of the plays of Christopher Fry as bearing much relation to his or to any age. They are written in a strange, arcane style and have a lightness of tone ill-suited to the forties and early fifties when doubt beset the nation and produced a swing towards Roman Catholicism. They were period pieces of enormous popular appeal, and Fry was a much sought-after subject for strip cartoonists in such magazines as *The Tatler*. Strange to imagine his name being linked with T. S. Eliot as the leading exponents of the post-war revival in verse drama. We have all but forgotten what the plays are about or just what made them popular. Stranger still to discover that Fry is in fact alive and apparently thriving, and that he last had a play on as recently as 1970. Devotees regard some of his characters as one regards the characters of more traditional classics: they cannot quite remember what life was like before such people had been invented. Fry seems to have won for himself quiet omnipresence, if not precisely for his dramatic achievement, then as something indigenously English, that no one really knows a great deal about.

Time enough, then for a Fry retrospective—a revival of his earlier plays to see whether time can reveal them in their true perspective. Alas, though the current production of Fry's best known work sheds considerable light on the subject, it hardly strikes one as particularly dazzling.

The play is, or it should be, about something, at least. The medieval setting promises allegory, and the characters and situation are rife with allusions of much political and ethical significance. The central female character (Eileen Atkins), we soon discover, is about to be burnt at the stake as a witch. Her male counterpart (Derek Jacobi), with satanic malevolence, strains to convince the local officials that he is a more suitable candidate for perdition.

Despite his pleas, they refuse to condemn him and insist on the lady as their victim. Talk of moral estrangement in a world where "no one can be sure of his origins" establishes a framework of scepticism, replete with Shavian overtones. The terrain, though familiar, is worthy of modern appraisal.

The mystery is not so much in Fry's failure to do his theme justice, but more in his failure to make an attempt. Time and again he eludes opportunity in curious favour of—well, what? There is nothing substantive to put in its place. We might have guessed that the language is decorous. His epigrammatic turn of phrase is sufficiently expert to provoke laughter each time the characters open their mouths. One character transforms the benediction "... good to all men" into "good t'all women", a blasphemous joke to bring Mary Whitehouse out in a rash.

But the fabric of verbal facility envelopes a world in shadow, and we find by the crux that Fry's real frame of reference is the historical romance. The sorcery alludes only to enchantment. The characters resemble the stock figures of fairy tale almost. At one moment, the heroine asks for the protection of laughter. It is disappointing to discover that Fry has sought similar protection from the complexities he himself introduces.

JAMES MACDONALD

LETTERS

FREETHOUGHT AND ANIMAL RIGHTS

Readers of "The Freethinker" will not, I hope, be too impressed with the opposing stances taken by Brigid Brophy and Francis Bennion on animal rights (June), particularly as there are other courses open to us.

Miss Brophy rightly points out that the Danish experiments on pigs were cruel, exploitative and of dubious scientific value. Amnesty International should not have sanctioned such "research" and it was justifiable to complain to Amnesty in no uncertain terms. This does not, however, excuse publicly embarrassing the National Secular Society by burning an NSS membership card at one of the Society's major public functions, particularly as the NSS had affiliated to Amnesty for reasons utterly unconnected with such experiments. Anarchist and socialist members of the Society could just as rationally resign on the grounds that the NSS received income from rents and shares.

Brigid Brophy also states that the value of a pig's life to a pig is "invaluable". On what rational grounds does she make such a statement? If she said that she observed that pigs suffered pain and fear, that I could believe. As for her claim that "I do not see how any secularist who agrees that evolution took place can find it in his conscience or his reason to be otherwise" than a vegetarian, well, the mind boggles! I happen to be a vegetarian, for moral reasons, but I could draw upon the theory of evolution, which I accept, as a rationale for meat eating, cannibalism, cultural oppression and wholesale genocide! The moral issues involved in the present exploitation of animals go—as I am sure Miss Brophy knows and admits—a good deal deeper than just eating their meat.

Francis Bennion rightly points out that "to accomplish anything it is necessary to limit oneself". But that is not quite the same thing as tunnel vision. And what are we to make of the fatuous comment that "Whatever the NSS rules may say, animals have nothing whatever to do with secularism or humanism?" In an Alice-in-Wonderland world, perhaps not, but in the real world if animals are mentioned in the Society's objects, they are to that extent the Society's concern unless they are removed from the objects. Secularists and freethinkers have been concerned with animal rights for a very long time—I believe Thomas Paine even wrote on the subject—and some, but not all, sensitive and thoughtful freethinkers have been vegetarians.

The NSS would be wrong, in my submission, to make vegetarianism a condition of membership; it would be equally wrong to remove its long-established concern for opposing blood sports and needless destruction and cruelty in respect of animals—amongst which the human race is but one rather destructive and arrogant species.

NIGEL SINNOTT

Whilst I am an admirer of Brigid Brophy's attitude on many issues—since they coincide with mine—as a vegetarian, agnostic supporter of Amnesty, I think she is wrong in censuring Amnesty and advocating disaffiliation of the Writers' Guild on the grounds of so-called Amnesty support of animal experiments.

Firstly, Amnesty itself is a very loosely-knit organisation in membership, (it also has two types of membership). Therefore it is impossible to refer to Amnesty as a collective entity, which carries responsibility for actions of its individual groupings or members. I myself had serious doubts about the ethical wisdom of presiding over a manifestly "gambling" stall at a local village fete in aid of Amnesty.

Secondly, although attempts are being made to broaden Amnesty's concerns (i.e. on sexual persecution, capital punishment and sanctions against offending states) I, for one, feel that to extend Amnesty's concerns—even to such good causes, as noted, or as Ms Brophy suggests—would increase the work-load of an over-burdened organisation.

This is not to say that such experiments or indeed the exploitation of our fellow creatures is to be condoned. I merely assert that it is not yet the concern of Amnesty.

JOHN ROBINSON

Brigid Brophy's arguments (Amnesty and Animal Rights, June 1978) against vivisection, on the grounds that pigs have rights to enjoy life, are not reasonable. Natural selection requires all living organisms to achieve success over others: it selects by this standard. Evolution is dispassionate: it owes nobody a living. Far from being a god who awards humans with domination over all other animals evolution is the fact which bestows that power. So much so, that now we may even hold the future of this planet in our hands.

For a pig to have equal rights with us postulates some creature superior to both who can manipulate both for its own superior ends. i.e. pig = man = God. Our real and difficult task is, godlike, to judge accurately for our own good between choices like two Jehovahs Witnesses against one champion of black political consciousness—not just on the basis of their "rights" as humans, or animals, or whatever, but finally in respect of their communal value to mankind.

The reasons for "kindness" to fellow-men and creatures must be that such action enhances our survival rate, i.e. our consideration for the pig (as an animal

with feelings and with capacity for pleasure in life) improves us and makes us fitter in the evolutionary sense.

Sadistic excess cruelty in any one of us probably rebounds adversely on our race and therefore should be considered to be anti-human. But medical investigation on live animals with cruelty minimised is justifiable by a reasonable person, especially if it successfully extends our useful knowledge.

I would like to know how Brigid Brophy would set out to test substances for poisonous effects or develop sterilizers, the pill, methods of abortion, vasectomy, vaccines, serums, even extra-terrestrial-space vehicles. Even after vivisection the final proof can only be obtained from selected human guinea-pigs. How would Brigid Brophy tackle that hot potato? All experiment is by trial and error: all errors in medical treatment cause suffering and pain to some "innocent" living creature.

ARTHUR MORRIS

CHILD PROTECTION

Your Editorial on my Protection of Children Bill based itself on Lord Houghton's silly and shallow speeches in the Lords and as a result you must not expect your voice to carry much weight.

Like Lord Houghton, you choose to turn a blind eye to the fact that the majority of Western countries have either set up investigations into child pornography or have passed new laws.

Frankly, it is no longer tenable to claim that child pornography is not a problem for our society in the light of innumerable press articles over the last six months. A short telephone call to the NSPCC would leave you in no doubt.

Equally, I find it incredible at this stage for you to claim that there is no legal loophole to close. As you will know, the most relevant Act is the Indecency with Children Act 1960 and this concerns itself only with children under 14. It does not protect young people between the ages of 14 and 16, two highly vulnerable years when they are of special interest to the photographer.

I can assure you that the Prime Minister could not have come to the rescue of my Bill, which has almost 100 per cent support in the Commons, if he believed that it was either based on emotion or legally unsound.

May I put to you a simple question that to date no Humanist has answered. What alternative method are you going to put forward to safeguard our children?

CYRIL D. TOWNSEND, MP

WRONG TERMINOLOGY

In reply to Mr Charles Oxley's letter in the July "Freethinker", I would have to say that the value of a child's life to the child is indeed unique and irreplaceable, but I am afraid that he has got his terminology slightly wrong when he refers to an "unborn" child when in fact he means "foetus".

According to Mr Oxley's logic when a pig eats an acorn it is in reality devouring an oak tree.

KEN WRIGHT

MESSAGE FOR FREETHINKERS

Although I had never met Phyllis Graham, it gave me quite a shock to read in "The Freethinker" (July) of her death. As an ex-priest I almost wish that I could recite a mass for the soul of an ex-nun, but I am too much out of practice.

Having been dominated for half a century by "the Jesus hoax" which some learned doctors of divinity

have recently defined as "the myth of God incarnate", I do know from personal experience just how hard it can be for some souls to achieve that freedom of thought and independence of mind that seems to come to the vast majority of persons without any effort, without any thought, without any pain.

For some people the price of freedom is health, happiness and even life itself. Even in death Phyllis Graham has left a message to all freethinkers that freedom of thought is more important in itself than the preservation of physical life in the body. There is certainly no reason why the death of a body should be described as the extinction of a soul. The end of a story is not the destruction of the story. The completion of a symphony does not destroy the beauty of the music. All humanists both ancient and modern have constantly asserted that human beings should have some "say" in the duration of their lives here on earth.

I attach no importance to "biblical authority" or to "ecclesiastical authority" but I do attach immense importance to the common sense of mankind which has from the very beginning of recorded history given encouragement to the opinion that there is a life beyond life, and that the purpose of existence cannot be discovered in the events of life between the moment of birth and the moment of death.

Faith in God is far more ancient and far more universal than Judaism or Christianity or any other organised religion. The time is ripe for a return to the eighteenth century deism that inspired the author of the "Rights of Man".

PETER CROMMELIN

ASTRONAUTS

May I reply to Mr W. J. Glennie ("The Freethinker", June) re my criticism of Von Däniken.

Mr Glennie states that the figure I criticised as a spaceman is not to be taken literally, but is a stylised representation of an astronaut based on legend and folk-lore.

Quite so, and that is the trouble with Von Däniken and presumably Mr Glennie. Any carving or drawing that looks like or can be interpreted to represent a spaceman must, of course, be true. Von Däniken states that the ancient Egyptians couldn't have built the pyramids since they didn't have the technique, therefore beings from space must have helped them. But a book has been published some years ago showing they could build them, and without the aid of space people.

Von Däniken also states that the gigantic figures on Easter Island weighing several tons couldn't have been made by the primitive tools of the islanders—again space men came to the rescue. But a group of humble earth men visited the island and duplicated these gigantic figures using identical tools and were able to move them by ingenious handling. I could go on like this, but for Mr Glennie's benefit I will conclude by pointing out that another supposed superman once came from nowhere and did most wonderful things on this earth, including creating human beings: his name was God.

J. H. MORTEN

South African television has turned down an advertisement for a Walt Disney cartoon, because it contains a mouse saying "holy mackerel". "Where possible the phrase 'holy mackerel' should be avoided as its repetition could create a negative reaction", said the South African Broadcasting Corporation.

PUBLICATIONS

(A full list is available on request with s.a.e.)

- The Dead Sea Scrolls, John Allegro. £1.00 (15p).
 The Humanist Outlook, Ed: A. J. Ayer. 95p (26p).
 Religion in Modern Society, H. J. Blackham. £1 (29p).
 The Longford Threat to Freedom, Brigid Brophy. 10p (7p).
 Thomas Paine, Chapman Cohen. 15p (7p).
 Woman and Christianity, Chapman Cohen. 5p (7p).
 Must We Have Religion?, Chapman Cohen. 5p (7p).
 Pagan Christmas, R. J. Condon. 20p (7p).
 Women's Rights, A Practical Guide, Anna Coote and Tess Gill. £1.25 (19p).
 The Devil's Chaplain, H. Cutner. 10p (10p).
 Muslim Politics in Secular India, Hamid Dalwai. 50p (12p).
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A storm in a teacup has arisen over Warrington borough council's selection of guests for the Royal Garden Party. Each year the two political parties select guests on the basis of seniority: this year Councillor Verdon has been chosen by the Labour Group.

But the Tory group strongly object to Councillor Verdon. Tory leader, Councillor John Walsh, has said: "The man refuses to join the council in prayer. You can't have someone as silly as that representing the town at the palace. There's no telling what he may do."

Councillor Verdon said: "I am astounded. What do they take me for? I'm a great supporter of the Royal Family . . . I'm a churchgoer and always joined in prayer until the council decided to build flats on the children's playground. Then I began to wonder who the Tory group were praying to. It was an unchristian act."

Religious periodicals in Britain have lost nearly half their readers in the past twelve years, according to figures released recently. The *Universe*, and the *Methodist Recorder* have suffered drops of 53 per cent. Others, including the *Church Times* have lost between a quarter and a third of their sales.

THE FREETHINKER

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"The Freethinker" can also be ordered through any newsagent.

EVENTS

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

Brighton and Hove Humanist Group. Francis Bennion: "Sex, Violence and Censorship—the Limits of Permissiveness". Sunday, 3, September, 5.30 pm. Imperial Avenue, First Avenue, Hove.

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. Annual pub saunter. Sunday, 6 August, 7.30-8.00 pm. Meeting in "The Goat", Kensington Road, W8.

Merseyside Humanist Group. Norris Harvey: "Spin-za". Wednesday, 16 August, 7.45 pm. 248 Woodchurch Road, Birkenhead. Further details from Marion Clowes 051-342 2562 or Ann Coombes 051-608 3835.

Muswell Hill Humanist Group. Walk and tea. Sunday, 19 August. Meeting 3 pm at Kenwood House (rear entrance).

West Glamorgan Humanist Group. August social event details from W. Grainger, 24 Glanyrafon Gardens, Sketty.

Humanist Holidays. Christmastime: 4 or 7 days full board family hotel. South Devon coast. Easter 1979, similar at Bournemouth (without lunches). Secretary, Marjorie Mepham, 29 Fairview Road, Sutton, Surrey, tel: 01-642 8796.

(Armaments and Peace)

(presumably both standing against some non-existent threat from the West) while at the same time making monumental preparations to welcome the whole West to Moscow for the 1980 Olympic Games, and negotiating madly for American wheat and European beef and butter mountains and wine lakes. What are the Russian people to believe? Are they besieged? Clearly not! Are they threatened in any way? No! Are they going to attack the West? The idea is absurd! Then what are we in the West worried about? The answer is that we are not! Then it has all become a ridiculous game? Yes! Is it not time then, that someone blew the whistle? It is indeed.