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TRAGEDY IN GUYANA SHOWS BANKRUPTCY OF ALL RELIGION

Soon after the mass-suicide of members of a religious cult in Guyana, an emergency resolution was passed at the Annual General Meeting of the National Secular Society. It read: "This AGM instructs the Secretary to promulgate the following statement:

'The recent tragedy in Guyana is conclusive evidence of the bankruptcy of the ideology and practice of all religions, whether of orthodox or fringe variety.

'Jim Jones's claims to cure cancer and other diseases were directly in line with the miraculous claims of orthodox religions, his claim to be God in direct relationship to the godhead or prophethood claimed by or conferred on the founders of orthodox religions, and mass suicide a logical corollary to the obsession with life after death.

'For all followers of fringe cults and religions the next step from Jonestown should be not a return to orthodox religions but to reason and commonsense.'

In the widely publicised tragedy in Jonestown, Guyana, more than 900 people joined in drinking cyanide in a mass-suicide led by the leader of the People's Temple, the Rev Jim Jones. The disastrous end to the sect seems to have been sparked off by an investigation by American congressman Leo Ryan. The congressman and a number of journalists were preparing to leave the sect's jungle headquarters in their chartered plane with a half-a-dozen or more defectors from the sect, when gunmen opened fire on them. Congressman Ryan and four others were killed.

Shortly afterwards the Rev Jim Jones assembled members of the sect and dispensed Kool-Aid laced with cyanide to members at a makeshift altar. According to reports there had been rehearsals for such a mass-suicide. Jim Jones is thought to have died by gunshot. At first it was thought that about

300 of the sect's members had died, but in due course it was discovered that almost the entire population of the community, including children and animals, had been party to the communal suicide. One who escaped said they were told that the People's Temple was under threat and that they were going to a better life.

Typical Cult Leader

The Rev Jim Jones, who started the People's Temple, had a weird history—not untypical for the leader of a sect. He was 47 at his death. He had obtained a degree in education at the University of Indiana before he began his first temple, which provided meals for down-and-outs in Indiana. In 1961, after having a vision in which Indianapolis was consumed by a holocaust, he moved to a small town in northern California. He then began to preach his gospel of racial integration and a classless society in San Francisco, quickly acquiring a following especially among working-class black people.

Jim Jones established connections amongst politicians; at one stage Governor Jerry Brown spoke from his pulpit. Mr George Moscone, mayor of San Francisco, appointed him chairman of the San Francisco housing authority because of the help which the People's Temple gave him in an election in 1975.

However, in the last year or so of his time in San Francisco accusations were made of corruption in the sect. There were reports of rigid discipline for members, including public beatings for those failing to uphold some of the sect's rules. (One report tells of a young woman beaten with 75 strokes for hug-

(Continued over)

ging another woman said to have been a lesbian.) There were accusations that he had built up the Temple's funds to over five million dollars, mostly at the expense of his poor followers. His secretary for four years, who deserted the movement, described fake healing sessions which the Rev Jones had arranged. The sessions included claims to cure cancer, with chicken's innards held up as extracted cancer, and the secretary pretending to be a cripple and rising from her wheel-chair at an appropriate point in the service.

The Rev Jim Jones denied the accusations vigorously, but moved to Central America. He told his followers that Guyana was a "promised land" where all could live together in harmony. He established a jungle colony, which the Guyanan government regarded as a model of community land development. The settlement of 27,000 acres, known as Jonestown, aimed to be self-sufficient. Pressure from former members of the sect and from relatives of the Jonestown settlers led to congressman Ryan's investigation, which resulted in his death and the extinction of the settlement.

The career of Jones and his sect shows some characteristics of fringe religious leaders and groups. Jones was totally self-styled as a leader, who developed his own religion and acquired a following as a result of his strong and influential personality. Some of his initial ideas were well-meaning, especially his belief in racial equality and help for the poor, but, if sincere, they became perverted as the sect developed.

Two common tendencies of the development of sects were seen: as its leader became more powerful, so he sought to build an empire of political and financial influence, far removed from any of the naive beliefs of his followers. Also, as the sect grew it separated itself more and more from the rest of the world—its final jungle colony was the ultimate in this kind of separateness; and the more it became alienated from the world, the more its members were kept in rigid check by an authoritarian system.

Violent Undercurrent

Another aspect the Jones sect shared with such groups was a developing undercurrent of violence. Other sects which have recently displayed this streak have been the Ananda Marga, originating in India, and the American Synanon group. The Ananda Marga (Path to Peace) sect has had members setting themselves alight and has been involved in attacks on diplomats. The founder of the Synanon group, Charles Dedrich, has been arrested for persuading two members to send a rattlesnake, with the rattle removed, through the post to a lawyer who had won a case against the group.

One other notable feature seen in the case of the People's Temple is that it was not only the vulnerable and uneducated who became involved, but in-

telligent and well-placed people, who often give such movements a spurious credibility.

Dr Jolyon West of the University of California, who has studied fringe religions, says people who join cults share three characteristics: a sense of disillusionment or dissatisfaction with society; a sense of revelation or discovery at having found a new way; a willingness to lose oneself in a larger identity. These can also be characteristics of followers of orthodox religion. They could best be countered by a greater sense of realism about society and its imperfectibility, and an upbringing which creates a stronger sense of individual worth and autonomy.

It is important to distinguish between various sects and fringe cults, whose harmfulness can vary from the sinister to the merely eccentric and pointless leisure-time activity. Equally important is the very small number of followers of fringe religions in comparison with the followers of Christian sects. The fringe religions do not differ essentially from Christianity, which is itself based on an alleged suicide by someone who felt he had a special mission to be crucified.

Comments in the press at the time of the Jonestown mass-suicide argued that when traditional religion fails there is a vacuum which is filled by fringe religion and there is consequently a need to return to orthodox traditional religion. This is a quite fallacious argument. There have always been weird sects and cults; it is the media which now give them such prominence. They have existed side by side with established groups and are a natural part of the religious spectrum. The answer is to see that religion is not merely theoretically nonsensical, but can also be socially and psychologically damaging. Tragedies like the mass-suicide in Guyana remind us of this and cry out for mankind to resort to common sense.

PAKISTAN

President Zia-Ul-Haq of Pakistan has now advocated further steps in a return to a full Islamic State. In December he announced that all Government servants must pray during office hours. Heads of department have been instructed to lead the congregational prayers if they know how. Because Friday prayers are compulsory all shops, factories and other establishments would be closed during the hour of prayer. It has been reported that there is the possibility that vigilante groups could be established to ensure that every male Muslim goes to a Mosque on Friday afternoon.

President Zia also announced a decision to create "Shariat" (Islamic laws) in addition to the legal system. A high court "Shariat" bench may decide whether any law or provision of law is repugnant to the rules of Islam.

The Blasphemy Case Final Appeal

NICOLAS WALTER

The end of the "Gay News" case is at last in sight. The most recent developments are described and discussed by Nicolas Walter, editor of the "New Humanist" and press officer of the Committee Against Blasphemy Law.

The legal process begun in November 1976 by Mary Whitehouse's private prosecution of the editor and publisher of *Gay News* for blasphemous libel has gone through three main stages. Denis Lemon and Gay News Limited were tried at the Central Criminal Court in July 1977, and convicted and fined (Denis Lemon also received a suspended prison sentence); their appeal was heard by the Court of Appeal in February 1978, and dismissed in March 1978 (though Denis Lemon's prison sentence was quashed); their further appeal was heard by the House of Lords in November 1978, and is expected to be dismissed during the next month or two.

The sheer magnitude of the legal process is almost beyond belief. Two teams of lawyers have been working on the case for more than two years, and nine judges have listened to their arguments. Every relevant document has been photocopied dozens of times. The trial hearing took six days, half the time being devoted to legal arguments; the Court of Appeal hearing took four days; the House of Lords hearing took five days. A complete transcript of the entire proceedings would fill several large volumes. The three Appeal Judges gave a single judgement of about 10,000 words; even if the five Law Lords agree about their conclusion, they are expected to give separate judgements. In the end the whole case will have cost hundreds of thousands of pounds, most of it coming out of public funds—i.e. our pockets.

The sheer irrelevance of the legal process is quite beyond doubt. Despite all the trouble and expense, the law of blasphemy will be no better or even clearer at the end than it was at the beginning. It is a common law offence which has been developed by judges over a period of more than three centuries and which has never been considered by Parliament. The legal result of the case will be the most authoritative judgement yet given, but it will be narrowly confined to the question whether a person accused of blasphemy must be found guilty of *mens rea* (guilty mind) as well as of *actus reus* (guilty act)—that is, whether he must be proved to have the subjective intention to blaspheme, or whether he may be proved only to have been responsible for what ten members of a jury decide is blasphemous.

In the particular case of James Kirkup's poem "The Love That Dares To Speak Its Name", it is obvious to anyone living in the real world that the

subjective intention of its author and publisher must be relevant to any discussion of whether it is blasphemous. But this element was excluded in the trial, and this exclusion was upheld by the Court of Appeal and will probably be upheld by the House of Lords. As a result, in the last hour of the last hearing the lawyers and lords were reduced to considering Denis Lemon's probable subjective intention in the light of "what one has heard him say on television"! Meanwhile, the crucial element of the tendency to cause a breach of the peace, which was emphasised at the trial and was included at the first appeal, was almost excluded from the final appeal.

Whatever happens in whatever court, the result will have nothing to do with the fate of the poem. After the prosecution, and again after the conviction, it was reprinted in several political papers (Young Liberal, Trotskyist, pacifist, anarchist) and then in several student and community papers, and it was also reproduced in several leaflet editions. The two editions produced by the Free Speech Movement alone must have reached as many people as the original issue of *Gay News*. On two occasions Mary Whitehouse's solicitors have complained about the reprints to the Director of Public Prosecutions. On two occasions other complaints have been made against me, and on two occasions I have been questioned by officers from the Obscene Publications Squad of the Metropolitan Police; but on both occasions I have refused to make any statement, and no further action has been taken.

Poem Read in Public

I have already explained in *The Freethinker* that I disapprove of the poem, because it drags sex down to the level of religion. But I disapprove much more of attempts to suppress the poem, and as long as they continue I shall continue to circulate it. The most recent occasion was the most recent debate I attended on the subject of the blasphemy law, at the Bristol University Union on 8 December 1978. A young law student who wished to speak in favour of the law complained that it was difficult for her to do so without having read the poem. I gave her a copy, which she immediately read out to the audience, and which changed her mind and swayed the vote. This was the first time I heard the poem read openly beyond an audience of sympathetic freethinkers and/or homosexuals, and I realised that like so many previous victims of the blasphemy law it has now been guaranteed immortality. Like the works of Shelley and Paine, and the old issues of *The Freethinker* which I took to court as exhibits in the two appeals, James Kirkup's poem has been given the kiss of life by the very people who were trying to stifle it. Mary Whitehouse might consider this before she tries her next trick.

The Jews Considered Historically

GEORGE JAEGER

This article considers the history of the Jews and reflects upon their situation in the Middle East and their persecution by the Nazis. George Jaeger was an army chaplain in Palestine during the second world war, and thoughts about the genocide of the Jews in Germany were a factor in his renunciation of the Christian faith. (See his article "Why I Left the Church", "The Free-thinker", January 1977.)

It is common knowledge that the Jewish people have been persecuted throughout history. Also that the persecution, far from depressing the Jewish character or Jewish individuality, has enhanced and sharpened it. The Jews *had* to be cleverer and more talented than others in order to survive.

In Europe in the Middle Ages, the Jews were confined to only two trades—clothing and money-lending. They mastered those trades so thoroughly that even today they are acknowledged experts. Today all trades and professions are open to them, and they tend to become masters in whatever field they have chosen. In music and in science, to take but two examples, it is astonishing to realise how much has been contributed by them. Take Isaac Stern and Yehudi Menuhin; take Einstein or Bronowski; there are too many instances to quote. The rest of the world undoubtedly owes them a great debt.

In the novel *Jew Süß* by Feuchtwangler, the author shows that by the eighteenth century or thereabouts the rulers of the German and Austrian states went to the Jews to borrow money or to obtain help for finances and investments; to learn also how to find opportunities to expand their trade. Nowadays this kind of expertise has been learned by non-Jews, perhaps from the formerly despised Jew himself.

The Jewish race have contributed a great deal to the world by way of religion. The Old Testament, particularly the psalms and the prophets, has nourished Christian and Jew alike. Christianity sprang from the Jewish race and has done much both to enrich and to debase European civilization. It is an inescapable part of our culture.

The present Middle East conflict in which they are involved dates back to the Balfour Declaration of 1917 implemented in 1920, when the British having conquered Palestine from the Turks, decided to set up a homeland there for the Jewish people. In a way, this was a mistake, for it roused the messianic and Zionist hopes of many Jews who regarded the land as virtually theirs because of the so-called promises of god to Moses and because it had belonged to them in the biblical past. The land was not a gift to them;

it was theirs by right. They expected not only the part they settled in, but every bit up to the borders of the "Holy Land" of ancient history. It needs to be re-stated that T. E. Lawrence had already, on behalf of the British Government it seems, offered Palestine to the Arabs.

To consider, in 1978, whether any other part of the world could have been given to the Jewish race as a homeland, is a purely academic exercise. The die has been cast for all foreseeable time, whatever the consequences.

I was stationed in Palestine during the war at the 1st Australian Convalescent Depot in a coastal kibbutz known as Kvar Vitkin, north of Tel Aviv. We could see all around us evidence of the energy, enterprise and ingenuity of the new settlers. They were turning the former Arab and Turkish wilderness into a "land flowing with milk and honey".

Incidentally, I knew of no instance, at that time (1941-2) of any forcible take-over of Arab lands by Jews. The lands they had were sold to them by Arab Sheikhs over the heads of peasants, who carried on a primitive agriculture. In some areas Arabs still had their own lands and farms, and even their own towns and the occasional city—Jaffa for instance, and the old city of Jerusalem—side by side with Jewish settlements.

Palestine during the War

In the war years Tel Aviv was already an impressive city with many fine hotels where we could stay when on leave. Though on occasions I put up at the Armon, we had no need to stay in an hotel. We could always go to the Jewish Hospitality Committee, who would arrange for us to stay, free of charge, with a Jewish family. I took advantage of their offer on one occasion and stayed with a charming family surnamed Davidowitz. The head of the family, who had a doctor's degree, was busy translating Shakespeare into Hebrew, and I understand that he has since become famous because of his successful work in this field.

One day during my stay in Palestine, the daily newspaper, the *Palestine Post*, brought out an edition marked by huge black frames round each page. It appeared that a ship full of refugees from Europe had been voyaging round the Mediterranean area trying in vain to find a country that would receive them. Wherever they went they found the barriers up. The British refused to let them land in Palestine because of their strict immigration quotas. (We had seen, in the harbour of Tel Aviv, the remains of a ship deliberately wrecked by refugees. They had to be taken ashore as victims of shipwreck.) The refugee ship described in the *Palestine*

Post had finally been sunk at sea by a German torpedo, with no survivors. The mourning in Palestine was sincere and bitter.

Undoubtedly the greatest tragedy of all for the Jewish people and perhaps the greatest tragedy of all history was the loss of six millions of their number in Hitler's gas ovens and concentration camps. Nothing that I can write can embellish that bare statement. It is something even now unthinkable, yet it really did occur and there is ample historical evidence as well as eye-witness accounts to prove it.

To my mind this was the last great proof, if proof were needed, of the non-existence of a personal god. Here were his "Chosen People", as they called themselves, undergoing the greatest persecution of all time, along with unimaginable horrors and uncountable sufferings, and no god was intervening to help them. "God" was deaf and blind.

What did it mean to me personally? Not immediately, but later, as the full implication struck me, it was the last straw that brought about my loss of faith. If a personal god had existed, if there had been any truth in the Old Testament view of god's special relationship and "covenant" with Israel, something surely might have emerged to mitigate the

tragedies of Auschwitz and Belsen, some champion might have come forward to save the Jews. But nothing intervened. Hitler and Himmler had a free hand.

I ask myself now, how can the Jewish people continue to believe in god? Where the Government of Israel is concerned, they obviously don't. For very good reasons they put their faith in their own strength and brains, and in guns, rockets, napalm bombs, war planes, and, ultimately, atom bombs. Can one blame them?

One has been told that the people of Israel, world-wide, retain their customs and their faith because they are the only things that integrate them and ensure their continuance as a race. It is difficult to argue with them on that score, yet many Jews opt out and become liberals and humanists. Many renounce Zionism or the claim to occupancy of Palestine based on faith in the Old Testament Texts.

As a humanist I would like to see the Jews draw the inescapable lesson from "The Holocaust" and agree with us that god does not exist. They have now developed faith in themselves. Let them draw the corollary and discard the supernatural altogether.

WORLDWIDE

CANADA

A play presented in Montreal, *Les Fées Ont Soif* (The Fairies are Thirsty) has been denounced as blasphemous and sacrilegious. It depicts the Virgin Mary as a broken woman trying to break out of her role and includes explicit and scatological language. The regional arts council refused a grant on the grounds that the play was offensive and lacked taste. The play is frankly feminist and according to some reports is feminine, poetic and thought-provoking.

The Catholic Archbishop of Montreal has condemned the play as an act of blasphemy against the Virgin Mary. Seven Roman Catholic societies in Montreal have won a temporary ban on sales of the text of the play.

SPAIN

A new constitution in Spain, accepted after a referendum, includes separation of church and state. This means the disestablishment of the Roman Catholic Church, and leaves the way open for a law regulating divorce and abortion, both still illegal. The new constitution will also secure freedom of speech and abolish the death penalty.

Before the vote the constitution was sharply attacked in a pastoral letter from the Primate of Spain, Cardinal Gonzalez Martin. The opposition of parts of the Catholic Church and other reactionary forces was, however, to no avail.

ITALY

The Vatican is to lose some power and privileges if the third draft of the revision of the Concordat, between Italy and the Holy See is accepted by the Italian Parliament. The Concordat, which was signed by the Church and Mussolini in 1929, has been a point of controversy between the ruling Christian Democratic Party and left wing parties.

The most recent revision eliminates a number of clerical privileges such as the special legal status of priests accused of crimes. The right to opt out of religious education in schools would be ensured by the new Concordat. Radical groups in Italy are not satisfied that their demand that the pupil and parent should have to make a written request for religious instruction has not been accepted and are unhappy that there is no removal of the tax exemption which religious institutions enjoy.

The Vatican is in deep financial waters. A bill of 900 million lire from the Italian state to cover the cost of supplying water has not been paid. The Rome Town Council have criticised the Vatican for slow payment. It is rumoured that economic experts are urging the Vatican to sink or swim.

If there is a God, it would seem to be his will that human beings should be unaware of his existence. And the will of God should be respected. Hjalmar Söderberg (1869-1941), Swedish Freethinker.

The connection between crime and vandalism and what is now known as the "permissive" society is considered in this piece. Cyril Marcus, a longstanding humanist, was brought up in Glasgow, where he lived from the age of eleven up to the early years of adulthood, with a two year absence in Paris.

In the years when I was in Glasgow, from 1915 onwards, Glasgow was the most lawless town in Britain—it probably still is. The lawlessness began with widespread youthful vandalism and went through every stratum of society, grown-up toughs and rowdies, right up to the Municipal administration, where corruption prevailed to such a degree that an inquiry into it, instituted by a member of the Corporation, Baillie Fletcher, was held in the thirties.

Yet Glasgow was superficially a most austere place. At the time during which I knew it, pleasure seems to have been equated in high places with evil. There was no Sunday cinema, nor Municipal golf, tennis or bowls; dance halls closed decorously early—except when the Magistrates granted an extension. It was the proud boast of the Council that prostitutes had been swept off the streets of the city.

The Kirk was almost wholly responsible for the restrictions on personal liberty at the time of which I write. Indeed Churchmen were not a little proud of their success in this field, in spite of the fact that

it had no beneficial effect on the *mores* of the city. If members of the Kirk consider the restraints which it fostered had a beneficial influence on the conduct of the populace of Glasgow, don't they hesitate to contemplate what it would have been without the Kirk's good (?) work? A man could not buy a drink with his lunch on Saturday, whilst on Sunday alcoholic beverages of any sort were out of the question for citizens, although travellers from other towns might obtain them in certain hotels.

When, as an adolescent, I went to live in Paris, I was appalled and shocked by its uninhibited, sparkling gaiety and the brazen abandonment of the women of the Boulevards—and I must confess not a little titillated. In later life I have reflected, "Was this 'shocking' Paris—'shocking' to my absorbed puritanical ideas—was not this Paris a safer place, a more sober place, in which to walk than Glasgow? Was there not more culture, both in the place and in its people, than I had seen in Glasgow? Were not the people happier in Paris?"

Might it not be that the very permissiveness of Paris, its sexual freedom—as opposed to libertinism—is really in itself a good thing? Would the present campaigners for purity and restraint not be better and more constructively employed in devoting their energies to trying to combat the real, unequivocal ills of society—violence, stealing (look at the supermarkets!) bad housing, unemployment—than arbitrarily trying to impose their stultifying ideas of morality on society?

COME IN GOD!

"Come in Fred" cried a disembodied voice half way through the sermon. Such interruptions are becoming more common during acts of worship. This does not mean that the almighty is coming through rather more loudly and clearly than hitherto, but that English churches are updating their public address systems. Some amplification systems are picking up unintended messages. Electric organs have been known to receive the "colourful language" of taxi-drivers, and a period of prayer was recently enhanced with a call from "panda one to panda four".

BAN ON CAROLS

"What religion is there in a carol service these days?" This question did not come from a secularist, but from a member of the Free Presbyterian Church of Scotland. Mr Iain MacDonald, a Presbyterian, was suspended from his position as headmaster after

banning carol singing at his school in Ross-shire. Members of the Free Presbyterian Church of Scotland do not celebrate Xmas (they prefer the X) since they regard it as a pagan festival with no biblical authority. Quite.

Seven people were killed, and two critically injured when a helicopter crashed into a church festival picnic in Derry Borough, Pennsylvania last month. The helicopter was dropping ping-pong balls, with prizes attached, to the picnickers below when it plunged to earth.

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JOTTINGS

WILLIAM McILROY

Opposition by Conservatives at Westminster to expenditure on social services is as predictable as the sun rising; but it is rather feeble, almost apologetic, when compared to the vindictive hatred for social welfare projects to be found at town hall and constituency association level. So when the Education Committee of the very Conservative West Sussex County Council proposed employing another officer at £10,000 a year, howls of protest could have been reasonably expected from the small businessmen, estate agents and middle-class tabbies who uphold the Conservative cause in that neck of the woods.

But not a bit of it; only one Conservative councillor made a half-hearted protest, and he did not go so far as to put forward a motion against the appointment. For even in these days of economies and cuts in public spending it appears that the West Sussex Conservatives have no qualms about wasting money on religion—on the appointment of a religious education adviser, to be precise.

Councillor Kenneth Ball, chairman of the Education Committee, attempted to justify this plundering of the public purse with a touching appeal on behalf of those parents who, he asserts, "have been crying out for more moral and religious leadership in our schools".

Certainly parents in Sussex and elsewhere have been crying out, with good cause, about shortcomings in schools. There are often too many pupils in classes, too few text-books, exorbitant financial demands for school uniforms and games clothes, inadequate transport services. These are the problems, not the promotion of religious superstition, which are of real concern to parents, pupils and teachers.

Councillor Peter Shepherd, leader of the Conservatives on the Council and a member of its Religious Education Conference, has publicly stated the level of "education" on religion he believes that children should receive. He declared: "This is a Christian country and parents wish and require their children to be taught Christianity. They should be given a superficial knowledge of other religions but not have them pressed on them".

Whether it is ignorance or wishful thinking that prompts Councillor Shepherd to talk such nonsense is not for me to say. Britain is not a Christian country. It is educationally and socially desirable that young people should not be taught any subject, including religion, at a superficial level. Certainly they should not be indoctrinated or pressed to be-

lieve, nor should any religious faith have a special place in the curriculum.

Councillor Shepherd's brutal frankness rather embarrassed Canon John Cotton, chairman of the Religious Education Conference, who said: "It is not the part of county schools to press adherence to a particular denomination or religious standpoint if the child does not wish to do so". Canon Cotton chooses his words carefully, but he must not be surprised if he is suspected of disingenuousness. After all the 1944 Education Act did make the teaching of religion and a daily act of worship compulsory in publicly maintained schools. The flood of handbooks and syllabuses which have since appeared make it clear that it is the Christian religion that is to be inculcated and the Christian god who is to be worshipped. And if the aim is not to "press adherence to a particular denomination or religious standpoint", why cannot the pupil, rather than a parent or guardian, request his own excusal from RE lessons and acts of worship?

West Sussex parents would do well to ponder the wisdom of electing apostles of ignorance and superficiality to public office.

* * *

One of the more disturbing developments following the *Gay News* blasphemy trial has been the well-orchestrated clamour to extend the protection of blasphemy law to non-Christian faiths. Rather than relinquish the privilege which blasphemy law affords them, Christian opportunists are prepared to share it with religious charlatans, crackpots and worshippers of "false gods". Muslim religious leaders, already exploiting Christianity's special position in the nation's education system in an attempt to establish their own sectarian schools, have welcomed the proposal. No doubt others will jump aboard the religious censorship handwaggon if it really starts to roll.

However it would be a mistake to assume that all religious groups defend or seek the protection of blasphemy law. The Friends of the Western Buddhist Order have just published their views in a well-researched document entitled *Buddhism and Blasphemy*. It is written by the Venerable Sangharakshita who does not indulge in mealy-mouthed platitudes or even bother to pay the usual, if undeserved, tribute to Christianity.

In the opening paragraph Sangharakshita declares that Buddhists, like most people who believe that they enjoy complete freedom of expression in religious matters, had their illusions shattered by the prosecution of Denis Lemon and *Gay News Limited*. They had wrongly assumed that the common law offence of blasphemy was a dead letter. He comments: "No unrepealed law is ever obsolete"—a

(Continued on page 14)

REITH LECTURES RIGHT

In her presidential address to the Annual General Meeting of the National Secular Society on Saturday 9 December, Miss Barbara Smoker referred to the just completed series of Reith lectures given by Dr Edward Norman.

"The fact that, after choosing some very progressive Reith lecturers, the BBC can revert in 1978 to the choice of a lecturer cast in the Victorian religious mould of Sir John Reith is," she said, "proof that, contrary to what we are often told, the National Secular Society still has an important job to do.

"Paradoxically, while many Christians have taken issue with Dr Norman's uncompromising view of the gospel message, we in the NSS say that he is quite right: the Christian creed does not lead logically to a progressive political theory and is not really compatible with progressive political action. People committed to humanistic social reform, who cling to the Christian label and to the historical privileges that go with it, are dishonestly trying to have it both ways.

"However, whereas Dr Norman would prefer them to keep to the traditional creed—original sin, vicarious atonement, and all—and to give up alien humanistic ideas, we would prefer them to put the welfare of humanity first and to jettison all anachronistic and immoral religious beliefs.

"People who discard their rose-tinted religious spectacles and simply look around cannot but see that the world and its living organisms could not have been designed and created unless by either a monster of cruelty (in human terms, a psychopath) or else an utterly incompetent bungler. The basic principle of life is vast over-production and the weakest going to the wall. This hardly indicates a loving God!

"Not until people in public life stop paying lip-service to Christianity will the laws of the country be amended so as to dissociate legal and financial privileges (as for instance those of charity status) from the hypocritical acceptance of religious labels."

Other important aspects of the meeting were a motion updating a draft of the aims and objects of the NSS. Motions passed included one deploring the "refusal by the Home Office to waive the Sunday Observance entertainment laws when New Year's Eve falls on a Sunday" and one supporting the Northern Ireland Gay Rights Association and the Scottish Homosexual Rights Group.

CATHOLIC QUEEN?

Enoch Powell has reared his head ravenous for publicity again. In a statement made on his home ground near his constituency in Ulster, he said that if Prince Charles were to marry a Catholic it would

NEWS

"Signal the beginning of the end of the British monarchy . . . and portend the eventual surrender of everything that has made us a nation."

Mr Powell's views are related to his romantic and mischievous views of the English Constitution. They are consistent with his phobia about a European parliament and his intolerance of immigrants. He seems to be unaware of the changes in the monarchy since the Bill of Rights of 1689 and the 1701 Act of Settlement, which enacted the prohibition on the crown being held by a Catholic.

Prince Charles, in being denied the choice of marrying a Catholic, is being denied the basic human right to wed a person of his own choice. Prince Charles is not constitutionally forbidden to marry an atheist or a Muslim (not thought conceivable in the seventeenth century) but such a choice would be difficult in his future position as head of the Church of England. The obvious answer is to separate the head of state from the head of the church. An emergency motion passed at the Annual General Meeting of the National Secular Society on 9 December 1978 read: "This AGM calls for the complete separation of Church and State so that Prince Charles may marry whom he pleases".

ENLIGHTENED EDUCATION

Two new educational projects have been devised to encourage youngsters to think about their sexuality. *Loving and Caring* is a film sponsored by the Family Planning Association and the Health Education Council, which takes a realistic look at teenage relationships. *Homosexuality, A Fact of Life* is a kit of slides, cassette tape and booklets produced by the Tyneside Group of the Campaign for Homosexual Equality aimed at giving secondary school children an understanding of homosexuality.

Although neither project is faultless, both are an extremely useful addition to material available to teachers in these important areas. The great virtue of *Loving and Caring* is that it is structured to encourage teenagers honestly to discuss and explore their own feelings about responsibilities and personal relationships. It also has the merit of not offering answers to the problems dealt with, so that individuals may come to different conclusions. Hopefully most secondary schools have now got well beyond the stage of ensuring full factual knowledge is being given (or is this a vain hope?) but unhappily there remains a tendency for sex education to contain an implied message that sex is all right as long as you

AND NOTES

don't enjoy it *now*, and any move towards encouraging youngsters to think about their own decisions is bound to be one towards an enjoyable and responsible adulthood.

The filmstrip is divided into five short sections and each section is followed by a discussion. The tale of Sandra and Simon, who are going steady, is rather in the soap opera style: he wants sexual intercourse, she wants to wait, and their parents and peers have a predictable variety of views and anxieties about the relationship. The unprofessional, unscripted performances are creaky in places, but it may be that children (especially unsophisticated and inarticulate ones) will be more easily provoked into discussion by this than by a more polished and wrapped-up film. In the discussion "among the lads" there was a nasty reference to "poofs", which could hardly be justified even as likely to provoke discussion.

Despite criticisms, the most plausible comments on the film at a press conference came from teachers who described the successful discussions which had occurred in their schools. The idea of showing the film to parents—who often have as much difficulty as children in discussing sexual matters—seems an excellent one.

Homosexuality, A Fact of Life obviously had less money behind it, but the slide and taped commentary give a good lesson-length background to homosexuality. It is clear on basic facts such as the incidence of homosexuality, that there is a spectrum from homosexuality to heterosexuality through bisexuality, and that homosexuals look and behave like any one else. It is particularly good in showing the feelings of a young homosexual, the pressures to conform and the value of "coming out". But in its laudable aim to show the emotional aspects of homosexual relationships, it perhaps was too delicate in completely averting its eyes from the physical side—which is something teenagers will ask about. Also, particularly since it is to be shown to youngsters it could have mentioned the fact that many adolescents experience a homosexual phase, which is not the same as an inbuilt homosexual orientation.

There is as far as we know no good educational material on homosexuality, so this is a first-rate start. Since Mary Whitehouse had already condemned *Homosexuality, A Fact of Life* before she had seen it, it will doubtless be in much demand.

"*Loving and Caring*" is available for hire from the Central Film Library, Government Buildings, Bromyard Avenue, London W3 7JA.

"*Homosexuality, A Fact of Life*" is available from

CHE, PO Box 427, 69 Corporation St, Manchester M60 2EL. Price £10.00 (booklets available separately).

The last "Freethinker" commented in "Jottings" (p.183) that Professor Taylor's scientific paper disavowing belief in Uri Geller's paranormal powers would not be given the same media coverage that Mr Geller achieved by his own self-advertisement. Since then we have heard that people closer to Mr Geller than Professor Taylor have lost faith in him. Yasha Katz, who managed many of his hoaxes, has appeared on Italian television to explain how they were done. (There have been rumours that Geller did not pay him.) Mr Geller has, nevertheless, said he will pay £50,000 to any magician who can duplicate his trick of transferring pictures by thought-waves. It appears that the British magician David Berglas has accepted the challenge. Good luck!

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To posit a First Clause is to assume law of causality and in the same breath require an exception from it. Hjalmar Söderberg (1869-1941), Swedish Freethinker.

THE MYSTERY OF THE PRINCES by Audrey Williamson. Alan Sutton, £5.95.
THE PRINCES IN THE TOWER by Elizabeth Jenkins. Hamish Hamilton, £6.95.

These two books are new attempts to scrub some of the tarnish off Richard III. Audrey Williamson thinks that Richard did not kill his two nephews and Elizabeth Jenkins thinks that he did, but that he was not nearly the villain he is traditionally claimed to be.

Audrey Williamson is not one of the fervent Ricardians who wish to absolve Richard III of all possible guilt: rather, she demonstrates that in spite of the great choice of interesting possibilities all the evidence is inconclusive. Richard III, she argues, probably did not have the young Edward V and his brother Richard, Duke of York, murdered. Indeed, their deaths would have benefited Henry VII more—and after all, the blackening of Richard III's character was the work of Tudor historians. (The first Tudor was very much a Lancastrian at the end of a long reign of Yorkists: *we* know that the Wars of the Roses were over in 1485, but *he* didn't.)

Trying to untangle the intrigues surrounding the reign of Richard III is like trying to grasp the details of the Watergate affair 500 years on and without the help of the *Washington Post*. In spite of Audrey Williamson's constant speculation and rhetorical questions, she never loses sight of the fact that speculation is only a basis for a hypothesis and not a substitute for hard evidence. Even when the circumstantial evidence seems strong, she reminds us that it is still only circumstantial evidence. Nevertheless, some of her speculation verges on fantasy. The adolescent Richard, younger brother of the lecherous Edward IV, apparently fathered two illegitimate children, although in later life he fathered only one other, legitimate, child. Audrey Williamson surmises from this and other evidence that he was "rather asexual in nature", but the illegitimate son, she says, "would fit in well with my own surmise that Richard in his early life could have been trying to imitate his admired elder brother in many ways, including sexual prowess. Could Edward considerably have provided the lady, for his hardly more than sixteen-year-old brother's initiation?"

The Mystery of the Princes could do with a genealogical table to help us steer our way through all the Beauforts, Plantagenets, Tudors, Nevilles, and Woodvilles (Queen Elizabeth had 12 siblings and numerous in-laws whose careers she tirelessly advanced; it is a tribute to her industry that she found time to have 12 children herself).

If Ms Williamson's first object is to encourage reassessment of Richard III's character, a second object is to challenge sloppy historiography. She

demonstrates how legends and hearsay are retailed by successive generations of historians, and where the original writers may have qualified their remarks with reservations, the conclusions tend to survive as fact and the reservations are dropped. It may come as a surprise to some readers to learn that no one really knows what became of the princes.

She may well be right in her contention that earlier, male historians have been inclined to overlook the human element—the influence of emotion and family connections. (What she actually says is "One occasionally has an odd feeling that male historians are not human beings at all, but have drifted here from outer space, where there are no mothers and no children in our sense of the terms".) Whether or not men have been insensitive to human relationships in history, women historians are bound to see things in a different light from that of men, and new perspectives on history can only be an enrichment.

The Mystery of the Princes is written in an attractively colloquial style. The racy prose (The Duke of Norfolk was a "tough customer") sometimes, however, lapses into clumsiness, as in "true facts" and the over-use of "totally" to mean "quite", "completely" or "thoroughly". It is disconcerting to find her heading a chapter "Warbeck: King or Pretender?", as though a pretender to the throne were one who "pretended" in the modern sense. If it is a pun it skates too near ambiguity. The over-enthusiastic use of italics makes me feel a little as though I'm being taken by the lapels and shaken slightly, but Audrey Williamson is intensely interested in this historical mystery and follows every lead like Sherlock Holmes, Miss Marples, and Lord Peter Wimsey combined. Finally her enthusiasm seizes the reader and you do not really mind being taken by the lapels; instead, you exclaim back to her italics, "Yes! Elizabeth of York must have *known* Richard III didn't murder her brothers, because she was on friendly terms with him and *dancing at Court* nine months after leaving sanctuary! Ah ha!"

As part of her mulling over of the evidence and clues to the characters of the protagonists, Ms Williamson allows herself a good many generalizations which may or may not be accurate but sound uncomfortably sweeping. We are told that "there is often a close bond between a womanising father and his daughters" and that the aged Countess of Desmond "could have made herself the important heroine of [a story about her youth], as old ladies sometimes do in telling tales of the remote past".

REVIEWS

This is one of those books with the notes at the end of the chapter. That means that when you first come upon a note you must page around through the book to find whether the notes are at the end of the chapter or at the end of the whole text. Then you must keep a marker at the notes page or else decide not to interrupt your reading by flipping to another page at every superscript number. Authors are at the mercy of printers and of publishers' house styles when it comes to footnote policy, and no doubt the footnotes were herded together at the end of the chapters because readers find them inconvenient.

While Audrey Williamson begins her book very much *in medias res* with the legends which have grown up around the disappearance of the princes from the Tower, Elizabeth Jenkins takes a leisurely run-up to the central issue. Indeed, it is page 142 of *The Princes in the Tower* before Edward IV finally dies and the stage is set for the murky business which follows. The background is carefully drawn: there is the physical description of the Tower which opens the book and a careful explanation of the dynastic struggles among the descendants of Edward III's three sons, Lionel, John of Gaunt, and Edmund. There is a heaven-sent genealogical table showing the line of Edward III, who had six sons in all. *The Princes in the Tower* is more like a history of the royal family (or families) from Edward III to the Battle of Bosworth Field. The book is much less for specialists in the controversy of the fate of the princes than for the general reader who wants to know something about the princes and also some details of fifteenth century politics. Although Elizabeth Jenkins never loses the thread of her story, she pauses long enough to give us the reason that Warwick's cannons consistently missed Edward's army on the night before the Battle of Barnet and to tell us that the Duke of Exeter imported the first rack to be used in England and that Bamburgh was the first castle to be broken up by artillery. She mentions in passing the careers of William Caxton and Sir Thomas Malory. But it is surprising that a writer of Elizabeth Jenkins' skills should wonder whether the chronicler who called the death of Richard's legitimate son "an unhappy death" meant that it caused unhappiness. ("Unhappy" in the fifteenth century meant "unlucky".)

Some minor advantages of Elizabeth Jenkins' book are that the footnotes are at the bottom of pages, there is a good index, and the pages do not reflect glare, as those of *The Mystery of the Princes* do. But if you want to know rather less about the

fifteenth century panorama and more about why this 500-year-old mystery still arouses so much interest that there is a whole Richard III Society devoted to it, you will want Audrey Williamson's meticulous investigations. Better still, get both.

SARAH LAWSON

SEX, VIOLENCE AND THE MEDIA by H. J. Eysenck and D. K. B. Nias. Maurice Temple Smith, £5.95

It is fashionable, but profoundly mistaken, to link sex and violence in debating the influence of the media (the title of a book I reviewed in *The Free-thinker* for June 1978 did the same thing). Manifestations of human violence are usually deplorable; manifestations of sexuality are deplored, but usually wrongly. Treating the two from one standpoint is a manifestation of sex hate. That is not the only defect of this book.

The authors are psychologists of the behaviourist persuasion. They belong to a school that believes in manipulating people, and also in manipulating their environment. Other manipulators (such as the media) arouse their suspicion. Psychologists alone (they tell us) are fitted to experiment in this field and judge the results. They present some interesting findings, but end by falling from their pedestal of scientific objectivity. On the way they frequently contradict themselves. Here is one example.

The Thouless law (we are told on page 97) lays down that doubtful personal beliefs (such as belief in the harmful effect of pornography) tend to be held, or rejected, with extreme rather than intermediate degrees of certainty. There is a polarization effect. Indicating no awareness of the inconsistency, Eysenck and Nias present (on page 240) the results a large-scale experiment suggesting that in this field the spectrum of opinion goes "right across the board, from one extreme of permissiveness to the other extreme of puritanism, without a break anywhere." Which is one to believe?

In man's evolution, the primitive paleocortex or lower brain (concerned with emotions and other elemental feelings) became enveloped by the neocortex (introducing rational thought, self-consciousness and adaptability). "We thus have two largely separate and independent systems controlling behaviour, the old-fashioned, primitive, but very powerful emotional-conditioned system, and the new-fangled, recent, cognitive system". Opposition between these systems produces neurosis. I am not competent to judge the scientific truth of this hypothesis; but I note that it puts down sexuality and emotion by depositing them firmly with the lower, primitive cortex. It does the same for aggression, but what would the human race have achieved for itself if not powered by these forces?

The research findings presented in this book derive from three types of study. *Field studies* report

on behaviour which occurs naturally. Results vary from study to study "and are generally inconclusive". *Experimental field studies* are designed by researchers who manipulate the factors occurring naturally. "Researchers have not yet explicitly designed experimental field studies on the effects of pornography". *Laboratory experiments* have scientific vigour, but are wholly artificial. They reveal that after exposure to erotica both sexes exhibit changes. "For males, these changes included a decrease in the tendency to feel composed, innerly calm, interested and friendly. For females, the changes included a decrease in the tendency to feel composed, unconcerned, lazy and interested. Relative to males, the females were more likely to report changes in the direction of feeling shocked, irritated and disgusted". One study noted "a decrease in mirth".

We all know that prolonged exposure to violence on television must have some effect, and this book confirms it. We all know that looking at sexually-explicit material can arouse us. Again, this book confirms it. If asked, most people would answer that these effects are complicated and work in both directions. Our authors agree. "The issue is very complex, with pornography having a mixture of good, bad and unknown effects". The same, they tell us, applies to violence. The obvious is scientifically confirmed.

To be fair, our authors do give some useful technical instruction about the precise ways media exposure may influence people. These include: *desensitization* (counter-conditioning), *modelling* (the desire to imitate), *identification* (the image corresponds to something we were, or want to be), *disinhibition* (public acceptance of what we thought forbidden frees our desires), *triggering* (the compressed emotional spring is released), *catharsis* (respected by the ancient Greeks but not by Eysenck and Nias), *substitution* (giving us a "respectable" equivalent to what we desire serves as a safety-valve), and *satiation* (over-exposure to safe equivalents drains desire).

As we shall see, the book ends with a specific, firm recommendation. How odd then that it abounds with contradictory findings. One study finds that the more children watch TV the less aggressive they are found to be. The explanation is simple. Active children watch fewer programmes than passive children! A spate of burglaries followed the TV showing of *Break-in*. Was this a degenerate crime thriller? No. It was a programme designed to help citizens protect their property by demonstrating the techniques used by burglars! A 1976 study by Gerbner and Gross found that constant exposure to TV will give people the impression that the world is a more violent place than it really is, and that this will cause them anxiety and encourage paranoid feelings about their fellow-citizens. It sounds reasonable, but is attacked by Eysenck and Nias. Evidence for the first part of

the theory has not been established, they tell us. The second part of the theory conflicts with the "desensitization" evidence that exposure to TV violence leads to a decrease rather than an increase in anxiety. When the only competent guides disagree, what are the rest of us to think?

That a show of violence may be socially *beneficial* because of its aversive effect is admitted by our authors. Some people at least may be pushed by it in the opposite direction: "disliking violence even more than they did before, being brought face to face with its ugly consequences". It is the same with sex. Exposed to "perverted" sex in one study, subjects experienced an attitude change with "the realization that unconventional sex, specifically group sex and homosexuality was not for them". The Weber-Fechner law shows the futility of attempts at social control. Perception of stimuli (visual, tactile, auditory etc) is a function of the amount of similar stimulation experienced on previous occasions. A single candle lit in a room where 100 candles burn will be unperceived; in a totally dark room it will transform the scene. "Even a single exposure to pornography may have a lasting effect on sexual attitudes and behaviour". One thing can be guaranteed. Whatever social controls may be imposed on pornography, no one will pass through life without exposure to it—and that is likely to arrive in childhood.

The fact that the findings of psychologists are inconsistent and even contradictory does not prevent Eysenck and Nias from deserting in the final chapter their role as scientists and proffering political advice. They emerge as prejudiced human beings; their innate conviction being that *l'appetit vient en mangeant*. Scruples are felt: "These recommendations inevitably imply certain social value judgments; in this the present chapter differs from those that precede it".

The main recommendation (on page 255) is for more censorship. "Such censorship already exists, to some extent, but it needs to be strengthened . . ." A little earlier (on page 219) the authors had recorded a reverse conclusion: "If the aim of censorship is to reduce arousal, then it appears to have the opposite effect".

The book proposes an ingenious new system of censorship. Instead of vague formulas like the "deprave and corrupt" test of the present law, the authors urge scientific precision. A chart allocates penalty points according to what is depicted in the material under examination. "Manual manipulation of female breast, over clothes" rates 4.5 points, while the tricky feat of "Sexual intercourse, man behind woman" attracts 12.2. (If the copulators are face to face their rating drops to 8.3). Top score of 15.0 is awarded to "Mutual oral manipulation of genitals to mutual orgasm". The authors concede that their scale would need to be modified to

account for elements such as use of force or the tender age of participants. Naively they say "there is no difficulty in that". Can scientific foolishness go further?

The truth is that we are all conditioned by everything we experience. Television, films, books form part of our environment. The complex effect of the lifetime environment is beyond computation. Those who claim the right to manipulate our experience of life by censorship bear a heavy onus of proof. All this book shows is that they are still far from discharging it.

FRANCIS BENNION

QUESTION 11, edited by G. A. Wells. Pemberton Publishing Company. £2.25 Cloth, £1.00 paper.

The most recent edition of *Question*—successor to the *Rationalist Annual*—covers a wide range of topics. For me the two most enjoyable articles were "Hjalmar Söderberg" by Carl Lofmark and "The Genesis of Avowed Atheism in Britain" by David Berman. "Hjalmar Söderberg" is an account of the life and writings of a Swedish freethinker (1869-1941) little known in this country. Söderberg's writings covered short stories, novels, articles and some theological studies. His irreverent and trenchant attitude to religion shocked the Swedish establishment and he remained a controversial figure to the end of his life, when he denounced his country's failure to take a firm stand against Hitler and Mussolini. Among his novels two which received much abuse concerned the life of Moses as a politico-religious trickster and the life of Jesus as a human being very different from the gospel picture—seen as created by fanatical propagandists. Carl Lofmark gives an enjoyable picture of Söderberg, a man determined to face life without illusions, and makes us want to learn more about him.

David Berman is researching into the early history of atheism at Trinity College, Dublin, and his "The Genesis of Avowed Atheism in Britain" concentrates on one late eighteenth-century book. *Answer to Dr Priestley's Letters to a Philosophical Unbeliever* (1782) is probably the first openly printed piece of atheistic argument in Britain. Dr Berman makes the useful distinction between avowed atheism and more general atheistic writing, which might be from writers who qualified their arguments for reasons of prudence while holding atheist beliefs, such as perhaps Thomas Hobbes, or from those who produce implicitly atheistic writings while not believing themselves to be atheists, such as perhaps Spinoza. By ingenious literary detective work Dr Berman tracks down joint authorship of the *Answer* to William Hammon and Dr Matthew Turner—"a good surgeon, a practised dentist, a draughtsman, a classical scholar, and a ready wit..." and also author of part of the first professedly atheist book in

Britain. In a detailed discussion of the arguments in the *Answer*, Dr Berman pays particular attention to the repressive tendency of criticisms of atheism which state that an atheist's views are worthless because he cannot testify to his arguments by oath since he does not believe in God.

Barbara Wootton's attack on "Linguistic Malpractices in Economic and Social Contexts" examines the implications of the misuse of words such as "reflation" and "inflation" in language which is itself precise and elegant. (How refreshing to be reminded of the difference between saying "The price has gone up" and "The price has been put up"—like the difference between hot air and an umbrella.) There is a very timely philosophical spotlight on current controversies concerning the sociology of knowledge from Antony Flew, whose lucidity is as well-known as his dislike of trendy Radicals (or is it?)

A look at the psychology of magic in relation to the ideas of J. G. Frazer (of *The Golden Bough*) comes posthumously from Ronald Englefield, of whom a number of the contributors were pupils. "Medical Ethics and Etiquette" by Dr John Potter considers some of the problems of a profession noted for defensiveness and concealment of problems rather than candour. The final article by the Editor, G. A. Wells, is a substantial piece about the Epistles and Acts, incorporating recent European New Testament scholarship, displaying the customary erudition of the author of *Did Jesus Exist?* and concluding with a plea for a fair-minded historical approach to Christianity.

Question 11 could not honestly be described as lively reading from beginning to end, but there is much material which repays the effort of close reading.

JIM HERRICK

THEATRE

STRIFE by John Galsworthy. Olivier, National Theatre

When this play was first produced in 1907, critics took it as something of a slap in the face at Shaw, as though socially conscious drama was strictly an Irish preserve. Now, some seventy years on when nearly all fringe theatre has a political sting in its tail, Galsworthy's depiction of an unofficial strike and its gruelling consequences might seem dated to some and rather weak-kneed.

His credentials, for one thing, were suspect. University-trained, a dandy who later made his name with a string of novels about the genteel upper classes, Galsworthy was hardly the man to come at the world with a pick-axe or hammer and sickle. And so he did not. His play anticipated the climate of industrial relations for the next fifty years, and it is particularly good at predicting the way in which the unions would alter the face of the nation. Yet

progressives might well say that Galsworthy is timid in showing his colours. His strike leader, David Roberts, has the command of a fury unmatched by most of our present-day diehards, but then the likes of Sir Terence Becket would not last long in a room with Galsworthy's boss either.

In short he divides his sympathy equally between workers and management, and in drawing out the similarities between the two implacable forces, may be said to have damaged the force of his argument.

In political terms, perhaps. But poor political reasoning can make for superb drama, and *Strife* is one of the dramatic masterpieces of the century. The pity is that it has been so infrequently revived since it was written.

For this reason alone, the present revival at the National deserves our applause. But we are doubly fortunate in its being such a fine production, and in having the talents of Andrew Cruikshank and Michael Bryant in the central roles. The play depends on the combined strengths of the founder of the tin plate works and the strike leader, and these accomplished actors play their parts magnificently. As the white-maned John Anthony, refusing to yield one inch to the strikers, Mr Cruikshank recalls a tempestuous Lear. "A white-faced monster with bloody lips", Roberts calls him. Yet he is forced to admire Anthony's resolve. For his part, Anthony admits he would do the same thing in Roberts's position. They have mutual respect for each other, even though they form opposite ranks.

Mr Bryant's performance as the strike leader conveys all the inner power developed through years of exploitation and struggle to create solidarity among his men. This is no more clearly displayed than in the moment when he is informed of his wife's death. With precise timing, Mr Bryant checks himself, then continues his harangue at the Company's Board of Directors.

The keynote is struck in two splendid speeches by Roberts and Anthony. Again the play invites comparison with Shakespeare as the two evoke Antony's "honourable man" speech from *Julius Caesar*, Roberts ringing the word "capital" like a death knell, and Anthony responding to equal effect with "cant".

The full force of the drama is brought home in the final paradox. The board defeats Anthony's motion not to give way, and the strike committee by-passes Roberts's leadership and agrees with the management to settle the strike through union arbitration. Roberts and Anthony, defeated generals robbed of absolute victory, retreat wearily to their respective hovels, and with them goes something heroic. Galsworthy's was a world of absolute values, and his play reflects them fairly and with a degree of affection. We are no longer so certain in our own beliefs, and our world is not one of absolutes. The compromise at the end of the play refers not only

to the strike or strike action in general, but to the mood of scepticism informing our present condition.

JAMES MACDONALD

LETTERS

It seems Peter Cadogan is trying to convince us of his sincerity (Letters, "The Freethinker", November 78). His sincerity is not in question, but his credibility is. I cannot take Mr Cadogan's strident irrationalism seriously, his schemes for world peace are seriously deficient, and his suggested means of achieving them so altruistically obscurantist as to be at least naive, if not a little absurd.

I stand by what I have said, for I believe it to be true, and while I agree with Shaw that "assassination is the worse kind of censorship", in this case, I believe to assassinate the censor is no crime against truth.

JOHN SUTCLIFFE

JEWS CRUCIFIED

How very strange: John Sutcliffe writes half a column on the television presentation "Holocaust" without once mentioning the word "Jews", let alone six million Jews. ("The Freethinker", October, 1978). Does it upset him that Christian Europe, led by Christian Germany, crucified my brothers and sisters? Is he a Christian, an anti-semite ("I cannot hate the Nazis") or what?

GAY FIFEN

(Jottings)

warning which every reformer and libertarian should take to heart.

It is only to be expected that Christians who wish to retain blasphemy laws will not be averse to using them. Sangharakshita writes: "Christians have never been remarkable for their tolerance, and after the events of 1977 and 1978 no Buddhist—no non-Christian in fact—can feel really safe so long as the blasphemy laws remain unrepealed. The baying of the wolves, however distant, is not a very reassuring sound to more pacific beasts".

Sangharakshita has little time for Christianity and even less for "ex-Christians who are not yet non-Christians". Indeed he takes a swipe at those ex-Christian Buddhists who, "anxious to show their broadmindedness, not only object to anyone criticising Christianity but go out of their way to speak well of it. Any attempt on the part of Eastern Buddhists, or less psychologically-conditioned Western Buddhists, to point out the shortcomings of Christianity, or defects in the moral character of Christ, or the absurdity of many Christian doctrines . . . is not met with calm consideration of the matter but with accusations of 'narrowmindedness' and 'intolerance' and the assertion that the Christianity about which the critics are talking is not the 'real' Christianity".

It is not only among The Friends of the Western Buddhist Order that such muddleheadedness prevails. Sangharakshita's forthright castigation of Christian-

(Continued on back page)

PUBLICATIONS

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

- The Dead Sea Scrolls, John Allegro. £1.25 (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).
 Origin of the Species, Charles Darwin. 60p (22p).
 Bertrand Russell's Best, Robert E. Engar. £1.00 (26p).
 Fact and Fiction in Psychology, H. J. Eysenk. 90p (15p).
 The Bible Handbook, G. W. Foote & W. Ball. 65p (19p).
 Frauds, Forgeries and Relics, G. W. Foote and J. M. Wheeler. 15p (7p).
 The Presumption of Atheism, Antony Flew. £3.50 (26p).
 Causing Death and Saving Lives, Jonathan Glover. £1.25 (15p).
 The Nun Who Lived Again, Phyllis Graham. 5p (7p).
 Bertrand Russell: A Life, Herbert Gottchalk. 25p (12p).
 The Humanist Revolution, Hector Hawton. 95p (19p).
 Controversy, Hector Hawton. 95p (19p).
 RI and Surveys, Maurice Hill. 5p (7p).
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 Mistakes of Moses, R. G. Ingersoll. 15p (7p).
 The Little Red School Book, S. Jansen. 30p (12p).
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(Jottings)

ity will give offence not only to many of that faith but also make many "positive" humanists wince.

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EVENTS

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

Brighton and Hove Humanist Group. T. F. Evans: subject to be announced. Sunday, 4 February, 5.30 pm. Imperial Hotel, First Avenue, Hove.

Havering and District Humanist Society. Pat Saunders: "Humanism for the 1990s". Tuesday, 16 January, 8 pm. Harold Wood Social Centre (Junction of Gubbins Lane and Squirrels Heath Road).

Leeds and District Humanist Group. AGM followed by discussion on "Humanist Ethics". Tuesday, 9 January, 8 pm. Swarthmore Education Centre, Woodhouse Square, Leeds.

Lewisham Humanist Group. John Evitt: "Vagrants of Eternity". Thursday, 25 January, 7.45 pm. 41 Bromley Road, Catford, SE6.

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. Professor Sir Hermann Bondi: "Science and Education." Wednesday, January 17, 6.30 pm. John Ainsworth: "Homeopathic Medicine", Sunday, 21 January, 7.30 pm. Sheila Oakes (National Peace Council): "Is There a Threat to Western Democracy?" Sunday 4 February, 7.30 pm. All at 13 Prince of Wales Terrace, London W8.

Merseyside Humanist Group. "What Kind of Sex Education for the 1980s?" Discussion led by member of FPA. Wednesday, 17 January 7.45 pm. 46 Hamilton Square, Birkenhead.

Muswell Hill Humanist Group. Mrs C. Celner: "National Schizophrenic Fellowship". Wednesday, 17 January, 8.30 pm. 43 Pages Lane, N10.

Nottingham Humanist Group. Mr W. Massey: "From Baptist to Humanist". Friday, 12 January, 7.30 pm. Adult Education Centre, 14/22 Shakespeare Street, Nottingham.

South Place Ethical Society. Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, WC1. Sunday Morning Meetings, 11 am. 14 January, Peter Heales: Rousseau Revisited. 21 January, Victor Serebriakoff: Has Technological Invention Outstripped Social Invention? 28 January, Eric Millstone: Rationality and Science—Rationality and Society. 4 February, Nicolas Walter: Robert Ingersoll—The Happy Man. Sunday Forums, 3 pm, 14 January, Dr Kit Pedler: Life in a Post-Industrial Society. 28 January, Colin Shindler: The Jewish National Problem in the USSR. Tuesday Discussions—theme "Secrecy": 23 January, Duncan Campbell: Investigative Journalism and the Law.

West Glamorgan Humanist Group. Dr Patricia Howell: "What Price Windscale?" Friday, 26 January, 7.30 pm. Venue—contact W. Grainger, 24 Glanyrafon Gardens, Sketty.

Humanist Holidays. Easter 1979. April 12 or 13 to 17 or later. Small private hotel fairly near the front at Boscombe, Bournemouth. £7 per day, breakfast and dinner. 11-25 August 1979. Similar accommodation at Lowestoft, Suffolk. About £64 per week. Camping and caravan possibilities. Details Mrs M. Mephram, 29 Fairview Road, Sutton, Surrey.

THE FREETHINKER

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