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CHURCH OFFICIAL THREATENS WALK-OUT AT CONFERENCE ON CHURCH SCHOOLS

The Director of the London Diocesan Board of Education threatened to walk out at a day-conference about Church Schools and the Comprehensive System. Eric Tinker, who was feebly attempting to answer criticism of the Church of England proposal to purchase a school in the London Borough of Ealing, said he couldn't stay while people were making unjustified criticisms of the church.

The most controversial session of the day-conference, organised jointly by the Campaign for the Advancement of State Education and the Advisory Centre for Education, was that in which the platform was taken by Stephen Novy and Martin Maycock of the Ealing High Schools Defence Campaign and the representative of the London Diocesan Board of Education. Parents, residents and educationalists were present and feeling ran high.

(In the view of the *Freethinker* Editor, the church official, Eric Tinker, was outstandingly ill-equipped to answer criticism, incompetent in his ability to face up to the issues involved, and apparently blandly unconcerned about the strength of feeling of the opponents of the purchase. An ecclesiastical huff is not an adequate response to such serious criticism.)

The purchasing of a functioning, secondary, comprehensive school by the Church of England in Ealing is quite unprecedented. The Church has been involved in such purchases before as part of re-organisation schemes, but the former Minister of Education, Shirley Williams, admitted that this situation is quite unprecedented. The ostensible reason for the purchase of the school is that there is no secondary Church of England school in the borough and there is a demand locally for one. Many critics say that the actual reason is the desire of some parents for a more selective school. The Church of England will be entitled to operate a

selection system which gives priority to children from practising Christian families. This is bound — in effect, if not intent — to give priority to middle-class, white families.

The Labour council was approached in 1976 with the idea and asked to make a survey—a suggestion which was rejected. A group of supporters of the scheme later held their own survey and found support for the scheme. Critics of the survey say it did not present the choices clearly or cover a representative sample of the borough. After elections in which Conservatives gained a majority of the council seats, the issue was re-opened and a decision taken, in principle, to sell one of the secondary schools in the area. In May, 1979, ironically on the same evening as the violent demonstrations against the National Front in Southall in the borough, Twyford secondary school was chosen as the school to be sold—at a price of £1½ million.

Successful School

Twyford school is a successful multi-racial school in an area of great ethnic variety. It is inevitable that children from Sikh, Hindu and Moslem families will not wish to remain in the school once it has an avowed aim of providing a "Christian ethos". How tragic that a successful example of multi-racial, multi-credal co-operation should be divisively shattered by the decision to sell the school. All the teachers' unions are opposed to the sale. Only ten per cent of teachers at Twyford are practising Anglicans—and a contented school has already entered a period of pain and uncertainty with teachers looking for posts elsewhere.

There will obviously — and justifiably — be an

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increased demand for voluntary aided schools for other-than-Christian religions, as John White, Chairman of the British Humanist Association Education Committee, pointed out when talking to the CASE/ACE conference. The time had come to re-examine the place of church schools in the state educational system. Can we accept an increase of sectarian schooling or do we favour people learning about their own and each other's beliefs and culture together. If the Church of England has any good faith at all in its shaky claim to contribute to the betterment of education and society (rather than preserve its right to indoctrinate) it should drop the right of selection and allow church schools to follow the normal LEA procedure.

A press release, commenting on the purchase of the Twyford school, was issued jointly by the British Humanist Association, the National Secular Society and the Rationalist Press Association: "We are not only opposed to sectarian schools on principle on the grounds of divisiveness, we are totally opposed to the expenditure of large sums of public money to propagate particular religious beliefs. The horse trading between government and churches prior to the passing of the 1944 Education Act has resulted in a situation where 20 per cent of children attend church schools. In many areas parents have no

choice but to send their children to schools where the prevailing moral code is anathema to the non-believer and to those of other faiths. Successive governments, far from reducing support for these sectarian schools, have increased support until today 85 per cent of the cost of new church schools is paid by the state as are all the running costs.

"Not content with the present massive subsidy from the state for its existing schools the C of E is, in Ealing, trying to expand its empire still further. It might have been hoped that the greedy old men of the church hierarchy had learned the lesson of Northern Ireland, of the Middle East and of Iran, that power politics and religion mixed together are one of the most explosive and destructive forces in the world today. Apparently they have not.

"Far from sanctioning the present takeover bid the new Secretary of State for Education should consider cutting off all government subsidies for sectarian schools and their incorporation in the county school system. This would not only save a great deal of public money (one of the present government's objectives) it might help to create a more harmonious and less destructive society. Certainly it would put the innumerable warring religious sects back where they belong in the churches and not the schools."

Euthanasia, Please . . .

NICHOLAS REED

In the April "Freethinker" Lord Raglan's comments about euthanasia made at the National Secular Society's Annual Dinner were reported. Lord Raglan claimed that in the letters he received supporting the 1969 Voluntary Euthanasia Bill, he saw pleas for help not for easeful death. Here Nicholas Reed, Secretary of the Voluntary Euthanasia Society, suggests that while some people might be helped by improving their social conditions, it is not possible to believe that all pleas fall into this category.

I receive letters every week from people, many of whom ask for easeful death here and now. On investigation, it is only very rarely that they seem to be in a situation which could be improved. Extreme old age, physical disability or even fading intellect are *not* matters which can be dealt with by sending round a cup of tea or a social worker. Lady Wootton received 260 letters as a result of the 1976 Incurable Patients Bill—only ten of them opposing the Bill. I have seen those letters, and neither she nor I think they invalidate the case for euthanasia: on the contrary, some of the stories they tell are heart-rending.

As to the argument that euthanasia would only have to be used when there is "insufficient care and inadequate training in care of the dying", Lord Raglan presumably thinks that if all dying patients were looked after in "hospices for the dying", there would be no need for euthanasia. While it is true that splendid work is done in hospices, it must be appreciated that there are three reasons why hospice care can never be enough.

First, it would be virtually impossible to create enough hospices. Hospice care needs the equivalent of one full-time nurse for every patient. There are 600,000 patients dying every year, of which only about 2,000 can be accommodated in hospices. Even if the fantastic financial resources were applied to put all dying people in hospices, one would never find enough nurses prepared to do this type of work.

Second, even with the best possible care, a small percentage of patients still have inadequate relief from pain. The estimate commonly given is 1 per cent of hospice patients who cannot have their pain relieved sufficiently. When one takes other forms of terminal distress into account, more like 5 per cent of patients still suffer distress. And outside the hos-

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Whither Pakistan?

AN INDIAN RATIONALIST

The hanging of Zulfikar Ali Bhutto has caused revulsion against Ziauddin, not only in Pakistan but in India also and indeed in the rest of the world. The repercussions in Pakistan will last long and no one can predict the future. But at some stage, surely the people of Pakistan, and their friends in the Muslim world as well as in the West must stop and take stock of the whole situation?

The idea of Pakistan was based or ostensibly justified on the ground that the Muslims of the Indian sub-continent would not be safe and secure in a united secular state in India because they would constitute a religious minority of 25 per cent. In reality, there was also the fact that the mass of Muslims was taught by its leaders to identify itself with the Muslim rulers of pre-British India. They were therefore led to believe that they must constitute not merely a religious or spiritual community but a political power and a sovereign one at that. The first victims, once this dream was realised, were the religious minorities on both sides of the Punjab frontier who lost their lives and their homes by the hundred thousand. Virtually the entire Hindu minority of Sind (about 10 per cent) fled to India and so did a part of the very substantial Hindu minority of East Bengal. In the reverse direction fled sections of the Muslim minority from the Gangetic valley.

After all this suffering, the two countries settled down to give themselves a constitution. Despite the fact that the secession of the Muslim majority areas removed the strongest argument for separation of religion and state, the leaders of the Constituent Assembly in India stuck to their secularist ideals and gave themselves a secular, democratic and republican constitution. In Pakistan the constitution-making process was bedevilled by the clamour of the Ulema for an Islamic constitution which would revive the period of the Prophet and the early Caliphs. The modernist leadership, constrained to sing the praises of Islam and to trim their sails to the Islamic wind, failed to formulate a constitution and military take-overs and coups followed very quickly.

It is noteworthy that in 1953 the Islamic ideology turned against the somewhat unorthodox Muslim sect of Ahmediyas and severe rioting broke out against the hapless sect in Lahore. One of the leaders of the Ulema, Maulana Maududi was sentenced to death but was reprieved and then continued to flourish as the leader of the extremist Jamaat-e Islami party.

In the sixties and seventies the Islamic military state incredibly turned against its own Eastern wing,

which in fact contained a majority of the population. Not that the Muslims of East Pakistan were lax in their religious observance. On the contrary. But their offence was that they stuck to their Bengali language and could not be persuaded to adopt the sacred Arabic script but wished to retain the same script as is used by the unbelievers. In other words they were not cast in the Arab/Persian/Turkish image and so were worthy of contempt and suppression. It must be noted too that Bhutto could not be absolved altogether from this attitude and its sequel. The terror let loose by the Pakistan Army in East Pakistan resulted in the flight of millions of refugees, not only Hindus but also Muslims, into India. So dazzled have been the mass of the Muslims in Pakistan by the cry of Islamic revival, that they have not paused to look and draw the lessons of this extraordinary situation: viz, that their state which was formed to protect Muslims from possible domination by the Hindu unbeliever had now forced its own Muslim citizens to fly for shelter into the arms of the secular state in India, based on the following of its idol-worshipping citizens!

After the debacle in East Bengal, the country was settling down to some stability till the struggle for power between the modernist Bhutto and the revivalist Jamaat-e Islami ended up in the military dictatorship of Zia. The drive towards a truly Islamic state has produced the idea of reviving the medieval penal code, including flogging and hand-chopping, and destroyed its best-known citizen. In retrospect one can see that the Islamic revival has so far devoured the Hindu minority, the heretic Ahmediyas, the Bengali Muslims and now its own Prime Minister.

The followers of Bhutto now gathering strength for revenge could produce an equally ferocious counter-terror. They might end up turning against yet another group, say the Buluchis or the Pathans. But if they get wise leadership, they could turn their back resolutely against the Islamic revivalist spirit. One would not expect them to turn Pakistan into a secular state. But they could turn it into a modern federal democratic republic with Islam as its official religion, rather like Britain with the Protestant form of Christianity as its official and ceremonial religion. This does not require Britain to be governed by the Canon Law or by the laws prevalent in the reign of Constantine or Henry VIII.

The chances of such a sobering up of the Muslim mood are not very bright. The Islamic revolution is very fresh and Saudi oil money is still a potent factor. But in the fullness of time must come the realisation that Islamic fundamentalism and revivalism is only a blind alley leading to a brick wall on which one can only hurl oneself to frustration and self-destruction.

Freedom of Information

The importance of changes in official secrets law was emphasised by all the speakers at a public meeting organised by the National Secular Society on 24 May in the library at Conway Hall. The main speakers were Crispin Aubrey, one of the accused in the notorious ABC case and Phil Kelly, a freelance journalist and contributor to "State Research".¹ James Michael, author of the pamphlet "The Politics of Secrecy"², also contributed from the platform.

Crispin Aubrey gave an account of his direct involvement in the ABC case. The prosecution followed a meeting of the Agee-Hosenball Defence Committee. Philip Agee and Mark Hosenball were both American writers resident in Britain who had exposed aspects of the CIA's world-wide activities. They were issued with deportation orders by Merlyn Rees in 1976 "in the interests of national security".

The committee in defence of Agee and Hosenball realised that they were under surveillance including telephone tapping, mail opening and thefts. In February 1977 the Agee-Hosenball Defence Committee were contacted by John Berry, an ex-soldier who had served in the Intelligence Corps in Cyprus. He wanted to help the campaign against deportation. Crispin Aubrey, then a *Time Out* journalist, arranged to meet Berry with Duncan Campbell, a technical journalist. The meeting was arranged by telephone. On coming out of the meeting all three were arrested by members of the Special Branch.

Crispin Aubrey stressed that the arrest took place before any article was printed. In fact, it was an irony of the case that John Berry's information was of limited interest, his change in attitude towards the army and secrecy being of most significance to a journalist. The arrest, therefore, followed a relatively routine journalistic encounter.

Section 2 of the 1911 Official Secrets Act covers communicating and receiving official information. (Following the unsuccessful prosecution in 1970 of Jonathan Aitken, Editor of the *Telegraph* at the time, there had been concern that this Section should be reformed.) Those involved were surprised that the Attorney General, Sam Silkin, whose consent is necessary in such a prosecution, not only agreed to charges under Section 2, but also brought charges under Section 1. Section 1 has almost invariably been used against spies, and it can carry sentences of up to 14 years' imprisonment.

The Colonel 'B' affair arose out of the committal proceedings of the ABC case at Tottenham magistrates' court in November 1977. One of the chief witnesses for the prosecution was a Colonel 'B' from the Ministry of Defence. His name, H. A. Johnstone, was published in *Peace News*, the *Leveller* and the *Journalist*. Contempt orders were served on these three magazines. But MPs named the

Colonel in the House of Commons, the name was published in *Hansard*, and then broadcast and printed by nearly all the national press. The ludicrousness of this open secret was, as Crispin Aubrey pointed out, an indication of the military paranoia in matters of secrecy. Because of the process of indoctrination which people in the services undergo, there develops an unrealistic but deeply embedded fear of information coming out.

The first trial was stopped in its third week after a London Weekend Television programme had reported that the foreman of the jury was an ex-member of the Special Air Services regiment, who had himself signed the Official Secrets Act. In the second trial the weakness of the prosecution case began to show when the serious Section 1 charges were dropped. The chief reason for this was the continual demonstration by the defence that the information alleged to have been "secret" was in fact fairly easily obtainable in print. At the end of the case only a small number of the original charges remained. All three accused were found guilty. Berry was sentenced to six months' imprisonment (suspended for two years) for communicating information; Campbell, for receiving information, and Aubrey, for aiding and abetting him, were given three years conditional discharge.

Fear of Whistle-Blowing

Aubrey pointed out that behind the trial lay a fear of the type of whistle-blowing in which vast amounts of information were exposed in the USA by individuals formerly in key positions in the government or military. The only harsh words at the end of the trial from Judge Mars-Jones were addressed to Berry: "We will not tolerate defectors or whistle-blowers from our intelligence services. . ."

After a full account of the case Crispin Aubrey concluded that there was no point in reforming the Official Secrets Act without also taking a look at security organisations and asking whether they should not be made more accountable to the democratic process. There was also a need to make clear that the serious Section 1 of the Act could only be applied to spying and would not be used against investigative journalism.

As an example of the way in which some areas were seen as outside the democratic and legal process, Crispin Aubrey quoted Lord Denning's remarks at the Court of Appeal on Hosenball's rights to due legal process: "Where national security is involved our own cherished freedoms, even natural justice, may have to take second place."

* * *

Phil Kelly said he would take the hard example of information about the war in Northern Ireland.

He used this example, in contrast to Crispin Aubrey's experience of investigative journalism, because he believed it showed that official secrets were *never* justified.

He quoted from a document which had been lost or stolen from a train to Paddington, which gave a high ranking army officer's view of the IRA. It showed that the army considered the IRA as a serious force, with backing from parts of the community, likely to be able to continue to fight for some years. This was a very different view from the media picture of a small gang of hoodlums and wreckers with no support or ideology. It was a case where official secrets prevented serious discussion of a political solution.

Northern Ireland

Parts of this report were published in a Sinn Fein paper in Eire, but there had been no discussion of the content of the document in the UK press. The D notice system is a vague understanding that British papers will not publish any secret details about military matters published in the foreign press. Phil Kelly pointed out that this agreement—not a law—was another way in which serious public discussion was stifled.

James White referred to "the more boring everyday aspects of secrecy", which nevertheless affected public discussion. Because of much concern about official secrets in relation to military matters there was often an incorrect assumption that the public knew what was going on in other areas. He gave as an example the fact that no one could find out how government cabinet meetings were organised.

A government could classify and protect informa-

tion, or remain neutral towards information, or accept some kind of public information bill which required records to be disclosed. Today many areas remain protected, where the government is neutral. Civil Service codes and traditions operate against openness, and there is now no immediate prospect of substantial changes in the law.

During a period of discussion and question at the well-attended meeting wide-ranging points were raised. Details of Clement Freud's attempt to change the law in the previous parliament were given. A comparison was made with the USA where there were legal rights of access to information. The secrecy of government reports on questions such as poor hospital treatment was mentioned, bearing in mind the recent allegations of abuses at Rampton.

Privacy and Secrecy

An important distinction was made between privacy, which is the right to have personal information not made available to other individuals, and secrecy, which is the withholding of public information. There would always remain the difficulty that people in power would try to withhold information however open the system became. In the USA a group of radicals, who had attempted to look up files on themselves, after first failing to find any information eventually found that they were catalogued under N—Not To Be Filed.

¹ *State Research* is available from 9 Poland Street, London W1.

² *The Politics of Secrecy* by James Michael is available from the National Council for Civil Liberties, 186 Kings Cross Road, London WC1.

THATCHER THATCHER POVERTY HATCHER

One of Mrs Thatcher's first statements on becoming Prime Minister was a prayer of St Francis of Assisi, murmured with tremulation and conviction to the television cameras, using all the resources with which the Public Relations firm of Saatchi and Saatchi had groomed her. This prayer opens "Lord, make me an instrument of thy peace" and includes a request where there is doubt to give us faith. But the prayer was in fact written 700 years after St Francis is supposed to have died. It first appeared anonymously in France in 1912 and was introduced into England in 1936.

Will she remember the more important point that St Francis is famous for giving up all his worldly possessions and adopting a life of poverty?

WORLDWIDE

INDIA

A prominent Gandhian leader, Vinoba Bhave has been fasting to support a total ban on cow slaughter. Some states have already banned cow slaughter, but great opposition is arising from those who feel poor Hindus should be allowed another source of protein and from Christians and Moslems who do not feel their eating patterns should be controlled by another religion.

CHINA

The Father-General of the Jesuits in Rome has confirmed rumours that the Jesuits are negotiating with the Chinese government for a return of a Jesuit presence in China. The negotiations are being conducted through French embassies and it is French Jesuits who are involved.

Off With His Head! Lewis Carroll Reconsidered

SAMUEL BEER

The Rev Dodgson, who wrote "Alice in Wonderland", is one of a long line of eccentric English clergy. His two famous stories of Alice reflect some of the political and religious ideas of the mid-nineteenth century, but they are not at all in the mould of moral or religious tales for children.

In this United Nations Year of the Child we should give some attention to children's books and in this country *Alice in Wonderland* and *Alice Through The Looking-Glass* have long been popular. The story of the first is well-known. On July 4th, 1862, the Rev Charles Lutwidge Dodgson and a friend named Duckworth rowed the three Liddell children, daughters of the Dean of Christ Church College (Oxford), up the river. On the way he composed and told the adventures of Alice Liddell Underground, later to be renamed *Alice in Wonderland*.

The book is more frequently quoted, especially by scientists, than any other English book except Shakespeare. It has been translated into 47 languages including Esperanto. Why is it so popular? Chiefly because it is not in the least pious: in fact some of the characters are quite ruthless. Both books have an odd logic which appeals to intelligent children. The author was a Mathematical Lecturer and in those days a Mathematical Lecturer at Oxford had to be in holy orders.

It is a well-known fact in literary criticism that an author (e.g. Gogol) may start with the intention of defending one set of values and the result may be the reverse. Lewis Carroll (as Dodgson called himself) does not quite do that, but there is enough in the two Alice books to keep both psychoanalysts and ecclesiastical historians busy. We must remember that *Alice in Wonderland* was published in 1865, not long after the *Origin of Species* hit Oxford. Professor Empson considers that the opening chapters about the bath of tears, the animals and the Caucus-race refer to evolution and the theory of natural selection. In both the Alice books predation is a constant theme: "Do cats eat bats? Or bats eat cats?" and the theme of "The Walrus and the Carpenter" are examples. There is also the argument over whether Alice or the Unicorn is a fabulous monster.

The Rev Dodgson was outwardly a sincere Christian. He complained to W. S. Gilbert about Gilbert's frivolous treatment of curates in his plays and wrote a long letter to some friends who (he thought) abused Christ's name. He belongs to the long line of eccentric clergy which begins with John Donne,

passes through Jonathan Swift and Laurence Sterne, and continues with Coleridge. Somehow their religion does not seem to fit them and we feel that in a different age they would be scientists or TV sages. If, for example, we look closely at songs in the two Alice books we find that they are nearly all parodies of such grave writers as Watts, Wordsworth, Southey, G. W. Langford and John Taylor. In *Alice in Wonderland* the Duchess tells Alice "Everything's got a moral if only you can find it" but the morals she finds are all absurd, culminating in "Never imagine yourself not to be otherwise than what it might appear to others that what you were or might have been would have appeared to them to be otherwise." It is a good satire on the moral fables the Victorians gave their children. Lewis Carroll could not be fully ordained because he would not give up his fondness for the theatre. He was also very fond of little girls and an excellent photographer of them.

Determinism

Alice Through The Looking-Glass is of more interest to freethinkers because it is based on determinism. "It's a huge great game of chess that's being played all over the world" but Carroll does not reveal who is playing whom. There is much discussion of time and names. Humpty Dumpty changes the meanings of "glory" and "impenetrability" and Alice is told she only exists in the King's dream. Many attempts have been made to identify the characters. It is generally agreed that the White Knight represents Carroll himself or T. H. Huxley (Science) or both. The Red Queen is said to be the Roman Catholic Church at a time when the Oxford Movement was strong. "She lays down the law to Alice, stresses her title (Apostolic Succession), claims that all the walks belong to her, demands the use of French (Latin services) and genuflection," comments a critic, A. L. Taylor. She also proffers a biscuit.

In fact, Shane Leslie translated two verses of JABBERWOCKY as

"Beware the Papacy, my son,
The jaws that bite, the claws that catch!
Beware the Jesuit bird and shun
The Benedictine batch!
"He took his Gospel sword in hand
Long time the Roman foe he sought—
So rested he by the Bible tree
And stood awhile in thought."

Tenniel, Carroll's illustrator, made the Lion and the Unicorn look like Gladstone and Disraeli and

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JOTTINGS

WILLIAM McILROY

First it was the Grocer; now it is the Grocer's Daughter who is in residence at number 10 Downing Street.

Although there are indications that even within her own party Margaret Thatcher is not the most popular of politicians, there is a puff-pastry justice in her elevation to the Conservative premiership. It may be regarded as a form of compensation to the generations of ladies who have acted as envelope-lickers for the Conservative Party. True, many of them are rewarded by the bliss of attending the Conservative women's annual gathering (surely one of the unloveliest spectacles in political life) where those piranhas in pretty hats give vent to their blood-lust and proclaim their antiquated views. But when it comes to real power in the party which they serve with masochistic fervour, Conservative ladies, like their flower-arranging sisters in the Christian churches, have traditionally been kept in their second-class place.

The outcome of the General Election should be a matter of profound concern to all secularists and humanists. Former MPs who were not returned to Westminster include Brian Sedgemore, an outspoken critic of blasphemy law, and Helene Hayman, a formidable opponent of sexual dinosaurs in all the parties. Arthur Latham, the scourge of the Church Commissioners in Paddington, lost the seat by 106 votes.

The Conservative majority at Westminster will be just as amenable to the pleas of Christian pressure groups as it will be to the demands of financiers and speculators. There is little prospect of any significant liberal reforms getting through the House of Commons during the next five years. Indeed many reforming measures, particularly the 1967 Abortion Act, will come under attack, and a determined attempt to bring back capital punishment is likely.

However, the election result was not one of unrelieved gloom. Renée Short held Wolverhampton North-east and John Parker had a majority of over ten thousand at Dagenham. Teddy Taylor, a hardened authoritarian and ardent Thatcherite, got his marching orders at Glasgow Cathcart.

The odious National Front came a cropper, making a poor showing even in those areas where its support is concentrated. Albert Elder, the Front's Jewish representative in Hendon South, secured fewer votes than did joke candidates like Miss Howlett (Jesus and His Cross, Birmingham Edgbaston) and Mr Beddows of the Fancy Dress Party

(Dartford).

One of the sillier actions during the campaign was the cancellation of a television showing of the union-bashing film, *I'm All Right Jack*. Quite apart from the wrong principle of exercising censorship in this way, the resulting fuss probably did Labour more harm than would have been the case if electors had seen the film for the umpteenth time.

The Liberals fought a clean if rather pedestrian campaign. They were genuinely embarrassed by what one of their leaders described as "a caddish trick" in Cardiff South-east (former Prime Minister James Callaghan's constituency) where their candidate entered into an eleventh-hour pact with the opposition, did not lodge his nomination forms and advised Liberal supporters to vote Conservative.

Once again the Conservatives emerged from an election campaign as the SS (Smear and Scapegoat party) of British politics. Ever since they won the 1924 election largely because of the hysteria which the *Daily Mail* and other newspapers drummed up over the Zinoviev Letter, Red scares and bogeymen have been favourite weapons in the Conservative armoury at election time. One of the main planks in the Conservative platform on this occasion was the tale that Labour leader Callaghan is in thrall to Tony Benn and the wicked Reds of the Tribune Group.

Winston Churchill came unstuck when he used similar tactics in the first post-war election campaign. But where that great master of the English language failed in 1945, the Fleet Street hacks and sycophants have succeeded in 1979.

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The impertinence of Christian propagandists is quite boundless. One contributor to the *Guardian* newspaper's "Face to Faith" column has informed readers that "agnostics and atheists may be the blind servants of God, witnessing not only to the ineluctable mystery of life, but to God's respect for the integrity of his children". A correspondent named Jean Raison soon slapped down this "patronising nonsense" by pointing out that agnostics and atheists are intelligent and independent individuals who have decided that the answer to the question of God is either open or negative. Such doubters "witness not only to the fact that mysteries are seldom as ineluctable as they seem, but to our ability to elucidate most of them by relying on our own efforts".

A few days later, in a BBC Radio 4 discussion on the question of addiction to drugs, alcohol and gambling, one of the panel who belongs to a group which supports people who are trying to overcome addiction, referred to a member who is an atheist. The panelist declared in most dogmatic terms: "I don't believe he is an atheist at all. He would do anything to help anyone so he cannot be an atheist".

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FOOD FOR THOUGHT

At the Annual Dinner of the Rationalist Press Association, held on 9 May, the speakers were Hermann Bondi, Bernard Crick and Nicolas Walter. Anthony Chapman, Chairman of the RPA, pointed out that no one talked much about disestablishment these days and said that it should be taken more seriously as an issue.

Hermann Bondi suggested the role of rationalism lay not in providing an agreed position but in offering a method of argument and enquiry. He said that any current view that the humanist movement was suffering from anaemia because all its battles had been won was a misreading of the situation. "Perhaps we have been too polite for too long," he indicated. There was a tendency to accept that religious belief was all right for other people — "Quite nice really, but we just don't happen to believe it." "Religion is not nice at all," he continued, "it makes us take unbecoming attitudes unfitted for human beings." He also criticised religion's divisiveness and its fraudulent claim to superior authority via a private wire to the office of the almighty.

Turning to the rational method of enquiry, Hermann Bondi pointed out that this was very important in looking at risks. He commended a rational attitude towards risk, especially in areas with horrible risks like defence and nuclear power. Life could not be lived without risks and we must take a balanced look at the statistics of probability, not regarding them like superstition or astrology. We tend to demand total safety at work and total safety at home, so that we may go hang-gliding in our leisure. Rationalism favoured balanced enquiry in these areas.

Bernard Crick said that religion *had* more or less withered away and this placed the humanist movement in a different position from the past. The function of rationalism could be not to attract a vast membership but to lead in raising important issues. The media had the effect of discouraging speculative thought and we needed to encourage thoughtfulness and participation in society.

Two important issues, in Bernard Crick's view, were the need to consider whether some behaviour was offensive and to take a moral stance. Even though we deplored legislation against offensive publications we could still take a moral position towards them. In education he looked for greater balance between methods of discovery and imparting information and the importance of giving a moral outlook now that this was no longer provided by religion.

Nicolas Walter referred to his recent visit to the World Atheist Congress in the USA. He said that Americans had been amazed that we had a law ordering worship in schools. On the other hand, he said, the media in the States was soaked in religion in a way that was not true in the UK.

NEWS

Americans were fascinated by the freethinking tradition extending back to the beginning of the nineteenth century. Nicolas Walter emphasised that our origins lay in these people, who were not at all respectable and who went to prison for publishing works criticising religion.

He quoted a toast which he had revived from past RPA dinners: "To the immortal memory of the men and women, known and unknown, to whose intelligence and courage we owe the knowledge and liberty we now possess, and to the unshakable determination that those who come after us shall possess even more."

The dinner took place at the London Zoo and during an interval the Chairman of the British Humanist Association, Editor of the *New Humanist*, President of the National Secular Society, and Editor of the *Freethinker* all had a conversation with a parrot.

PREACHING RATION

Complaints about a lay preacher in a Cotswold village have led to the parish council ruling he should visit on only one Sunday each month. Mr Robert Ferrish has been delivering a sermon on the village green of Bourton-on-the-Water every Sunday. He may have the Lord on his side, but he has not convinced the villagers. According to one local person "He stands right opposite my shop and just drones on and on—no one listens to him and everyone I have spoken to gets very annoyed by him.

METHODISM AND GAYS

A Methodist report *A Christian Understanding of Human Sexuality*, which will be debated by their London conference in June, has already created controversy with its references to homosexuality. The report argues that "stable permanent relationships can be an appropriate way of expressing a homosexual orientation. This involves an acceptance of homosexual activities as not being intrinsically wrong."

The BBC Radio 4 programme *Sunday* reported the letters they had received as a result of an item on the report. Of 68 letters 59 had been hostile to this toleration of homosexual relationships. Eight letters had been sympathetic, including one from the agnostic mother of a homosexual, and one was incomprehensible.

OBITUARY

PROFESSOR R. A. JONES

Robert Arthur Jones, who died last month in Brighton, had a long and distinguished career as a university lecturer and administrator. He was aged 85.

Professor Jones was born in Battersea and took his Master of Arts degree at King's College, London, where he made his mark both as a student of French and as a first-class athlete. During the 1914-18 war he served as an officer in the Norfolk Regiment and was awarded the Military Cross. After the war he returned to King's College where he was appointed Lecturer and then Senior Lecturer in French. Later he became the first person to be appointed to the newly created post of Sub-Dean. For many years he carried a heavy burden of responsibility both for teaching and for administration.

During the 1939-45 war King's College was evacuated to Bristol and Professor Jones was one of the key personalities of the College in exile. Throughout his career he set a magnificent example of cool judgment, efficiency and absolute devotion to duty.

On retirement he was offered the post of Acting Head of the French Department in the University College of Legon in Ghana (now an independent University). His talents and experience were of enormous value to West African students and teachers.

There was a secular committal ceremony at the Downs Crematorium, Brighton, on 14 May.

Freethinker Fund

Thanks are expressed to the following for their generous and valuable contributions: Anon, £1.00; Anon, £1.00; J. Ancliffe, £1.60; C. M. Anderson, 60p; E. Baker, £1.60; P. T. Bell, £3.50; C. Blakely, £2.75; C. Brunel, £1.00; Mr Channon, £1.60; D. Cheesman, 60p; C. H. Childs, 60p; A. R. Cook, 60p; G. J. Davies, £3.60; J. L. Ford 60p; D. J. George, £2.60; R. P. Gill, £1.00; R. Gimple, 60p; E. Gomm, £6.00; P. D. Hawker, 60p; R. A. Hora, 60p; G. B. Horne, £2.60; F. Howard, £4.00; E. C. Hughes, £1.65; E. J. Hughes, £1.00; R. Jeffard, £2.60; C. Maine, £2.00; C. Marcus, £1.60; F. Mijskett, £3.60; P. Ponting-Barber, £1.00; B. Reid, £1.50; G. Reid, £1.00; R. Saich, £5.00; N. Sinnott, £2.60; I. N. Treavett, 60p; S. M. Williams, £2.60; A. E. G. Wright 60p; L. M. Wright, £2.00. Total for the period 20 April to 23 May: £68.00.

The burning issue of the scorch marks on the Shroud of Turin was debated in the correspondence columns of the "Guardian" by Barbara Smoker and Geoffrey Ashe.

AND NOTES

The Church Society has called on the Methodist Conference to reject the report. The Church Society complains that the report pays little regard to biblical teaching on homosexuality: "God's word is meant to be taken in its clear and obvious meaning". (What a surprise that Christians have always disagreed so vigorously about that meaning!)

Lest it be hoped that such bigotry tends to be found in the less thinking or older members of the Christian communities, here is a revealing quotation from a letter from seven theological students to the *Methodist Recorder*: "We believe the final authority in matters of faith and practice to be God, and the primary revelation of His will to be the Bible; no amount of interpreting can deny that the practice of homosexuality is sin without also denying the sinfulness of envy, murder, strife, deceit, malice, gossiping, slander, boasting and the other sins listed in Romans 1."

WORLD ATHEISM

This is a very advance notice—but people need some time to make arrangements for worldwide travel.

The Second World Atheist Conference will be held in India in December 1980, from 25 to 28 December (inclusive). The venue will be the Atheist Centre, Vijayawada, which has been active for the last four decades in developing atheism as a positive way of life.

Further information from Atheist Centre, Vijayawada—520 066, India.

SHOULD WE HAVE MORE DENOMINATIONAL SCHOOLS?

A public meeting

MR MAYCOCK

Ealing High Schools Defence Campaign

JOHN WHITE

Chairman of the BHA Education Committee
and an experienced teacher.

In the chair: G. N. DEODHEKAR

Thursday, 14 June, 7.30 p.m.

Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London WC1

WHAT ABOUT GODS? By Chris Brockman: illustrated by Anna Cammisotto. Prometheus Books (75p plus 12pp from G. W. Foote & Co Ltd, 702 Holloway Road, London N19 3NL).

What about gods? is a sensible pamphlet, to which no ordinarily sensible reader could have the slightest objection. It is perhaps for this reason that it has, as I understand, attracted very powerful objections from religious leaders in the United States. Addressed to the vulnerable young, it simply avers that gods have the same status as dragons and fairies: that is, in origin they represent attempts to explain things that seemed once to lie beyond human understanding. At later moments in history, Chris Brockman points out, this gave rise to the problem that the explanation became desperately in need of . . . explanation. An imaginary being was posited: and this imaginary being had, in some manner, to be accounted for. If there were gods, who created the gods?

As it turned out, there was a universal state of uncertainty that gave enormous strength to any statement in which certainty and doubt could be combined. The shorthand for this lay in the word "faith": which, says the pamphlet, "means believing something even though there was no good reason to believe it". The ability to digest this ambiguity had once the importance we now attach to the ability to absorb, by way of the mind, any simple fact. Faith, the pamphlet holds, is a form of "lying to the mind". This, in turn, becomes a model of good conduct. You keep quiet about the awkwardness of things. To lie, in the end, becomes a kind of decency.

Belief in a god is also used to cause fear, and to make people docile, as well as acting as a support to the view that there is something essentially awful in being human. It reduces our belief in ourselves: it causes us to cringe away from important kinds of thinking.

It's a good, simple, clear text, saying things strongly. "Some religions teach that people are evil when they are being born." "None of the rules of any religion come from a god." I'd be glad if any child came across it. It speaks for trust in one's humanness, and that of others: it's in favour of the hard use of the mind. It doesn't, however, altogether avoid some rather prim over-simplifications. "Another way religions try to get people to go to church is by building big, fancy buildings for churches. They have singing and other pleasant things to make people like being at church." That doesn't really cover the complex question of the value and meaning of, say, St. Paul's or St. Peter's: there's even something a little daft in proposing that they might be described as "big fancy buildings." It's

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what they are, of course, but it's not perhaps the architectural formulation you'd like to urge upon the young. Having said it, you've left so much unsaid. Bach didn't write the St. Matthew Passion only to reconcile people to the otherwise dolorous business of attending church. A humanist must have more than this to say about our human past, the immense pouring of the human spirit into buildings and music and art. . . . I don't think the illustrations add much to the pamphlet, and there's a poor one at this point: with pointing finger a child seems to be inviting us to share his indignation at the existence of the cathedral standing behind him. I'd be glad if children were sceptical and awkwardly thoughtful about religion: but I don't want to make little cathedral-baiters out of them. Apart from anything else, it's a bit humourless, all that.

A stimulating booklet, then, which makes its plain sensible case sturdily: but leaves out, or hops too easily over, some of the complications.

EDWARD BLISHEN

SEX WITHOUT SHAME by Alayne Yates. Temple Smith, £4.95.

The equation of childhood's "innocence" and "purity" with sexual ignorance and abstinence — even during adolescence (when, as Kinsey has shown, the sexual drive is at its peak) — was a Victorian commonplace. That mid-nineteenth century mine of medical misinformation, Dr William Acton, wrote: "It were well if the child's reproductive organs always remained in a quiescent state till puberty." But alas, "amongst the earliest disorders that we notice is sexual precocity" which "is always attended with injurious, often with the most deplorable consequences . . . fraught with danger to dawning manhood".

Dr Yates would have given Acton apoplexy. A new-born baby's whole body is, she asserts, a sexual organ. For sexuality and sensuality cannot be separated; and the infant's first contacts with life outside the womb are sensual. To be wholesome, they should also be sensuous: a mother's loving gratification of her new-born baby's needs for touch, scent, food and warmth lay the crucial foundations for a healthy, erotically well-grounded personality. And alienation of "bad" sexual feelings from a youngster's "good" self-image, the rejection of certain organs and zones of the body and of the enjoyable physical sensations associated with them as "nasty", "dirty" and "immoral", sows the seeds of adult sexual shame, anxiety and dysfunction. Touching is vital to health, yet all too many parents restrict their physical contacts with their children

REVIEWS

because they themselves feel threatened by intimacy.

Deprived children are angry children. And, says Dr Yates, the commonest root of the confusion between sex and anger is child-abuse. Rage is bred from hurt and rejection. It is ironic that those who lament sexual "permissiveness" and abhor violence in the same breath are apparently unaware that an inverse ratio between the two phenomena has been demonstrated, and that violence (including sexual violence) tends to be pervasively present when happy sexual fulfilment is absent. Children over seven are well aware of adult attitudes about sex; according to Dr Yates, they devise elaborate strategies to present themselves as "innocent". In fact latency is a cultural myth invented by puritans (Christian or Freudian), and all healthy children of whatever age are interested in their own and others' sexual organs and the pleasure to be derived from them.

How adults react to this inescapable fact is all-important for the child's future well-being. Dr Yates, while recognising the difficulties (not least of which is the spectre of incest, which she would deal with by advocating greater tolerance of peer-group sex play outside the family), makes a strong plea for an accepting and open response to children's sexual curiosity, masturbation and sex games. Such an attitude is, of course, only possible for adults who are more comfortable about their own sexuality than most people are, even in these miscalled "permissive" days. "The fear that we may lose control of our children's impulses is part of our fear that we may lose control of our own."

This is a book from which a reviewer is tempted to quote extensively—it contains so much good sense. I only hope that everyone concerned with the sexual health of society will get hold of it, read it and weigh its argument. It will, no doubt, scandalise the "down with sex" brigade who love to rush around wringing their hands at the mess their misguided moralising and meddling has created. Yet it promulgates a morality which is far healthier and more wholesome than their supposedly "Christian" ethic: a morality based upon acceptance of our own and other people's sexuality as intrinsically good; upon giving children and adolescents self-respect based on a positive eroticism and an encouragement to celebrate sex instead of either repressing it or using it as an aggressive weapon. I agree with Dr Yates that young people brought up in this way are more likely to be tender, sensitive and honest in their relationships. Her book is a blueprint for sexual sanity. And a blast against sex-hate and moral humbug in this "Year of the Child".

ANTONY GREY

LANDLORD OR TENANT? A VIEW OF IRISH HISTORY by Magnus Magnusson; research by Helen Fry. Bodley Head, £3.95.

Although I have always appreciated Magnus Magnusson's style as a broadcaster and documentary reporter on television, I must confess that at first I approached his short, popular account of Irish history with some trepidation. The path has, after all, been well trodden, and some of the earlier travellers on that road left a lot to be desired in terms of breadth of information and of objectivity.

However, after beginning the present, 155-page volume, I was very soon reassured. The author and his researcher have not just précised old texts, or flipped round Ireland and picked up a few laments and bar-room battle-ballads; they have taken the trouble to sit at the feet of some of the modern, "scientific" Irish historians—and they have *listened*. Not merely that, but Mr. Magnusson has added his own style and highlights to the execution of what is, in general, a well-known saga.

Landlord or Tenant? begins with 1541, when Henry VIII proclaimed himself and his heirs kings of Ireland, and ends—wisely, I think—with partition in 1921, "where the ancient tensions between North and South, Anglo-Saxon and Celt, Protestant and Catholic, were frozen in constitutional amber." The book therefore covers some of the most intriguing epochs in Irish history, including nearly all the events which have gone directly into the making of the horrors, the heroism and the tragedy of the "Irish problem" we perceive today.

It must be difficult to include all the salient features of this busy period in a small book, but Magnus Magnusson and Helen Fry have succeeded not only in doing that, but in illustrating them with quotations from contemporary documents that one might only occasionally find in more detailed works. I enjoyed, for example, details of Henry VIII's *Act for the English Order, Habit and Language* (c. 1545); Oliver Cromwell's ultimatum to David Synnott, the luckless governor of Wexford (1649); and the needle-sharp polemics of a liberal-minded English journalist, the Rev. Sydney Smith in the 1790s:

"The moment the very name of Ireland is mentioned the English seem to bid adieu to common feeling, common prudence and common sense, and to act with the barbarity of tyrants and the fatuity of idiots."

But of course this book does not just trot out the conventional "green" myth of Irish sufferings and Saxon repression. The author points out, for instance, the fallacy of the old allegation that the terrible famine of the 1840s was an act of genocide contrived by the British bureaucracy against the Catholic Irish peasantry. On the other hand the horrors and the consequences of that period are clearly indicated.

The book gives a good, brief account of the

"plantations" during James I's reign and of the Cromwellian settlement of Ireland. Much has been said in the past of how Cromwell left a sort of open historical wound in the collective Irish memory; in contrast, I have always maintained that it was not so much Cromwell and his aftermath that set Ireland on a course towards sectarian bitterness—the scars seem to have healed well by the 1670s—but rather the renegeing, by the Dublin Protestant Parliament, on the terms of toleration accorded to Catholics by the 1691 Treaty of Limerick. I was glad to see this small volume give the Treaty the emphasis it deserves and proper attention to the disgraceful laws subsequently enacted in Dublin. The Penal Laws, as they were called, left Catholics in Ireland in a state comparable with that of the Jews in the Papal States or Tsarist Russia—in some cases worse.

Nearly all the major events within the period are treated with proportion and conciseness: the 1798 Rising and the Union, the rise of Daniel O'Connell, Young Ireland, the "Orange card" and the growth of Unionism, the development of the Irish Parliamentary Party and its revolutionary rivals, Sinn Féin and the Irish Republican Brotherhood. The account of the fall of Parnell dispels another old myth: Parnell was not ousted from leadership of the Irish Parliamentary Party primarily because of pressure from the Catholic hierarchy, but because Gladstone, no less, did not want the Nonconformist vote to come "unstuck" over the O'Shea divorce case (in which Parnell was co-respondent).

In dealing with Easter 1916 the author paints a skilful word picture of the intense, sometimes frightening, Pádraig Pearse, the "apostle of the Rising." It is a pity that space could not have been found for describing some of the other leaders of the rebellion, particularly James Connolly and perhaps also Thomas Clarke and Joseph Plunkett.

This, then, is an interesting and readable short book: competently indexed, well illustrated, and nicely printed apart from the duplication of a line of type and the loss of one or more other lines on page 142. As a hardback it is excellent value for money and can be recommended for anyone wanting a general historical introduction to the Irish experience from the Tudors to partition.

NIGEL SINNOTT

THEATRE

BODIES by James Saunders. Ambassadors Theatre.

Bodies is a play about—Well, it is about two middle-class couples who once swapped partners and meet nine years later to talk about what it means to them. It "means" very little, it turns out, and that is the real subject of James Saunders's play.

There is nothing to say you cannot write a very good philosophical play about articulate people;

Shaw did it and, nearer our own time, John Whiting did it as well. But drama—whatever else it does—approaches problems of this kind in an indirect way. And Mr. Saunders is too direct. His characters, if anything, are too articulate, or worse, he is too articulate about them.

There is a great deal of discussion about the loss of values, the "meaninglessness of meaning". Oh, yes, his theme is there, right enough. We are expectant as we watch each of the four soliloquies during the first half about their failure to come to terms with contemporary existence. One of the couples have actually given up thinking in abstractions. They are all but content to live in the present, in their bodies, without the trappings of theories. "I am not an 'ist'," the husband says in answer to the speculation that he is a bit of an existentialist. His wife is with him all the way in this. She was even against renewing the acquaintance of the other couple after so many years: "We've changed and Mervyn and Anne will have stayed the same".

"Mervyn and Anne", the more interesting couple, *have* changed, for the worse. He imagines himself exhausted, forever waiting outside the headmaster's office—though he is a headmaster. She, too, is tired, as much by her creaking flesh as by her husband's boorish drinking. In a monologue that opens the evening, she remembers what it was like to be thirteen, on the verge of her first menstrual period. The evocation of stasis is brilliantly rendered through the device of the off-stage "interruption". The middle-aged woman, as adolescent, begs to be allowed to continue, anticipating her married life with its continual waste and unending pain. Gwen Watford manages this splendidly.

Unfortunately, she is left to flounder throughout the rest of the performance, and it is a pity. None of the other performances is as strong, because the writing is weak and the acting only bears this out. I was undecided whether or not the author did not like his characters or did not like writing about them. He certainly has not personalised them enough, or related the problems he introduces in human terms. And so we cease to care about whether art or science or advanced thought have any relevance outside their own frames of reference. Even the interesting sub-plot of one of the headmaster's students on the brink of death is diminished because the headmaster's reaction to the crisis is so incredible. He does not seem really to care about the boy and the fact that his life-support machine is switched off, as indifferent to the boy's end as we are about the play's.

JAMES MACDONALD

The Christian religion not only was at first attended with miracles, but even at this day cannot be believed by any reasonable person without one.—David Hume (1711-1776)

CINEMA

THE HARDCORE LIFE. Directed by Paul Schrader. X Certificate. Odeon, High Street, Kensington, and Warner 2, Leicester Square.

WIFEMISTRESS. Directed by Marco Vicario. X Certificate. Gate 2 Cinema, Brunswick Square, WC1.

In the March *Freethinker* I praised Paul Schrader's anarchic film *Blue Collar*. I only wish I could do the same for *The Hardcore Life*. The action begins in Grand Rapids, Michigan, Schrader's home town. Jake Van Dorn, a businessman, and, like Schrader's own family, a devout Calvinist, learns that his teenage daughter has gone missing from a youth camp in California, to resurface as the star of a skinflick. Van Dorn combs the brothels and sex shops of the West Coast, helped in his search by a handdog detective (played to perfection by Peter Boyle) and a spaced-out teenage prostitute. The latter is a devotee of the Life Science cult—cue for a few unstimulating exchanges about moral and religious values. The daughter is found, and accuses Van Dorn of having misunderstood and rejected her, accusations which would have been redundant if Schrader had explored their non-relationship at the beginning of the film. Anyway, the cardboard pair are reconciled.

So ends a film long on Shock! and Horror! (a welter of crotches and fists) and, despite a very brave performance from George C. Scott as Van Dorn, lamentably short on Probe.

The natural reaction to the self-belittling, conformist world for which Grand Rapids is the paradigm—figures frozen in a Norman Rockwell interior—is the equally self-belittling conformist California underworld.

In neither refuge can spontaneity and trust flourish. Schrader's earlier work is charged by an awareness of this. By returning to Grand Rapids to make *The Hardcore Life* he has, I suspect, resumed the puritan Madonna/whore view of human nature, a view which at the same time coarsens the film and defuses its impact. The mediocrity of *The Hardcore Life* is in a perverse way its message.

From American joylessness and caution to the Bohemianism of turn-of-the-century Italy. In *Wifemistress* Laura Antonelli plays the young wife of a wine merchant and small time anarchist who only rises from the sickbed on which she had been languishing when she believes her husband to be dead. Her former rival—a New Woman with cropped hair—becomes her mentor. The lady learns fast, and is soon dabbling in drugtaking, drinking, masturbation, fornication and troilism spiced with a dash of political activity. She is watched by her increasingly worried husband (Marcello Mastroianni) who, having faked his death to escape a murder rap, is holed up in a neighbour's loft.

This is a piquant and highly decorative film. Italian faces and those chalky-golden villages must be a

cameraman's delight. I only wish there was more feeling of tension and conflict. Liberation seems too easily achieved, the opposition is represented by a few beady gossips and a priest inveighing against the new permissiveness. For me, though, the film was well-nigh ruined by its hackneyed theme tune, which intrudes lushly upon scenes of self-discovery, love, death and reconciliation alike.

Ermanno Olmi's *The Tree of Wooden Clogs* (U Certificate) now showing at the Curzon Cinema, must be seen. It shows peasant life in late nineteenth century Lombardy, and is acted by local people. One family struggles to keep a bright son at school; the livelihood of another is threatened by the sickness of their cow; an old man teaches his small granddaughter how to grow beautiful tomatoes in the harsh climate; a pig is slaughtered; the peasants tell stories in the evenings; a halting courtship leads to marriage. The picture is arguably a little rose-tinted, but this is a film so outstanding in its warmth and dignity that any reservations about it seem churlish.

VERA LUSTIG

LETTERS

RELIGION AND NON-RELIGION

Thank you for your sympathetic write-up of the South Place Ethical Society case in "News and Notes" in March. I suppose you had to put a sting in the tail so if I jump a little perhaps you won't mind!

Your two questions "When is a religion not a religion?" and "When is a non-religion a religion?" are what it is all about. . . . I put it to you that homo sapiens is different from all other species in that he is a religious animal and has been so from his beginnings several million years ago. Current religions are simply transient expressions of a deeper phenomenon and none of them dates back for more than a mere 2,500 years.

Religion began in the primitive belief that all things, animate and inanimate, had indwelling spirits and those spirits, related to one another, were the religious aspect of the cosmos. Men did not separate themselves from nature and all natural phenomena had to be pleased and placated as means to health and survival. Out of this rose ritual and related art forms: dance, music, poetry and design.

Some 10,000 years ago the basic formula upset by the arrival of agriculture and civilisation and the advent of two new professional bodies—soldiers and priests—conjoined through the headship of a priest-king. In the new empires based on conquest and slavery the soldiers controlled the body and the priests controlled the mind. This situation remains essentially unchanged to the present day. In this situation religion lost its natural character and became an agency for the rationalisation of authority and privilege. Yet, the original natural role of religion was never wholly put down; authority had constantly to cope with heresy and the Golden Rule persisted.

I leave the rest to the readers' imagination. The stage we are now in is that of the eclipse of both supernatural authority and the priest-king. We are now able, therefore, to rediscover our religious relationship with nature and our own kind and restate transcendentalism in terms of the cosmos and our high aspirations.

I appreciate that this puts the traditional secularists in a rather invidious position. As I see it secularism has had an important function to perform in undoing authoritarian supernaturalism and that task is not over yet; but we are over the hump.

The dogma of today—the one that replaced that of the churches—is Marxist. It is a belief in “the historical role of the working class and the dictatorship of the proletariat”. In my opinion it would do secularism a power of good if this was to be seen explicitly as the new main enemy. Nothing is more stultifying and inhibiting today than this pseudo-revolutionary God-substitute invented in the nineteenth century by men who had lost the faith.

PETER CADOGAN
General Secretary, South Place, Ethical Society

BILLY GRAHAM'S CONVERSION

Although I am, of course, far from sharing Billy Graham's religious views, William McIlroy must be quite wrong that Graham only became converted against the Nazis when he visited Auschwitz last Autumn.

In the Spring of 1974 I took part in the concentration camp scenes of a film on the Dutch Resistance, “The Hiding Place”, which was based on the real-life experiences of Corrie Van Toom, who had helped Jews and British officers to escape from Holland during the Nazi occupation, and ended with her sister in a concentration camp as a result.

The sister (played by the fine American actress Julie Harris in the film) dies there, but Corrie survived to become one of Billy Graham's missionaries, and indeed he helped to finance the film. This seems to have hampered its wide release, as the impression was naturally given that it was a “religious propaganda” picture.

In fact it was a very fine and moving film by any standards, and the two women's religious outlook was only very lightly touched on. As a small-part actress and atheist, I can only say I was proud to have my name on the cast-list among those many women who shared the sisters' experience in Hut 28, and I would advise anyone who has an opportunity to see this superbly-made and acted film about wartime resistance, and the price paid by some, to do so.

AUDREY WILLIAMSON

CORRECTION

I wish to correct several errors in my booklet “The Unpleasant Personality of Jesus Christ”. They will be corrected in the next edition, but I should like them brought to the notice of those who have already bought copies.

On page 3 the quote “But those my enemies who do not want that I should reign over them bring hither and slay them before me” is Luke 19.27 not Luke 12.27.

On page 6 Jesus' statement that it is a sin merely not to believe in him is John 16.9.

This small booklet shows that the man who is held up as the ideal of western civilisation favoured authoritarian governments, taught that those who wouldn't accept his message would be tortured for ever in burning fires, advised his followers to castrate themselves, as well as making many other cruel, intolerant and crazy, statements.

COLIN MAINE
Rationalist Association, New South Wales, Australia

(Jottings)

Every week the BBC and IBA broadcast hundreds of hours of superstitious guff in scheduled religious programmes. That is bad enough, but it is a bit thick that Christians—who are, as a rule, rather careless about truth and fairness—use other programmes to blow their own trumpet and to disseminate ignorant nonsense about unbelievers.

* * *

A news item has appeared in a national daily on the hypochondriacal career and death of “the hoax £1 million malingerer” named William McIlroy. He is reported to have complained of every conceivable malady and “had over the years moved from hospital to hospital and had undergone numerous unnecessary operations”. (Even his obituary was unnecessary; he has since been located alive and well, despite having been treated at over 70 hospitals, in a Birmingham old people's home.)

In case any *Freethinker* readers think that I have been exploiting the National Health Service, let me put the record straight. It is evident that I underwent an operation in infancy, but the only occasion on which I was detained in hospital was as a scarlet fever victim at the age of ten. As far as I am concerned, visiting a doctor is only slightly less off-putting than going to church.

I enjoy perfect health except for weekly bouts of nausea brought on by reading the religious press.

(Lewis Carroll)

Disraeli also appears wrapped in newspaper in Chapter 3, “Looking-glass insects”. The monstrous Crow which frightened Tweedledum and Tweedledee is thought to be Disestablishment.

About *Alice Carroll* wrote: “I can guarantee that the books have no religious teaching whatever in them—in fact they do not teach anything at all”. The interesting thing for us is that, out of *no* religious teaching, he was able to create a mythology without terror which still fascinates us.

WHAT ABOUT GODS? by Chris Brockman

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75p plus 12p postage

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Christian theology is not only opposed to the scientific spirit; it is opposed to every other form of rational thinking.—H. L. Mencken.

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).
 Middle Eastern Mythology, S. H. Hooke. 90p (12p).
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(Euthanasia, Please)

pices, something like 9 per cent of patients in the community do not have adequate pain relief.

Lastly, and most importantly, most people do not want to die in a hospital or hospice: they would much prefer to die at home. (Only some 40 per cent do so at the moment.) And seeing that all hospices are heavily imbued with Christian (mainly Catholic) ideals and staff, there can't be many secularists who would like to end up in one of them!

The best example of how to die at home was given by Jean Humphry, as described by her husband Derek in the book *Jean's Way* (soon to be made into a film). Jean was terminally ill with cancer of the spine which affected all the bones. On the day when she simply leant forward in bed, and a rib broke, she decided that that was the moment she wished to end it all. She could have survived for a few more weeks, drugged ever more heavily until finally unconscious, after which the cancer would have reached her brain. Instead, she died when conscious, at home, after saying farewell to her relatives. She could only do so by getting her husband to break the law.

Nor is it just being awkward or selfish to say that one does not want to die in a hospice. Many people do not want to see scarce resources used in keeping them drugged to the eyeballs and half-conscious, when those same resources could be used to get someone else back to health.

In one respect Lord Raglan is right. Care of the dying does need to be improved. But that in no way invalidates the case for voluntary euthanasia.

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. A speaker from the National Council for Civil Liberties. Sunday, 1 July, 5.30 pm. Imperial Hotel, First Avenue, Hove. Havering and District Humanist Society. Frank Coffin: "The Magistrate and the Community". Tuesday, 19

June, 8 pm. Terry Hurlstone: "Battling against Officialdom". Tuesday, 17 July, 8 pm. Harold Wood Social Centre (Junction of Gubbins Lane and Squirrels Heath Road).

Lewisham Humanist Group. The Humanist Approach to Death—a Group Discussion. Thursday, 28 June, 7.45 pm. Unitarian Meeting House, 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. A speaker from the Anglo Kurdish Friendship Society. Sunday, 17 June, 7.30 pm. 13 Prince of Wales Terrace, London, W8.

Muswell Hill Humanist Group. W. Beauchamp Ward: "Women's Rights". Monday, 11 June, 8.30 pm. 15 Woodberry Crescent, N10.

Portsmouth Humanist Society. A Coach Outing is planned to Charles Darwin's old home and garden at Down House, Downe, Kent, on Sunday, 10 June. Telephone 01-272 1266 for details.

South Place Ethical Society. Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, WC1. Sunday Morning Meetings, 11 am. 10 June, Albert Vogeler: Francis Galton and the Inventive Genius. 17 June, Frank Dobson: The Fear of Freedom. 24 June, W. H. Liddell: Paternalism and Freedom. 1 July, Jan Ritzema Bos: A Dutch Point of View. 15 July, 50th Anniversary of Conway Hall: Foundations and Future of South Place.

Sutton Humanist Group. Phillis Gleaves: "Learning to be a Counsellor". Wednesday, 13 June, 7.30 pm. Marie Dukelow: "The Community Health Council". Wednesday, 11 July, 7.30 pm. 10 Cedar Road, nr Sutton Station.

Tyneside Humanist Society. Wednesday Meetings. 1 Archibald Terrace, Newcastle upon Tyne, 2. 7.30 pm. 13 June, "Have We Had The Millenium?"—A discussion. 20 June, F. R. Griffin: "For a Humanist Philosophy". 27 June, Buttercup: Plant Rights Demo. 4 July, A. C. Hobson, M.Sc.: "Robert Owen—Reformer."

Humanist Holidays. Summer 1979, 11-25 August. Small private hotel at Lowestoft, Suffolk. £64 a week, breakfast and dinner. Regret no more singles. Parking for two or three caravans or tents in grounds available; £24 to cover accommodation, food and use of house. Details: Mrs. Mephram, 29 Fairview Road, Sutton, Surrey; Tel: 01-642 8796. Christmas 1979, A visit to Malta is being planned. Details: Mrs Betty Beer, 58 Weir Road, Balham, London SW12 ONA; Tel: 01-673 6234.

THE FREETHINKER

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