

The Freethinker

secular humanist monthly

founded 1881

Vol. 100, No. 8

AUGUST 1980

25p

POLICE AND POPE TAKE ACTION AGAINST EUTHANASIA

Police have questioned Nicholas Reed, the secretary of the Voluntary Euthanasia Society (now called EXIT) in their investigations into the death of a woman who took an overdose of drugs. A member of the society has been charged with "counselling" a suicide. The Society has said that it would not give individual help that is against the law, but it is going ahead with its plans to publish a booklet giving practical advice on "self-deliverance".

Nicholas Reed was questioned overnight at Golders Green police station. Police were investigating the death of Mrs. Hetty Crystal who died last September. She was a wheelchair-bound victim of multiple sclerosis who lived with her husband in London. He found her dead in her bed. At the inquest the following May it was stated that she had taken at least 10 sleeping tablets together with a quantity of alcohol. The day before she died she had withdrawn £510 savings from a building society and divided the money between donations to EXIT and the Multiple Sclerosis Society.

Mr. Reed said he was happy to give the police the information they required. At the inquest he said that Mrs. Crystal had asked the VES for advice on how to kill herself, but that he had told her he could not help since that would be against the law.

A life-member of EXIT, Mark Lyons, has since been questioned and has been charged with "counselling" Mrs. Crystal in suicide. On some occasions members of the society get in touch with each other on a purely personal basis, to discuss matters of life and death and give support while in a state of anguish and anxiety.

It is surprising that the police are spending much time investigating this case and others. According to reports, about 12 cases are being examined and some 200 people have been questioned. The VES is watching the case with concern, since previous cases have not been pursued by the Director of Public Prosecutions. Derek Humphry, whose book *Jean's*

Way is a compelling account of how he himself helped his wife, who was dying of cancer, to end her life, was questioned by the police in 1978 but not prosecuted. Dr. Colin Brewer stated in an article in *World Medicine* that he had attempted to kill a terminally-ill cancer patient—but failed. He was also questioned by the police but not prosecuted.

The VES (EXIT) suspect that the police are now trying to obtain a successful prosecution. The heavy-handed police approach is shown in an article in the *Guardian* by Polly Toynbee in which she describes two cases of self-euthanasia she has encountered. One, the case of a young man paralysed from the neck down, was unsuccessful. He was questioned by the police and his wife said "They had a very one-sided view of it all".

Police Questioning

Polly Toynbee was questioned by detectives who told her that the young man had got over his depression and was happy now. She contacted him and was told that he felt "much the same about things". When Polly Toynbee revealed to the detectives that she had spoken to Nicholas Reed of the VES, one said "Don't you think that is suspicious behaviour? Don't you think that is rather sinister?"

A great deal of publicity was recently given to the suicide of Mrs. June Spencer-Churchill. She had been suffering from cancer for fourteen years and had been told that she would soon be paralysed. A coroner recorded a verdict of suicide and after the hearing Nicholas Reed said: "This was the supreme example of rational suicide. . . She chose to end her life, and we can only salute her great courage."

Although there has been criticism of the text and doubts about the legal position, EXIT intends to go ahead with its plans to publish the booklet, *Guide to Self-Deliverance*. The introduction is by Arthur Koestler and medical advice has been gained for the

practical details. The booklet will only be available to members of the Society. It is hoped to be ready by the time an international conference on euthanasia is held in Oxford on 11-14 September.

Supporters of euthanasia have been divided on the advisability of producing easily obtainable suicide information. However, membership of EXIT has rocketed from 2,000 to 8,000 since the publicity about the booklet last autumn.

In America a group was formed to campaign for active euthanasia and to publish a book giving information on how terminally-ill patients can end their lives. The group are called Hemlock and their chairman is Mr Derek Humphry (author of *Jean's Way*, now living in Los Angeles). The other two major right-to-die organisations do not favour publishing a "how to" booklet and tend to restrict the activity to acceptance of passive euthanasia—the right not to prolong life through life-support systems.

Vatican Opposition

Opposition to euthanasia has often been religious. The Vatican recently spoke out against euthanasia in a strongly worded declaration. In a comment quoted on the BBC World at One and other news programmes, the National Secular Society stated: "The official Vatican statement on euthanasia declares that pain and distress in a terminal illness do not give anyone the moral right to bring about an easy death; the National Secular Society, a militant atheist organisation, comments that a particular religious viewpoint does not give anyone the moral right to deny an easy death to others."

The Vatican declaration emphasised earlier guidelines. The Catholic Church teaching permits alleviation of pain even when there is a chance of hastening death. All forms of euthanasia are opposed—though the statement makes clear that it is not discussing capital punishment, war or the sacrifice of one's life for another, indicating a rather contradictory attitude to the sacredness of life.

The statement pronounces: "Intentionally causing one's own death, or suicide, is equally as wrong as murder, such an action on the part of a person is to be considered as a rejection of God's sovereignty and loving plan." God's loving plan is not very evident in cases of senile decay or extremely painful final stages of terminal illness. Secularists can be realistic in tragic cases when pain or decay make life unendurable.

The eighteenth century lawyer, Blackstone, aptly described the Christian attitude towards the suicide, who should be condemned for the spiritual presumption of "invading the prerogative of the Almighty, and rushing into his immediate presence uncalled for." An alternative approach is described in the original *Utopia* by Sir Thomas More. The magistrates were obliged to counsel the incurably ill into "honourable death" and then after proper inquiry to "either dispatch himself out of that painful life,

as out of a prison or a rack of torment, or else suffer himself willingly to be rid out of it by an other".

Not everyone will be happy about the idea of easily available information about suicide and mercy-killing. It needs little imagination to be aware of the dangers of over-enthusiastic propaganda for euthanasia and the need for safeguards against abuse. But it equally needs little imagination to see the need to help people aching to end prolonged suffering. A change in the law is preferable to "do-it-yourself" information, but are people to suffer through lack of professional help until the law is changed?

A simple change was suggested by Geoffrey Robertson in an article *Death Wish Without Pride* (*Guardian*, 21 July) to amend the Suicide Act of 1961 so that the clause making anyone break the law who "aids, abets, counsels, or procures the suicide of another or attempt by another to commit suicide" applies only if there were "no legitimate reason". Members of Parliament should enquire into whether the police are wasting their time with unnecessary probes into humane cases and begin the lengthy task of drafting and seeing through Parliamentary legislation to permit euthanasia.

Information may be obtained from EXIT, 13 Prince of Wales Terrace, London W8 5PG.

RITUAL BEEF SLAUGHTER

The method of slaughter to be used in a big beef order from Libya for an abattoir in Belfast has caused protest from councillors and MPs. Ritual slaughter will take place according to prescribed Islamic rules. Each steer is put in a box, which holds it in a steady standing position, then an Islamic slaughterman uses a knife, which has been blessed, to cut the throats from ear to ear with one stroke. The animals must then bleed to death.

The abattoir is in Newtownabbey and a spokesman says that it is "rubbish" to claim the animals take a long time to die. Mr Peter Robinson, MP for East Belfast, is demanding a debate on whether ritual slaughter of animals should be banned in Britain. Miss Janet Fookes, Conservative MP for Plymouth Drake and chairman of the RSPCA, is supporting him.

Under the Slaughter of Animals Act, animals must be killed instantaneously or stunned. The only exemptions relate to Islamic and Jewish ritual slaughter.

No new commercial radio station should give air-time to evangelists, according to a new ruling by the Independent Broadcasting Authority's Director of Radio. The ruling resulted from a request by a member of the public that a new radio station might carry "Sunday morning services that could be more evangelistic".

The Curse of Celibacy

AN INDIAN RATIONALIST

The chief of the Swaminarayan cult, the Hindu leader recently visiting Britain, has hit newspaper headlines because of his unusually strict rules of celibacy. He must stay far away from women so that they do not, even accidentally, appear in his line of vision. The idea of celibacy in India and Europe is here considered as perverse and hypocritical.

The cult of celibacy is not dead in Europe. If anything the Pope is trying to strengthen the cult by his refusal to allow clergy to marry. But in India the aura of reverence in which celibates are held has a very long tradition and is reinforced by modern leaders who ought to know better. The vast mass of people, aware of their sexual instincts and appetites, marvel at the "saintliness" of those who claim to have "conquered" all sexual desires.

Considering the fact that the three principal modern protagonists of celibacy, Mahatma Gandhi, Morarji Desai (the ex-Prime Minister) and the Swaminarayan chief, all hail from the Gujerat region of India, one wonders whether the very strong Jain ascetic influence in Gujerat is responsible for the continued strength of this cult. The old Hindu way of life, encompassed, in its tolerant embrace, asceticism as well as hedonism. The Hindu gods, like their Greek brothers and sisters, led a pretty hectic sexual life with their consorts, the occasional adultery and, of course, the "ever virgin" heavenly damsels. Even asceticism was supposed to be a way of exciting the pity of these gods so that they would grant your wishes. Ambitious ascetics hoped to gain access to the abode of gods and the truly ambitious even hoped to oust the gods. For the common man, celibacy was to be observed only while studying under a guru for twelve years from the age of eight onwards. As a householder he had a full sexual life, until he retired and renounced the pleasures of the world. This, of course, was the recommended ideal. On the other hand some cults flourished which elevated sexual union to the status of holy communion, to be practised as a group; some, more materialist, preached that heavenly bliss must be experienced in the world we know, here and now.

In the middle of this variety of thought and expression arrived the Buddha, about 500 B.C., and also Mahavir, the founder of Jainism, came along at about the same time. Modern rationalists and reformers in India, fighting against the ingrained inequalities of the caste system, are inclined to regard the Buddha with great sympathy, because of his egalitarian appeal and nonpostulation of a god. But though the Buddha preached the Middle Way, avoiding extremism, he began by renouncing his

wife and his child, and by preaching that desire was the cause of sorrow. The monasteries of Buddhist monks could only bring an aura of reverence to the idea of life-long celibacy. The Jain monks, who were extremists in their compassion for living things (necessitating the wearing of a piece of cloth on the nose) were possibly even more fanatical about celibacy.

The Jain influence on Mahatma Gandhi is obvious in his advocacy of nonviolence. On sexual matters, he went to the length of suggesting that abstinence was the only answer to the population problem and decided on abstinence for himself during marriage. This obsession with celibacy finally led him to believe that if his celibacy had been perfect he could have influenced Jinnah, the founder of Pakistan. He had not only to practice abstinence but to test himself while sleeping naked with young women in the Ashram, openly and without hiding the fact from other inmates of the Ashram. These facts became public knowledge only after his death. One or two of his close associates remonstrated with him on the ground that while he might be a saint his partners who acquiesced in the experiment were not, and he ought to think of the effect on them. This did not deter him, so obsessed was he with the idea of testing his celibacy. In spite of this weird result, Morarji Desai announced his abstinence from the age of 32-33, presumably in the hope that others would follow his example.

Hypocrisy

The celibate is expected to refrain from sexual intercourse with women, man or beast and also to refrain from any conscious act of sexual relief or masturbation. The claim to have refrained from masturbation cannot be, by its very nature, checked by anyone else, so that hypocrisy has an open field. All our study of biology and indeed our common sense tells us that the function of the male is to release his sperm and the attempt deliberately to suppress consciously obtained release, waiting for unconscious nocturnal emissions, must constitute the greatest deviation from nature and result in deep and unnecessary suffering. The building up of "celibates" as great personalities to be revered, in effect builds and reinforces deep guilt feelings in the large masses of people. Such is the variety of nature's arrangements, or at least since nature can produce freak results, it is conceivable that a very small number of men are so highly under-sexed that they could be content with an occasional nocturnal emission or "masturbation by the divine hand". Such a rarity could perhaps fulfil the conditions

(continued on page 117)

H. K. Rusden, Australia's "Iconoclastes"

NIGEL H. SINNOTT

Henry Rusden was an ardent disciple of Bradlaugh and one of the first people to call for scientific research on better methods of birth control. He played a leading part in various scientific and radical movements in nineteenth-century Victoria.

Henry Keylock Rusden, the fourth son of the Rev George Keylock Rusden, was born near Dorking, Surrey, in 1826. In 1834 the family migrated to Australia, taking with them Henry and his brother, George William Rusden (1819-1903), the latter of whom was to become an "author, historian and pillar of the establishment".

H. K. Rusden, however, became the adventurer, radical and freethinker of the family. He left home at 15 and soon tried his luck—with no marked evidence of success—in the gold rushes of New South Wales and Victoria before settling down in Melbourne in the 1850s. In 1853 he married Anna Spence. Until 1891 he served as an accountant in the Police Department and at the same time was an active member of the Royal Society of Victoria of which he was secretary (1870-73, 1877, 1885) and vice-president (1891-1900).

Despite his rather respectable profession and family background Rusden in private life became, to use Dr Barry Smith's phrase, "an autodidact who relished disputation". He soon started producing pamphlets such as *The Ethics of Opinion and Action* (c 1867), *Tough Morsels of Theology* (1868), *The Subjection Women* (1870), *Science and Theology* (1870), *Morality and Religion* (1871?), an *Essay on Suicide* (1875), *The Power of the Pulpit* (1877), and *Piety and Pilfering* (1882?), often using pseudonyms such as Hokor and Iconoclastes, the second of which was derived from Iconoclast, the *nom-de-plume* of Charles Bradlaugh (president of the National Secular Society in Britain).

Rusden in his middle years approached fairly closely the model of what a nineteenth-century secularist thought a serious freethinker should be like: he was industrious and assiduous in his professional commitments, deeply concerned with social questions and political reform, and took an earnest interest in popular science—he made his own boomerangs (in the hope of working out their aerodynamic principles), and his eyes became permanently damaged as the result of an ill-advised method of watching a solar eclipse. In *Men of the Time in Australia* (Victorian series, 1878) he described himself as "an atheist in theology, a determinist in philosophy, a Malthusian and radical in sociology, and an ultra-free-trader in political

economy". His motto was "Thorough", again derived directly from that of Bradlaugh.

H. K. Rusden was very much a pioneer of organisations. In 1867 he was a founder of the Eclectic Association of Melbourne (which lasted until 1894); in 1870 he started the Sunday Free Discussion Society which provided a valuable social forum for Melbourne's working people in the Sabbatarian gloom fostered by the city's Presbyterian establishment. On 17 July 1882 he was present at the founding, in Melbourne, of the Australasian Secular Association; and it is interesting to speculate upon what might have been the fortunes of secularism in Victoria had Rusden been the Associations' first president rather than Thomas Walker (1858-1932).

In 1877 the trial of Charles Bradlaugh and Annie Besant, for republishing Charles Knowlton's *Fruits of Philosophy*, attracted considerable attention. News of the London verdict reached Melbourne after a record voyage by the *Lusitania* (the ship later to bring Joseph Symes out to Australia), and Rusden wasted no time in espousing the cause of the defendants. On 26 August 1877 he gave a "lay sermon" to the Free Discussion Society, at the Trades Hall, on "Mr Bradlaugh's Conviction for Free Printing on the Population Question". (It was later published as a 16-page pamphlet.) The Society sent £5.8s to the Bradlaugh and Besant Defence Fund.

"Fruits of Philosophy"

In February of the following year Rusden gave a similar address to the Eclectic Association. Also in 1878 appeared the first "Australasian edition" of the *Fruits of Philosophy*, printed by A. Asher of Richmond, Victoria (and later by Smith and Merritt in New South Wales): this contained a preface and footnote by an anonymous "Melbourne editor" who was "one of the very few possessors in Melbourne of a previous [non-Australian] edition". Dr Frank Forster has recently demonstrated, beyond reasonable doubt, that the Melbourne editor was none other than Henry Keylock Rusden; the preface is identical with Rusden's pamphlet on the trial, and the text follows that of the Farrah (London) edition of Knowlton's book—a copy of which has conveniently survived bearing the Eclectic Association's library stamp!

In the "Australasian edition" of the Knowlton pamphlet Rusden described five methods of contraception: *coitus interruptus* (withdrawal), the condom, vaginal sponges, syringing, and a version of what is now called the "safe period" (except that nineteenth-century physiologists had the time

Much Disagreement In Public Debate

A debate on the motion "There is a world of the spirit and life after death" took place at Hackney Town Hall on 2 July. The event was organised by the Mutual Understanding Committee for Hackney. Proposing the motion were speakers from the Jewish, Muslim and Christian Communities and opposing were Barbara Smoker and Nicolas Walter.

Dr Joseph Solomons opening, said that all world religions would find agreement with the motion. The onus on the proposers, in his view, was simply to demonstrate the possibility without defining the form of "spirit" or "life after death". He said that a totally secular person was either deceiving himself or insensitive to the deepest experiences.

Nicolas Walter followed by pointing out that widespread belief in a phenomenon was not the same as evidence for it. He claimed there was no evidence for the world of the spirit and that when life came to an end nothing would remain but the memory of the person. Abandoning a belief in the after-life enabled people to concentrate on the things of value to human beings here and now.

The Muslim speaker, Mr Kiyani, explained that Islam believed in heaven and hell and that man's reason was given to comprehend such things. Man is accountable for his actions and will be judged in this life or the next, and history shows that nations are punished for breaking god's moral law. He claimed that human nature knew instinctively that life had purpose and there ought to be universal judgement.

Bargara Smoker suggested that from a period earlier than any of the religions represented there were people who rejected the idea of gods and an after-life. She explained that identity, with its memories and likes and dislikes, was linked to the brain and to the hormone system. Once the body had decayed no identity could remain. The idea of accountability was common, but she supposed when people voted for an after-life they were voting for heaven not hell. Eternal punishment was a repugnant idea and she would not wish to worship a god who willed it.

During the questions the religious speakers were reluctant to define the spirit or after-life in any detail. In a summing-up period, Mrs Pardo, a Christian who worked at a hospice, described dying individuals who had been convinced they were entering another world. Barbara Smoker pointed out that people could die in terror of punishment and belief in a future life was not all honey, flowers and sweetness. She stressed that subjective experience could not take place without a body. There was an overwhelming vote in favour of the motion.

of ovulation wrong). Moreover the footnote urged "the importance of skilled experiments being made, if necessary, by the State, at any amount of expense and trouble, to discover a better expedient". Henry Rusden must have been one of the first people in the world to advocate publicly-funded research into improved contraceptive methods! His concern was clearly personal as well as philosophical, for in 1878 Anna gave birth to their ninth child. Ironically the eight children (of ten) who survived infancy were brought up as Anglicans—presumably by their mother.

Collapse of Secularism

During the 1890s secularism collapsed in Melbourne and radicalism went into a temporary decline: contributing factors were the severe economic depression and massive movements of population out of the city. Rusden continued his interest in science and found a new cause for which to work. He became secretary of the Cremation Society and Dr Smith is of the opinion that the legalisation of cremation in Victoria, which took place in 1903, "proceeded from his [Rusden's] labours".

Henry Keylock Rusden died on 10 April 1910. He was not cremated, as might be expected, but buried—in St. Kilda Cemetery, near Melbourne (also the last resting place of Joseph Syme's first wife, Matilda). Rusden was a pioneer, of considerable ability and determination, who retains an important niche in early Australian social history; he also deserves international recognition in terms of the history of freethought and of family planning.

References

- FERGUSON, J. A. 1969. *Bibliography of Australia* 7: 158-163.
- FORSTER, F. M. C. 1979. "Birth Control in Australia: Henry Keylock Rusden and Knowlton's 'Fruits of Philosophy'." *Victorian Historical Journal* 50 (4): 237-242.
- SMITH, F. B. 1976. "Rusden, Henry Keylock." *Australian Dictionary of Biography* 6: 73-74.

(Celibacy)

imposed by celibacy. But there is no need to build such a man into a saint or a revered person, any more than one would elevate a man born blind or dumb to such a status for that reason alone.

The cult of celibacy needs to be fought not only in India where it seems to be deep and widespread, it needs to be fought in modern Europe, too, where the Roman Catholic clergy and the Pope have a hold over large sections of the population, which it is now rapidly extending in the under-developed world. Celibacy is either hypocrisy or a sexual deviation and in the guilt feelings it must produce it is a curse.

Sex Morality Changed (official)

FRANCIS BENNION

When the establishment turns at last, the first signs appear in the correspondence columns of *The Times*. Sensible people have been pointing out for years that a sexual morality (and corresponding law) that evolved in the days before scientific contraception must now need re-examining. The inert Establishment, always very slow to answer the helm, has at last begun to do so in the person of Canon G. B. Bentley, who writes from 8 The Cloisters, Windsor Castle (an address irresistibly reminiscent of Hilaire Belloc).

In *The Times* of 17th June, Canon Bentley gives utterance as one upon whom a great light has dawned. (The fact that the light dawned upon most readers of *The Freethinker* some decades ago should not blind us to the significance of this particular revelation.) Christian moralists, writes the Canon, find themselves in a quandary. The old Christian rationale of sexual morality was based on the structure and the biological function of the sexual act. As a seed-sowing operation that act needed to be confined within marriage, which alone was capable of providing the due environment for the birth and nurture of children.

Along comes contraception. The Canon announces its consequences to the bemused readership of the Top People's paper:

“. . . the link between sexual activity and seed-

sowing having been ruptured, there no longer appears to be any cogent reason for limiting such activity to copulation — 'the natural act', as it used to be called."

So the Canon will take his ruptured link (and invites *Times* readers to take theirs) to extremes, however unnatural. The degree of "kinkiness" now permissible is, he solemnly tells his neighbours in Windsor Castle (along with everyone else), simply a matter for mutual agreement.

Canon Bentley concludes with a criticism of Christian groups who "foolhardily" present reports on homosexuality while the grounds of heterosexual morality remain imperfectly understood. What, he asks, could be more absurd? Apparently homosexuals should wait to have their problems sorted out until those of heterosexuals are settled. (They will wait a long time, but are used to that.)

The Times placed the Canon's pronouncement in the top left-hand corner reserved for the Letter of the Day. A numbed readership was slow to respond. No protracted correspondence developed, but that does not mean the word from the Cloisters of Windsor Castle has gone unnoticed. It is now official that Contraception makes a difference to Morality. Precisely what difference it makes we shall have to wait in line to find out, heterosexuals first and the rest in the rear.

Spirits on the Air

Freethinkers are not the only ones with cause to be displeased over the BBC's religious broadcasting policies. British spiritualists, in applying to the BBC to allow the Sunday broadcasting of Spiritualist Church services, have been given a firm brush-off because "the Christian tradition is strongly against spiritualism."

The BBC's lack of co-operation was discovered by "veteran medium" Eileen Blaschke, who made the service broadcast request. Back from Sheila Cundy, of the BBC's Programme Correspondence section came the following reply:

"It is the policy of our Religious Department to broadcast acts of worship from all churches belonging to the mainstream of Christian tradition in this country roughly in the proportion that their membership bears to the Christian population as a whole."

The letter pointed out that some minority groups were represented but that "the Spiritualist church would not be included in this minority range."

"We recognise that its views are sincerely held, but in the opinion of our Religious Broadcasting Department it is true that the Christian tradition is

strongly against Spiritualism."

In an indignant front page story, *Psychic News* describes as "a lame excuse" the BBC assertion that pointed out that a Church of England committee set up to investigate Spiritualism "was far from hostile to our cause."

"It is clearly true," says the report, that the recognition of the nearness of our friends who have died, and of their progress in the spiritual life, and for their continuing concern for us, cannot do otherwise, for those who have experienced it, than add a new immediacy and richness to their belief in the Communion of Saints.

The paper's last word on the subject is this: "Lord Reith, the anti-spiritualist first BBC Director General, rejected our movement because it was 'outside the mainstream of Christian tradition'."

"Reith is 'dead'. He has been in the Beyond for many years. But obviously his outdated view has not been buried by the BBC."

The paper did not, it would appear, attempt to get comment from the dead in quotes from Lord Reith himself. If he in fact survived death, then the decent thing for him to have done was return immediately and let the BBC and the spiritualist movement know.

Some Thoughts of an Ex-Catholic Priest

PETER CROMMELIN

Peter Crommelin was ordained as a Roman Catholic priest fifty years ago. He left the Church in 1956, when he married. Here he reflects upon his early indoctrination, and the nature of life and death. Although he is more of a theist than a secularist, he prefers to be called an atheist than to be described as a Christian.

Fifty years ago, on the 14th June 1930, I became a priest of the Roman Catholic Church. My ordination was the final result of a long process of religious indoctrination which began in my early childhood. Indoctrination does not stop people from thinking. In a way it encourages thought. It does not destroy the power of reason. Indoctrination fails to point out to the pupil a conflict at the heart of things, the conflict between appearance and reality. Indoctrination very skilfully invents a multitude of reasons for belief and a multitude of obstacles to disbelief. Those who indoctrinate must have intelligence and those who are indoctrinated must also have intelligence. You cannot indoctrinate inanimate matter. You must not confuse the indoctrination of a person with the "feeding" of a computer. You can only partially indoctrinate persons who are mentally deficient. I was not very clever, but I was not mentally deficient. I absorbed religious doctrine in much the same kind of way that I absorbed scientific doctrine.

My own father was a "doctor of science" who never suggested to me that there was any essential conflict between religion and science. Certainly religious indoctrination did not stop me from thinking, but it did cause my thoughts to move in a predetermined direction, that in my individual case led to the priesthood as the best possible "vocation" I could choose for myself.

No amount of indoctrination can guard itself effectively against the cosmic power of time. It was time and the things that happen in the course of time that caused me to lose my faith in the teaching authority of the Catholic Church. But once I had lost my faith in this basic principle, it was only a matter of time before I excommunicated myself.

This act I achieved on the 25th October, 1956, when I contracted a marriage not recognised as such by ecclesiastical authority. I could not have left the Church without the help of my wife, but together we won a famous victory and we are still together. During our married life we have had our ups and downs, but the thought that we are better together than apart has always predominated.

But my marriage was not the one and only reason for my retirement from the priesthood. I wanted to leave the Church for many reasons. I have my own

personal faith in God, and my own personal faith was in growing conflict with the doctrine of the Church. I became more and more aware of the fact that the monotheism that seems credible to me is not derived from Christ or Christianity. And so although I am not an atheist, I would prefer to be called an atheist rather than a Christian. My own belief in God is derived almost totally from the contemplation of nature and from the deep mysteries of life and death. And these are so deep and so mysterious that they must have, I feel, some divine origin and purpose.

I have lived long enough here on earth to take some interest in the thought of my own death. The philosopher Spinoza is supposed to have said that a wise man never thinks of death. He deceived himself.

Thoughts of Death

It is the thought of death more than any other thought that stimulates the enjoyment or when necessary the endurance of life. In the course of my life I have seen many dead bodies. But dead bodies provide no clue to the nature of death as human experience. The question we cannot answer with any certainty until we are dead is whether the dead have a life of their own. It is equally difficult to assert with absolute confidence that such a continuation is beyond the bounds of possibility. We must simply wait and see.

And here at last I would bring in a touch of natural theology. It is no crime against humanity to express an opinion that the human soul can never be completely satisfied with a secular humanism that totally excludes anything beyond itself. It is no exaggeration to assert that the human soul demands an eternity of its own in which to make an everlasting contribution to the making of world without end. The human soul would never agree by any voluntary act to its own complete extinction or total annihilation. There is a sense in which even an atheist must trust in God as the First Cause of all that is both temporal and eternal.

Before our marriage the Catholic Church made every effort, fair and extremely unfair, to stop the wedding. There was a total disregard for all human feelings in the matter. But once we achieved the wedding no effort was made to bring about a divorce. Yet neither my wife nor I have any theology of marriage. It is a human institution. When it works well there is nothing better. When it works badly there is nothing worse. We have been fortunate. None the less I have no objection to the words "Thank God" as an expression of gratitude for the nature of things that enables us to live our own lives.

IRANIAN ATROCITIES

The Islamic revolution in Iran continues with horrific pace. Legal codes under the Shah were modelled on Western laws, but under the Ayatollah Khomeini full Islamic law is restored—to an extreme which has no basis in the Koran and has shocked some Muslims in other parts of the world.

An outrageous example was a ritual stoning to death of four people in Southern Iran. Two women and men were convicted by a revolutionary court of prostitution, rape and homosexuality. They were masked in the ceremonial “hood of death” then buried up to their chests and pelted with stones. When they were dead prayers were said and the bodies were buried.

In a letter published in the *Guardian* (5 July), Terry Mullins, Secretary of the National Secular Society, said: “Civilised people the world over will be revolted by your report of the partial burial alive and the stoning to death of four people convicted of sexual misdemeanours in Southern Iran. That the head of the court in the town concerned could not only pass such a barbaric sentence but join in the quarter-hour-long ritual murder makes this horror even more pernicious.

“It is reported that after this procedure was completed, prayers were said. It is to be hoped that heads of state and religious leaders in the West will protest to the authorities in Iran with whom they might conceivably have some influence.”

There have been some protests against the totalitarian Islamicisation. Women demonstrated against the enforced Islamic dress code, which forbids women to wear Western clothes in place of the traditional robes which must cover the head and disguise the outline of the body. There has been a ban on women serving as judges, and women fear an attempt to relegate them to an inferior position.

Doctors organised a day's strike in protest against the revolutionary rule, and in particular objected to inhumane punishments they were asked to carry out.

The rate of execution is reckoned to have risen to around ten a day. Ayatollah Khomeini, after reports of an unsuccessful plot against the government, endorsed a hardline fundamentalist approach, saying that the government must be “religious, 100 per cent Islamic and firm”.

POPE IN BRAZIL

Brazil is said to contain the largest Catholic community in the world—a much repeated comment during press reports of the Pope's twelve-day tour of Brazil. But the Catholic journalist Patrick O'Donovan pointed out that half of Brazil's priests are foreign and only three per cent of its people perform religious duties. Nevertheless, Brazil is a Catholic country in which the Church plays an important political role. The Church hierarchy has

NEWS

fought for measures to lessen poverty and stop violation of human rights. According to one report four hundred members of the Catholic Church, including nine bishops, have been arrested, 34 have been tortured and eight have been killed in the last 10 years. Many clergy have aligned themselves firmly with workers' strikes and demonstrations against the government.

The message which Pope John Paul II constantly reiterated during his tour was that the Catholic church is on the side of the poor. He told an audience of young people “You say rightly that it is impossible to be happy seeing a multitude of brothers with the least opportunity for human existence. You also say it is indecent that some should squander that which is missing from the tables of everyone else.”

He made a dramatic gesture to a small gathering of shanty town dwellers, when he took a gold ring from his finger and presented it to the parish. “The Church wants to be a Church of the poor,” he said. However, will the ring be sold to pay for the sewer-piped water and electricity for which the slum dwellers are petitioning the Pope, or will it be placed in a chapel and venerated as a holy object? One local person was sceptical of the result of the Pope's visit: “He is in the Vatican rolling with gold. He can come. But things here won't change much.”

A mass rally in a stadium which can hold 150,000 was the scene of a tragic incident several hours before the Pope's appearance there. The crowd got out of control and seven people died and more than 100 were injured in the stampede. This is the second time the Pope's crowd-mongering has led to loss of life. Last year a similar stampede during the Pope's visit to Zaire killed nine people. Should not the Pope's advisers ensure that crowd control is adequately arranged before agreeing to participate in mass meetings, or perhaps he should avoid altogether spectacular, but hysteria-prone, huge rallies?

In a country where rapid increase of population is a serious problem, the Pope made no mention of contraception at all.

The Pope did not comment on how poverty and human injustice could be reduced, only stressing the desirability, which no one would question, of change. It is easy to rail against poverty and uphold the rights of the poor. How to change the economic and social system to bring this about is complex, and a matter of intense controversy within the Brazilian Catholic hierarchy. Some so-called liberation theologians hold a pseudo-marxist view that capitalism is the devil's tool, others seek more cautious reform.

S AND NOTES

The Pope evaded the question.

Although papal tours enable human rights to hit the headlines for a few weeks, the truth may have been spoken by the chairman of the Vidigal shanty town in Rio: "The Pope brings us his blessings, but that doesn't mean our life will change for the better."

MIRACLES FOR SALE

Further "proof" of the authenticity of the Shroud of Turin is claimed in a report by Fr. Francis Filas published in America. Fr. Filas, a Jesuit theologian, says he has found the imprint of a coin in the position over the right eye where the body in the shroud was supposed to have been. Aided by a coin expert he contends that the coin bore the mark of an astrologer's staff and four Greek letters that are part of the Greek inscription "of Tiberius Caesar". This is said to date the coin from the time of Pontius Pilate's procuratorship and prove the Shroud was a burial cloth from the period of Christ's crucifixion.

While researchers continue to study the Shroud in minute detail, an American company is putting the supposed miraculous qualities of the Shroud's image to good commercial use. New Styles Inc. is selling partial copies of the Shroud for about £6 each with a claim that it brings good luck while gambling. Ads for the "Shroud Miracle Cloth" say that the owner will "not have to just read about other people's miracles. You can have them for your own self." New Styles has previously run escort agencies such as Dial-a-Doll and Escort Pussy, without miraculous results so far as is known.

Now the British Establishment is getting in on the act, though rather less crudely, with a Shroud Exhibition at Canterbury this month.

SCIENTOLOGY

That blandest and most respectable of all publications, the *Reader's Digest*, has incurred the wrath of the Church of Scientology, which has dubbed the magazine "Reader's Indigestion."

In a pamphlet subtitled "Anatomy of a Misguided Magazine," the Scientologists have hit back over an article published by *Reader's Digest* under the heading: "Anatomy of a Frightening Cult."

In the pamphlet the church lists some of *Digest's* past "mistakes" including its praise, in 1934, of

Josef Stalin. And how, in 1934, it lauded the sterilisation programme of Hitler's Nazis.

Someone has been going back through the *Digest's* files, because the pamphlet also claims that in 1929 the magazine was touting poison gas as a cure for tuberculosis, and the same year gangster Al Capone was characterised by the *Digest* as having "great executive ability."

In 1948 the magazine, it is claimed, praised J. Edgar Hoover, head of the FBI, for his work "protecting the civil rights of Negroes" and in July, 1963, the magazine was touting the medical benefits of LSD.

An American spokesman for the Church of Scientology was quoted as saying the Church was happy to enjoy the distinction of making *Reader's Digest's* "Enemies' List".

Meanwhile, in the UK, the recent decision by the Government to lift the ban on the entry into Britain of Scientologists has given many MPs cause for concern. Some Tory MPs are hoping that there will be a Home Office review of all sects, such as the Unification Church.

But the Government believes that the subject of such sects is one the all-party Home Affairs Committee might want to consider.

NATIONAL SECULAR SOCIETY ANNUAL OUTING

To the Chilterns, including the Hell Fire Caves
and Waddesden Manor

SUNDAY, 14 SEPTEMBER

Cost £5.50

Booking and details from
NSS, 702 Holloway Road, London N11 3NL

Freethinker Fund

We are grateful for the excellent total contributed this month by readers: J. Beeson, £1; P. Brown, £1; J. C. Brunel, £2; J. Busby, £2; V. S. Cavener, £1; H. L. Clements, £1; P. Crommelin, £4; S. Evans, £1.50; D. Fyfe, 70p; W. Gerard, £22; D. J. George, £1; L. B. Halstead, £5; E. J. Hughes, £2; S. E. Johnson, £25; M. Knight, £2; E. Lewis, £1; J. Little, £7; D. E. Marietta, \$3; H. L. Milland, £2; B. Moss, £2; H. A. Newman, \$10; J. G. Pearce, £2; M. Pinsker, £2; R. B. Ratcliff, £1; R. Raven, £1; D. Redhead, £1; K. C. Rudd, £3; C. Stephenson, 50p; I. R. Tiffany, £3; J. M. Thomas, £2; J. White, £1; L. W. Wright, £2; Anonymous, £25; Anonymous U.S.A. \$2. Total for the period 19/6/80 to 22/7/80: £125.70 and \$16.

THE Gnostic GOSPELS by Elaine Pagels. Weidenfeld and Nicolson, £7.95

There was a custom in the ancient Near East, referred to in Jeremiah 32: 14, of preserving important documents by sealing them in earthenware jars. These primitive yet effective deed-boxes held both the Dead Sea scrolls, discovered in 1947, and the similar find made a year or so earlier at Nag Hammadi in Upper Egypt. *The Gnostic Gospels* is described by its publisher as "the first account written by a scholar for the general reader" about the Nag Hammadi documents. Hardly the first, though, for *The Secret Books of the Egyptian Gnostics*, by Jean Doresse and published in 1958, is just as popular in style.

The find, or rather that part of it which escaped being used as kindling material by its peasant discoverers, consisted of thirteen leather bound papyrus volumes written in Coptic, containing the texts of 52 Gnostic gospels and other writings, many of which were previously known only by their titles and a few stray quotations. The manuscripts, thought to have been written between 350 and 400 AD, are copies of original works going back to at least 140, some of them possibly earlier than the New Testament gospels. In all probability they were hidden by monks from the monastery of St. Pachomius, close to Nag Hammadi, after an order from Archbishop Athanasius of Alexandria in 367 to destroy all apocryphal and heretical books. The suppression of Gnostic writing was so thorough that, until the discovery of the Nag Hammadi library, nearly all our information about these "heretics" came from orthodox polemics against them.

Why were these writings banned as heresy? Prof. Pagels says that Gnosticism was dangerous because it had social and political implications detrimental to the development of Christianity as an institutional religion. Here were bodies of men—and women—calling themselves Christians yet insisting on their right to think for themselves, thereby defying the bishops who were beginning to assert their sole right to decide church doctrine and discipline. Rejecting hierarchy, any member of a Gnostic sect could act in a clerical capacity. Women were encouraged to assume the priestly office, then as now anathema to Catholic Christianity. If the bishops were to rule, they had no option but to suppress Gnosticism.

Some Gnostic sects believed in a Jesus of flesh and blood. Others taught that he was not human, but a spirit which had adapted itself to human perception. The Acts of John, one of the few Gnostic texts known before Nag Hammadi, says that Jesus appeared sometimes as a child, at others

as a handsome young man or as a small ugly man. One suspects the influence of ancient Egypt here, for these were some of the transformations of Horus, who was Lord by name. After all, these were Egyptian Gnostics, and Doresse has noted other borrowings from the earlier religion.

Since Jesus was a spirit, it followed that he had not really suffered on the cross. His sacrifice was therefore worthless, and there could be no salvation as a result of Christian martyrdom. Only fools died for Christ.

Orthodox Christianity insisted on a physical resurrection of Jesus. To the Gnostics, the resurrection was a mystical experience open to every Christian believer. One had to receive the resurrection while one lived, this being the only "rising in the flesh" possible. Prof. Pagels suggests that the doctrine of a bodily resurrection served an essentially political function—it legitimised the authority of those who claimed exclusive leadership in the church as successors to the apostle Peter. According to John's gospel, the risen Christ had told Peter that he was to take Jesus' place as shepherd for the flock. To this day the Catholic Church claims that Peter was the first witness of the resurrection, and therefore the rightful leader of the church, the Pope being his heir by apostolic succession.

Writing as a Christian, Prof. Pagels has to assume that the gospel record is basically historical. She tells us that "we do know as historical fact" that certain disciples, notably Peter, claimed that the resurrection had happened. We know nothing of the kind, for no undisputed contemporary account of Jesus, his disciples, relatives and friends has ever come to light. Our author concedes that we know "virtually" nothing about the persons who wrote the gospels; we only know that they are attributed to apostles or their followers. Our knowledge, then, is not virtually but absolutely nil.

If, as the Gnostics maintained, there was no literal resurrection, the supremacy of the Catholic Church had no firm basis and was open to challenge. And the Gnostics did challenge the orthodox, claiming to have something the others did not, the secret teaching of Jesus referred to by Matthew and Mark. This teaching offered the initiate direct access to God, cutting out the ecclesiastical middleman.

The church fathers' charge that the Gnostics believed in another god beside the creator is confirmed by some of the Nag Hammadi texts. The creator, a minor deity, was but the instrument of a higher power. Since the orthodox clergy served

REVIEWS

only the creator, Gnosticism offered a theological justification for refusing to obey them.

The Gnostics could never submit to a bishop or priest; only the unthinking could do that. Gnostics were thinkers, seeking enlightenment from within themselves. God, Christ, heaven, all were within, and it was a Gnostic's business to discover and identify with them. Having thought thus far, some took a logical step further and made their god Anthropos, evolving a religion of humanity some 1,700 years before Comte.

With the imperial establishment of orthodox Christianity in the fourth century, the fate of Gnosticism was sealed. It survived only as a suppressed current, resurfacing occasionally in the Middle Ages. At the present time Prof. Pagels sees what amounts to a revival of Gnosticism in the increasing numbers of people refusing to accept the authority of orthodox institutions. The Gnostics had their own ideas about the nature of Christ and his resurrection, and such matters as the role of women in the church. These and other questions, sharply debated at the beginning of Christianity, are being reopened.

R. J. CONDON

INHERIT THE EARTH. A SOCIAL HISTORY by Maureen Duffy. Hamish Hamilton, £6.95.

In *Inherit the Earth* Maureen Duffy tackles the problem of describing a whole family through several centuries. Compared to that of conventional biographers her task has been a difficult one. The Jarvis family were, like most of our families, outstandingly undistinguished. They exist in a frank jumble of Essex county archives. Whatever order they have is dictated by their birth and death dates, recorded haphazardly in the parish register. Much of the family's charm now lies in the problem of making sense of their scanty records. They lived in Thaxted for generation after generation, variously accumulating property, paying taxes, serving on juries, falling on hard times and going upon the parish, being baptised, marrying, being arraigned for fornication, and finally distributing their estate among the next generation. They rise in social standing and they fall. Landowners at the Restoration, they are paupers by the Napoleonic Wars. Their very ordinariness makes the book fascinating.

For us the Jarvises may be Everyman, but for Maureen Duffy they are direct ancestors. She begins *in media res* with Samuel and Lydia Jarvis (fl. 1870-1920) and from this middle distance she moves to the origins of the family, as far as records are concerned, in late medieval Essex. There are frequent

dashes back to the present century, comments on the author's own childhood or still current family lore. This structure adds spice to a straightforward chronological narrative. As we meet the earlier Jarvises we know we are working toward Samuel and Lydia, the couple who left rural Essex for the more prosperous Stratford in East London; Samuel and Lydia are a kind of pivot between living memory and the past of the history books.

Parts of the story are narrated in an impressionistic flow of the general and the particular, an *Orlando* of a whole family. Here is Maud, whose father died in 1915, enabling her to wear a fetching black silk hat. She and her sister Maisie worked at the print works, where "they took their dinner to heat up in the staff kitchen and sat at their work-bench eating suet pudding with golden syrup and telling the story of last night's film". And like a film the flow is sometimes stopped for a commentary by the author as we continue to gaze at the still projected on the screen. By such devices has Ms. Duffy kept the proceedings from being a mere abstract of land transactions, marriage registers and wills.

The present and the past illuminate each other, as when Ms. Duffy mentions, in connection with the marriage portion a seventeenth or eighteenth century bride brought, that the expectation of a "bottom drawer" has disappeared only in the last generation, or when she reflects on the early nineteenth century Jarvises. "The painful saving up of the rent must have been the origin of the old teapot or vase that served as a money-box on the mantel-pieces of my childhood".

Parish records, even at their fullest and most detailed, are still scanty when you are trying to divine the real people behind them. Maureen Duffy fleshes out her characters as much as humanly possible, deducing character traits from the musty evidence. There is Mary Jarvis, whose father, Joseph, died in 1649 leaving her a handsome bequest provided she did not "take to husband Thomas Saggars the younger, husbandman". "She was twenty-seven and her chance was slipping away," the author reminds us. "What was she to do? Reader, she married him." Love match though it was, by the end of the century the ne'er-do-well Saggars' are receiving constant hand-outs from the parish.

No family is really a direct line, unless you ignore most of the members and simply concentrate on the route back to an illustrious ancestor. Rather than trying to make a tidy espalier of the family tree, Ms. Duffy calls it "a kind of nursery of seedlings or a coppice of saplings sprung from fruits fallen from the same parent and in their turn letting drop their seeds". There are no genealogical charts (although an index would be welcome) in the back of the book, and rightly so. True, you would have to have the mind of a chess champion to keep all the Thomases and Anns in their right order, but

their order and even their tortuous relationships are not the most important thing. Just as you are not expected to memorise all the pictures in somebody else's family album, they are a parade to be enjoyed as it passes.

As we approach the period of Lydia and Samuel Jarvis, whose sets of parents were both called Sarah and Joseph, the names of Thaxted people have become so familiar that we begin to recognise the maiden names of women marrying into the family. Perhaps 200 years before ancestors of the same name had been connected with other branches of the Jarvis family.

Ms. Duffy's last chapter is a revelation. I think it will provide new insights for practically anyone who is not already a sociologist. As an American fighting a long but losing struggle to understand the British class system, I am especially grateful for her elucidation of working-class attitudes in southern England. She shows how they arose from the circumstances of agricultural labourers in the nineteenth century who flocked to towns for work and founded the "respectable metropolitan working class". The movement of the young women of the agricultural labouring class into service in the households of their more prosperous neighbours began in Thaxted in the 1830s. The whole sad decline from landowner to small farmer to labourer and then often to pauper during the eighteenth century reminds me of the gradual slide into serfdom before the Norman Conquest. Only now has a comfortable standard of living become as widespread as it was at the end of the seventeenth century, when the Jarvises were leaving land and houses to each other.

SARAH LAWSON

THEATRE

NICHOLAS NICKLEBY by Charles Dickens. Royal Shakespeare Company. Aldwych Theatre.

A SHORT SHARP SHOCK by Howard Brenton and Tony Howard. Royal Court Theatre and Theatre Royal, Stratford East.

"Wealth and poverty stood side by side, repletion and starvation laid them down together . . ." In a fine choral moment many of the 45 actors presenting *Nicholas Nickleby* quoted Dickens's description of London while Nicholas returns to the city, but the dark perception of the desperate division between rich and poor, which broods over Dickens's later novels does not cloud the buoyant good humour of most of David Edgar's adaptation of this early novel.

It is fitting that a novel dedicated to Macready and which immortalised the fifth-rate acting troupe of the Crummies should provide so theatrical an occasion. Throughout the eight and a half hours, spread over two nights, a gallery of superb characters, superbly acted, keep the audience enthralled.

The plot and sub-plots are held together with great clarity, different groups being interlinked by Newman Noggs, the kind-hearted, alcoholic clerk, who helps Nicholas while working for his wicked uncle, Ralph Nickleby. Edward Petherbridge as Noggs gives a brilliant performance of a man shuffling around insect-like, his very bones dishevelled. John Woodvine, as the wicked uncle, belongs to a more sober production, and while this gives weight to his eventual, improbable repentance, it lacks the extravagance of Victorian villainy.

Nicholas himself (Roger Rees), as the character to whom it all happens, is especially effective in his relationship with maltreated Smike, whom he takes under his wing when leaving Dotheboys Hall. David Threlfall as the doggedly loyal Smike, thrown from the cruelty of Mr Squeers to the kindness of the Nickleby family convinces us of his child-like wonder and fear, and wrests real emotion from the famous Dickensian death-bed scene. Rose Hill as the miniaturist painter, Miss La Creevy, constantly touching up her own gentility, and Suzanne Bertish as the catty Fanny Squeers, are among the galaxy of delightful performances too numerous to mention.

Not surprisingly, the acting troupe of the Crummies provide a high spot of colour and humour. Mr Crumple (Graham Crowden) invests "the theatrical profession", with every inch of his tawdry splendour. Mrs Crumple (Lila Kaye) quells disagreements or doubts with what can only be described as a flourish of eyelids. The long extract from *Romeo and Juliet*, in a nineteenth century version where the tragic characters are all saved from death in excruciating couplets, concluded the first half and, as a demonstration of coarse acting by first-rate actors, had the audience in stitches. Like the whole production it ran the risk of self-indulgence, but the audience will certainly enjoy indulging themselves too.

"Rule Britannia" ended the Crummies' performance on the first night and "Tidings of Comfort and Joy" was sung to conclude the second night. The lack of political perspective which smothers evil and deep social wounds in warmth and bonhomie is typical of a certain aspect of Dickens, but is perhaps a surprising emphasis from so politically conscious a writer as David Edgar. Is it a sign of the times that early rather than late Dickens was chosen, that people can only respond to the presages of Thatcher's England by a plunge into warmth and cosiness?

A Short Sharp Shock by Howard Brenton and Tony Howard, originally titled "Ditch the Bitch", is barely adequate as a response to Thatcher's England, either. It is not sharp enough or short enough to be really shocking; at its best it has the pointedness of a telling political cartoon, but what cartoon would bear extension into a two hour play?

Mrs Thatcher is caught to a tee by Gwen Taylor, a real "Machiavelli among the tea-cups". Of the cabinet, a truly lunatic Sir Keith Joseph, toying with a glove-puppet Milton Friedman, and jolly Jim Prior, conjuring other ministers with an Employment Bill made of streamers and paper flowers, were particularly effective. Although it is easy, and not without a touch of accuracy to caricature the cabinet as public schoolboys up to nasty japes, it does not explain the radical new direction taken by the Tory Government.

There is an attempt at political perspective with a depiction of the Heath-Thatcher rivalry after the 1974 election. But there is nothing of the more important issue of the election campaign, its promises and advertisements, and the question of whether public opinion really shifted from acceptance of the welfare state to admiration of the entrepreneur are not faced.

Never mind, those who loathe Mrs Thatcher (like me) will find the evening a fizzy tonic. Like all sermons the play is doubtless preaching mainly to the converted, and the theatre foyer had the atmosphere of a political meeting. Maybe they were part of that "mad socialist extended family" to which the play refers, from "born-again Stalinists" to ecology enthusiasts.

The curtain falls with the ordinary characters (as opposed to political caricatures) turning to face the thunder of disaster — a suitably unresolved conclusion. No doubt it will take years rather than months to respond adequately to the conflicts and sufferings created by the present government, while we meanwhile resort to colourful Dickensian events and political caricature.

The programme to *Nicholas Nickleby* quotes Orwell's essay describing Charles Dickens: "He is laughing, with a touch of anger in his laughter, but no triumph, no malignity. It is the face of a man who is always fighting against something, but who fights in the open and is not frightened, the face of a man who is *generously angry* — in other words, of a nineteenth century liberal, a free intelligence, a type hated with equal hatred by all the smelly little orthodoxies which are now contending for our souls." We need such generous anger more than ever before.

JIM HERRICK

CINEMA

THE WOBLIES distributed by the Other Cinema. At the ICA Cinema, The Mall, London.
MARIGOLDS IN AUGUST at the Phoenix, East Finchley and the Paris Pullman, South Kensington.

The Wobblies is a 90-minute documentary by Stewart Bird and Deborah Shaffer, on the Industrial Workers of the World ("One Big Union" named the Wobblies after a Chinese worker's pro-

nunciation of the initials IWW), who took on American management during the first two decades of this century. What became of them thereafter is not made clear, but then clarity is not the strong point of this heady, singalong documentary. It is an impressive, exciting compilation of newsreel footage, of Disney anti-union cartoons, such as *Little Red Henski* (!), slogans, photos, interviews with spunky IWW veterans and depictions of factories and mills very similar to those *arpilleras*, propaganda patchworks, sewn by Chilean shanty-town women. Best of all are the Joe Hill songs. *The Wobblies* sweeps through American labour history, recording the police brutality and the violent struggles with other opponents, the way in which the IWW helped promote racial equality and women's rights and its association with the First World War and the Russian Revolution. The film moves so lickety-split that I for one was left breathless, confused and somewhat drained of my initial goodwill. I longed for a level-headed critical approach, for more placing of events in their geographical and historical context.

The distinguished South African dramatist, Athol Fugard, has scripted *Marigolds in August*, directed by Ross Devenish and starring the black actors Winston Ntshona and John Kani. Ntshona plays Daan, who daily walks the six miles from his settlement to work as a jobbing gardener in a white resort. His journey into the breaking day is followed with amused tenderness. He stops to feed the monkeys, to chase some painted bushmen, who had been idling with a young girl, back where they came from, and to try on a pair of glasses dropped on the roadside. Daan's work, digging spick-and-span gardens, is intercut with scenes of Melton (John Kani) and his wife burying their starved child, a pitiful bundle, in a rough woodland grave. Melton searches fruitlessly for work, pleading with whites who answer, or do not answer, from their safety behind screen doors and picture windows. He intrudes on Daan's terrain, and the two men clash. A wise, solitary, coloured snake-trapper, played by Fugard, reconciles the two men to each other and to the unpalatable fact that Melton will have to steal from the whites if he is to save the rest of his family without taking away any of Daan's hard-won jobs.

For me, the film only works when the main characters are apart, scrabbling for a foothold in a society in which it is impossible for blacks to survive without breaking some law (Daan is working without a legal pass) and which is stratified and dog-eat-dog even within the racial groups. Together, the three men become dull and embarrassing, as they heave and dribble the film's message to and fro. In the dialogues, I found Ntshona's performance particularly irritating and stagey, all wily, clownish eye-rolling and molasses voice. For this reaction I blame my own rigid addiction to the deadpan, mum-

bling style of white acting. But I also blame Fugard for burdening his actors with words which only serve to labour and re-labour points already made by the camera simply, beautifully and with haunting effect.

VERA LUSTIG

LETTERS

FREETHOUGHT AND THE MEDIA

In May's Freethinker there were lots of good things — or, rather, interesting observations — on problems facing communications, especially in the freethought field, notably from Nicolas Walter and Stuart Hood.

With excellent historical reasons freethinkers are prone to accept conspiracy theories, and often they are undoubtedly right. But there is probably another and more depressing ground for boycott, which I touched on in "The Rise of the Mediocracy".

When, as a young propagandist, I spoke regularly in Hyde Park and other places, from time to time I got the question, "If there isn't a god, how did you get here?". Sometimes I answered in the manner of the more experienced orators, "I walked" or "I caught the 73 bus" or "My mother met my father" or "Please give that man a biology textbook". That was always good for a laugh and my crowd grew a little, but it didn't of course answer the real question. So sometimes I decided to give a potted account of cosmology, biochemistry and evolution. No matter how potted this was or how devoted my audience had seemed, very soon their eyes glazed over and the crowd drifted away. Tell them how God made man in his image, and they nod or frown. Tell them how scientific forces did it, and they merely yawn.

Later, as president of the National Secular Society, I lost no opportunity of issuing statements on humanist concerns whenever a suitable occasion presented. Dis-establishment and disendowment were two related themes that definitely needed to hang from a good journalistic peg before anyone would deign to look at them. I scored a fair number of short quotations, the odd brief radio interview and an occasional article. But I always looked forward to a major radio or television programme. On two or three occasions I was drawn into initial discussions on such a project, but all of them fell through. Now, the procedures concerned may have run into entrenched clerical opposition from superiors or programming committees, but I'm prepared to believe their pleas that on reflection they didn't see how the idea could make "good radio" or "good television". In other words, the issue turned out to be more complicated than they'd thought, and they were stumped for household names to quote or film clips to show. Now that newspapers may be threatened by printout attachments to television sets, I shudder for the future of freethought propaganda.

DAVID TRIBE

REASON AND EMOTION

I was interested to read the account in the June "Freethinker" of my short talk given after the Rationalist Press Association Annual Dinner on 17th May. But may I clarify three points?

1. When Kathleen Nott and myself emphasise the important contribution made by the non-rational elements of the human mind—such as feeling, intuition, imagination, creativity, experiential awareness—we are not seeking to set the non-rational up as an alternative to reason but to give it its place as reason's necessary complement. Reason is vital but not total in human affairs. To ignore, or undervalue, the non-rational components of human nature—which some rationalists

appear to do—is to diminish personality. Humanists, surely, should deal with the whole human being, and not limit their perspective to the rational infra-structure of awareness.

2. Agreed, human beings do not come in pure types. We are mixtures. Nevertheless, in many people, a clear bias is ascertainable towards either left or right hemisphere modes of functioning and response. This was picked up by several leading psychologists and has now been established by neurophysiology. It is as meaningless to deny this as it is to deny that there are two sexes on the grounds that we are all sexual mixtures.

3. To compare split-hemisphere theory with phrenology is plainly absurd. Phrenology was a nineteenth century cult based on no evidence whatsoever. Hemisphere theory arose from scientific investigation of the differential functions of the two hemispheres of the cerebral cortex and has grown from continuing investigation.

JAMES HEMMING

SOUTH PLACE AND RELIGION

Mr Justice Dillon ruled that South Place was not a charity for the advancement of religion, but was a charity on other grounds. This was a decision about law, not about religion. In his judgement he started from the Society's aims and objects as at present stated, including the reference to "a rational religious sentiment". These he did not question. The aims and objects remain as they were.

Nicolas Walter's report is mostly fair as to the facts (although he omits to include Professor Ninian Smart's affidavit in his list of those in support of the Society) but slanted as one would expect! It is quite wrong, however, to say that the judge ruled that the Society "should amend its trust deed." He ruled that there should be "a new trust deed", a very different matter. The old trust deed of 1825, by virtue of his judgement, is dead and cannot, therefore, be amended.

Barbara Smoker is amazing! It could be that years ago she suggested making our case on grounds of education and the public benefit but for the last two years at least she has conducted a fierce one-woman campaign inside the Society to get us to quit the case altogether, withdraw. She didn't believe we could win and wanted us to cut our losses over costs. On the first day of the hearing, in the very court-room itself, she asked me what I thought were the prospects of our success and I told her that I put them at 80-20 in our favour. The "20" covered the inponderable question of the personal views of the judge. She offered to bet me on that basis and I turned it down just because I am not at betting man. I should have taken her money!

One final word to our secularist and rationalist friends . . . The world is a big place and there is plenty of room for us all. We, at South Place, would never dream of telling the NSS or the RPA what to do or what to think. Will you extend the same honour to us?

PETER CADOGAN,
General Secretary

Two significant facts deserve mention in connection with the Freethinker report on this topic.

Firstly, the Registrar General's decision "to cancel the record of certification of Conway Hall . . . as from 1st April 1977" relied on the fact that worship had actually ceased. As the law stands, "consequently, no marriage may lawfully be solemnised at Conway Hall after March 1977. At the same time, the appointments of any persons authorised under section 43" . . . were also cancelled. Since that date, weddings are not included among the ceremonies offered on the back cover of the Ethical Record.

Secondly, the Society's considered declaration of the true position was then already in print in the Record, April 1975, headed "South Place, Trusts, and Charitable Status". It was issued for the Special General Meeting by which the legal proceedings were authorised.

Nobody questioned the crucial phrase relating to Chapel days, long ago: "the religious observance for which the South Place congregation continued to meet cannot be classified as worship". The rider to this sentence quotes the Durham Report, but that is simply a rhetorical flourish, of no more value than the words of the original draft — "if we are to exclude all symbolical or even fanciful usages such as worship of truth".

Peter Cadogan gave his evidence as an expert witness, i.e. presenting personal views as well as the factual matter supported by exhibits of documents.

Dr. A. L. LOVECY

PORNOGRAPHY AND CHRISTIANITY

In William McIlroy's surprisingly emotional, chauvinistic and inaccurate attack on certain groups concerned about moral standards, he succeeded in generating more heat than light.

Surely the fundamental question is not whether Mary Whitehouse is an old fashioned puritan and he an old fashioned impuritan; or whether we should stick rigidly to his standards or hers; but rather, does the material in question have an effect on people and if so, what?

For example, do the books children read affect them in any way? do the books' grammar or vocabulary alter the children's grammar or vocabulary? Do the moral habits portrayed in the books influence the children's moral habits? Does pornography have any effect on anyone at all? Does it produce the sexual stimulation that many pornographers admit to be their purpose? If the pornography is successful in its aim, do all readers have socially tolerable outlets to that stimulation? Is it right to put any restraints on writers who appear to provoke people to anti-social activities?

And what is anti-social? Is Paki-bashing anti-social? Or is rape, or drug taking, or causing explosions, or paedophilia, or drunkenness, or promiscuity or taking handbags from old ladies?

No doubt every one of us has our own particular set of moral absolutes. I doubt whether any of us would preach no restraint.

Perhaps most of us, if left to ourselves, would settle for the set of restraints that fitted in best with our own personal desires and wishes for freedom.

However, those of us freethinking enough to look carefully at the evidence, and forced by that evidence to believe that God, the Creator of this planet, also lived on it as Jesus Christ, would not argue with His, sometimes surprising, recommendations. If God has spoken it would seem somewhat futile and selfish if we did not set aside our own set of morals in favour of His, as He would clearly have the wider view and know the long term effect of any set of restraints.

But this is not mere blind obedience. It also comes from seeing how remarkably sensible the guidelines are, in, for example, the Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 5-7). Negative perhaps in places (20 of them) but all of it seemingly of timeless value to us in a world whose fundamental desires seem hardly to have changed at all.

Most of us in this Association (and we are not a branch of a Community Standards Association) are involved in marriage and family counselling. We find that promiscuity is harmful; that pornography leads to promiscuity; that pornography can also lead to sexual violence.

ANTHONY BUSH,
Bristol Family Life Association

Mr McIlroy replies: I am accused by the chairman of Bristol Family Life Association ("To Proclaim and Uphold Christian Standards of Family Life and Public Morality") of inaccuracy when writing of "certain groups concerned about moral standards". The only justification Anthony Bush gives for this charge is that I linked his organisation with the Community Standards Association, and he points out that Bristol FLA is not a branch of CSA. I did not claim that it was, but wrote that the Community Standards Association operates under different names. My information was taken from a CSA leaflet listing its branches and similar groups. Bristol Family Life Association is seventh on the list. (Indeed much of the "Jottings" piece to which Mr Bush objects is based on publications and statements by the Community Standards Association.)

Mr Bush makes no attempt to defend or explain why the CSA wants education authorities to withdraw books by such authors as Barry Hines, Arnold Wesker and, of all people, Laurie Lee from school reading lists. Groups which are now ranting about the dangers of pornography are the successors of those who not long ago were warning all and sundry that masturbation could result in deafness, blindness, sterility, impotency, deformity, madness, separation from God and similar disasters. It is now generally accepted that masturbation is a harmless form of sexual release. And even if it were proved that pornography is harmful, condemnation of "A Kestrel for a Knave", "Chips With Everything" and "Cider With Rosie" widens the concept of pornography in a way that makes it ridiculous and meaningless.

Mr Bush invites us to "look carefully at the evidence" for God's existence, his creation of the planet and his return to earth in the person of Jesus Christ. We are frequently assured by earnest Christians that the "evidence" of such wonders will be found in God's holy word, i.e. the Bible. But does Mr Bush and "certain groups about moral standards" believe that this blood-drenched chronicle of violence, slaughter, disgusting practices, cruelty and treachery is suitable reading either in a family or a school setting?

And what is anti-social, enquires Mr Bush. Certainly violence, sexual assault, discrimination and uncontrolled exploitation of natural resources are high on the list of what I regard to be anti-social activities. So, too, is the setting up of cowboy counselling services through which puritanical, sex-obsessed and guilt-ridden Christians inflict incalculable psychological damage and misery on their victims.

WOMEN'S RIGHTS

In spite of Mr Francis Bennion's self-conscious attempts to be non-sexist with his "her or him" and "him and her", he succeeds in being sexist nonetheless with the usual trivialisation of women. (The Freethinker, July 1980).

One way to decide whether an article is sexist or not is to substitute a male character for the female one. Imagine if his article read: "Joe Brown obliged instantly. I did not even need to take him to lunch. We found a corner in the LSE warren, and I took out my pad. He did not in the least mind being interviewed standing up."

It is most disappointing that there is not more awareness in The Freethinker of women's rights, and animal rights (The Rationalist Press Association buffet in the zoo was reported without comment) as well as gay rights.

NORMA BENNEY

Perusal of The Freethinker over the last few years will show that all these important issues are covered. We aim to cover a wide range of topics, but our prime concern is the rights of the non-religious and the freethought outlook. Editor.

CATHOLICISM AND SECULARISM

Mr McIlroy is easily answered. (Letters, July). First of all, and for the benefit of your English readers, McIlroy, in spite of the "Mc", is an Irish Roman Catholic, not a Scottish Nonconformist name. Secondly, Mr McIlroy has never shown any backwardness about entering politics when it suited him. Could I therefore persuade him to write an article or a letter to The Freethinker objecting to citizens of the Republic of Eire — there are said to be about 1,000,000 in Britain — i.e. "aliens" in the United Kingdom, having a vote in Britain. No other country would allow this. It happens here because of the political power of the Pope's legions in Britain, a political power far, far, far beyond that of organised freethought in Britain or the National Secular Society.

Thirdly, while McIlroy was General Secretary of the NSS how many thousands flocked into the NSS through his campaigning? Maybe he wasn't preaching the right stuff? (I am sure he wasn't.) Fourthly, I began my letter, and this was the theme of it, by quoting a much better freethinker than Mr McIlroy. I quoted Mr Ridley saying that the Roman Catholic Church is the foremost opponent of freethought today. H. G. Wells would have agreed with that. Ditto Paul Blanchard and Avro Manhattan, etc. Why doesn't Mr McIlroy say it in his letter. Is there nothing he can agree with me about? ROGER SANTERRE

There was a laudatory article on the work of the Community Standards Association in a recent issue of "Housewives Today", a monthly journal which declares itself to be "supporting the policy of the British Housewives League". The author, Sue Evelyn, who is a member of the Association's Brighton and Hove branch, tells how one member was ordered by her doctor to take more exercise. Did the good lady take her walks along the sea front, in the park or on the nearby Sussex Downs? No! Miss Evelyn relates how the patient sacrificed herself in the interests of purity and moral standards: "She spent many hours daily walking round Brighton visiting newsagents and if she saw any pornographic magazines on display she asked to see the manager and gave him an anti-porn leaflet". Perhaps the porn-hunting trips exercised her imagination as well as her limbs.

W. Mc.

The Church of England raised the possibilities of religious broadcasting on the new fourth channel at a recent synod. "It is our opinion," said the

Bishop of Edmonton "that the approach to the fourth channel should be on an ecumenical basis..."

EVENTS

Belfast Humanist Group. Secretary: Wendy Wheeler, 30 Cloyne Crescent Monkstown, Co. Antrim. Tel: Whiteabbey 66752.

Brighton and Hove Humanist Group. Nicolas Walter: Humanism and Religion. Sunday, 7 September 5.30 pm. The Queen's Head, Queen's Road, Brighton (Junction Road entrance, opposite Brighton Station).

Havering and District Humanist Society. Frank Coffin: The Magistrate and the Community. Tuesday, 19 August. Stan Chisman: The Search for the Golden Rule. Tuesday, 2 September. Both 8 pm. Ring Romford 27858 for venue.

London Secular Group. (Outdoor meetings.) Thursday, 12.30 pm at Tower Hill; Sunday, 2—5 pm at Marble Arch. (The Freethinker and other literature on sale.)

London Young Humanists. Barbara Smoker: Easier than ABC—Alphabet reform. Sunday, 17 August, 7.30 pm. 13 Prince of Wales Terrace, W8.

Merseyside Humanist Group. Paul Ebsworth: Sexism— are we brainwashed by sexual conditioning? Monday, 18 August, 7.45 pm. 46 Hamilton Square, Birkenhead.

West Glamorgan Humanist Group. Summer social events—contact Georgina Coupland, Bishopston (828) 3631.

Humanist Holidays. Yuletide 1980. 24-28 December. Eastbourne. Hotel on promenade, £60 half board. Borj Cedria, Tunisia. 20-28 December. £157. Tour being planned. Easter 1981. Sorrento, Italy. Further details and inquiries to B. Beer, 58 Weir Road, London SW12 0NA.

The Brighton and Hove Humanist Group are intending to publish a quarterly newsletter. Brighton has a longstanding freethought tradition, with sale of literature and activities for over a century. Among the well-known freethinkers who have lived in the town are G. J. Holyoake, Herbert Spencer, Prince Kropotkin and Grant Allen. The group have recently found a more central meeting place at the Queen's Head, Queen's Road, Brighton (opposite Brighton station).

THE FREETHINKER

Editor: JIM HERRICK

News & Notes edited by Barry Duke

702 HOLLOWAY ROAD
LONDON N19 3NL
TELEPHONE: 01-272 1266

UK ISSN 0016-0687

The views expressed by contributors are not necessarily those of the Publishers or of the Editor.

"The Freethinker" was founded in 1881 by G. W. Foote and is published mid-monthly. Material submitted (including Letters and Announcements) must reach this office by the 20th of the preceding month.

SPECIAL POSTAL SUBSCRIPTION RATES

Inland and Overseas: Twelve months: £3.00 Six months: £1.75
U.S.A. and Canada: Twelve months: \$7.00 Six months: \$4.00

(Overseas subscribers are requested to obtain sterling drafts from their banks, but if the remittance is in foreign currency [including Eire] please add the equivalent of 55p or US \$1.00 for bank charges.)

Please make cheques, etc, payable to G. W. Foote & Company.