

# The Freethinker

secular humanist monthly

founded 1881

Vol. 100, No. 10

OCTOBER 1980

25p

## PUBLIC EXPENSE OF CHAPLAINCY SERVICES —NATIONAL SECULAR SOCIETY PROTEST

The National Secular Society has published a statement calling for chaplaincy services to be phased out. They have collated evidence indicating the expense of the service to hospitals, armed forces, and prisons and noted that at a time of sweeping cuts in public expenditure no one has called for the churches to pay for the provision of religious facilities for those who require them. The NSS questions the desirability of religious indoctrination of adults in captive situations.

The statement reads: According to the results of a survey published last month by the Bible Society, churchgoers comprise no more than 11 per cent of the English population. But as free citizens show less and less desire to attend religious services, the churches become all the more determined to retain captive audiences, such as those in the armed forces, in hospitals, and in prisons and detention centres.

The National Secular Society has collated, from official sources, the figures relating to public expenditure on chaplaincy services in those three types of institution. It appears that, at a conservative estimate, over £12-million a year is paid out of the public purse to provide chaplains for members of the armed forces, hospital patients, and prisoners, as follows:

### (a) Armed Forces

In June 1980, information obtained from the Ministry of Defence put the annual cost of the chaplaincy at "just under £8,000,000" ..... say £7,950,000

### (b) Hospitals

In February 1980, the DHSS disclosed that, as at September 1977 (the latest date for which figures were available), there were:

153 full-time hospital chaplains in England alone, whose annual salaries range from £5,000 to £5,971, according

to length of service (lowest possible) £765,000

3,000 part-time hospital chaplains (in England alone) at sessional fees varying from £6.80 to £26.91 (averaging, say £20 a week, as a conservative estimate) £3,000,000

£3,765,000

### (c) Prison Department Establishments

Whilst "it is not possible to attribute to the chaplaincy its portion of such costs as accommodation, fuel or common services," the Home Secretary stated in July 1980 that, for the financial year 1978-79, the cost of chaplains and paid visiting ministers in prisons and detention centres was as follows:

Salaries and allowances for full-time and part-time chaplains .....	£512,957
Fees paid to visiting ministers .....	£95,785
Religious education in penal establishments .....	£21,189
Prison Department grants to missions .....	£1,061

£630,992

£12,345,992

The above figures exclude not only the vast public expenditure on religious instruction in schools, but also on chaplains in universities, various residential institutions, the Houses of Parliament, embassies, and other recipients of an official chaplaincy service.

The National Secular Society has found no evidence that any of this public expenditure on chaplaincy services has been subjected to the economic cuts that have been inflicted recently on the social

services generally. Furthermore, the Society questions whether it is cost-effective or even desirable.

With regard to (a) the armed forces, it seems incongruous that by far the greatest share of the total expenditure on chaplaincy services should be devoted to the religious condition of those trained for warfare.

As for (b) hospital chaplaincies, the National Secular Society has no objection to special facilities being extended to clergy visiting any patients who specifically ask for them; but many patients are disturbed by noisy open services, especially hymn-singing in the wards, by unwanted visits from official chaplains, visiting ministers, and proselytising evangelists, and by the distribution of distressing religious tracts.

### Captive Audiences

Finally, the inmates of (c) penal institutions comprise a "captive audience" in the fullest sense; and while, admittedly, such institutions are not intended to be pleasant places, the punishment imposed by criminal courts is supposed to be limited to loss of liberty, not extended to indoctrination in controversial beliefs. True, adult prisoners have the right to refuse a visit by the chaplain, but most prefer to put up with it as a break from prison routine, even if there is no coercion in the matter. Over the years, several national and local secular humanist organisations have offered to provide official visitors for prisoners who would prefer a non-religious visitor — and, of course, these visitors would, unlike the chaplains, act in a voluntary capacity, not expecting to be paid out of the public purse — but the official response is always that such visitors must be in possession of visiting orders, so that they can visit only one prisoner each time, and, moreover, that the prisoner must forfeit a visit from a relative or friend.

In the case of young offenders, religious indoctrination is compulsory, and the tougher regimes introduced experimentally last year at two detention centres specifically include religious instruction and observance. Whether or not Christians object to their beliefs being forced on young offenders as part of the penal sentence of the courts, secularists certainly do object to it — and not only from the financial angle. These young convicts have all been subjected to religious instruction in school, and it has apparently failed to turn them into law-abiding citizens. Indeed, since religion is generally equated falsely with morality, there is the danger that, when youngsters become sceptical about religion, as most of them eventually do, some of them will abandon moral precepts with the religious doctrines and sanctions. It is the opinion of secular humanists that moral precepts should be soundly based on social reciprocity, not on questionable religious dogma. That which school religion has failed to achieve is hardly likely to be realised by the religious indoctrination of adults in captive situations.

The National Secular Society thus objects strongly on the grounds both of personal liberty and of public expenditure, to the provisions of chaplaincy services to captive members of the population, and urges the relevant authorities to phase out this service, leaving the churches concerned to provide such facilities when requested.

## WORLDWIDE

### BRITISH COLUMBIA

God is not a person, according to a Court of Appeal ruling in British Columbia. A man, charged with telling two people to start a fire, said: "Oh, God, let me get away with it just this once". His remark, recorded on a concealed microphone, was used in evidence by the prosecution, but the judge ruled that it constituted a private conversation and was not admissible as evidence. However, the appeal court decided that his appeal was evidence because God is not a person.

### GREECE

A play depicting church sex scandals has been cut and the producer and leading actress have been sentenced to five months' jail. The play, *The Saint of Preveza*, recounts the story of the Greek Orthodox Bishop of Stylianos of Prevenza, who was dismissed by a church court order for having girlfriends and seducing women during confessions. The play, which includes nude scenes, is continuing in a bowdlerised form, and the two given jail sentences have been freed pending an appeal.

### ITALY

The owners of a "weeping Madonna" have left their house and could be charged with fraud. A flower-bedecked shrine was created for the feast of the Bodily Assumption of the Virgin Mary, and neighbours shared food and wine before the shrine. When someone noticed paint tears rolling down the cheeks of the plaster, it was accepted as a miracle. Pilgrims came, visiting hours were arranged, donations were received and traffic became a nuisance. But a neighbour at the back of the house saw the owner squirting pinkish water with his son's water pistol at the statue.

### FINLAND

The Opposition Christian League in Finland wants a total ban on liquor, pornography and abortion. They supported an anti-beer march in Helsinki in September. The Finnish alcohol consumption is below the international average and, although alcoholism is recognised as an increasing problem in European countries, bigoted religious teetotalism is not a practical or sensible solution.

# The Sermon on the Mount as a Guide to Behaviour

G. A. WELLS

Professor Wells, author of "Did Jesus Exist?" and other works, has been prompted by a comment on the good sense of the Sermon on the Mount as a guide to behaviour to examine that Sermon in detail. He questions both its precepts and consistency.

Mr. Anthony Bush (Letters, August) holds that God, in the form of Jesus Christ, has given us, in Matthew chapters 5-7, guidelines for behaviour that are not only authoritatively binding but also "remarkably sensible". Let us examine some of the precepts in this Sermon on the Mount, supposing, with Mr. Bush, that they are not a motley collection taken from various sources and put into Jesus' mouth, but a single speech delivered by him. At 7: 24-7 he does use an elaborate simile to press home the point that his hearers would be well-advised to follow his precepts.

"The Jewish law forbad adultery, but for Jesus every one that looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart" (5: 28). Does this mean that the desire is as reprehensible as the action? Is there no virtue in resisting a desire? At verse 39 the audience is instructed not to resist evil. Surely he is not saying that no kind of crime should ever be punished. Did he perhaps mean that all punishment should be left to God? He certainly believed that the punishments of God would be certain and severe.

"Love your enemies . . . that ye may be sons of your Father which is in heaven: for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sendeth rain on the just and the unjust" (5: 44-5). Does God then make no distinction between the just and the unjust? That the sun rises and the rain falls without distinction for all men is not to be denied. But what of it if the unjust are to be in hell for ever (cf. verses 29-30)?

"In praying use not vain repetitions, as the Gentiles do: for they think that they shall be heard for their much speaking. Be not therefore like unto them: for your Father knoweth what things ye have need of before you ask him" (6: 7-8). Why, then, should we ask him, in our prayers, to "give us this day our daily bread" (verse 11) if he knows beforehand what we need? And why should we pray that he should not lead us into temptation (verse 13)? Why should God wish to lead us into temptation unless it suits his larger purpose? And then what would be the use of praying?

"Be not anxious for your life, what ye shall eat . . . nor yet for your body, what ye shall put on . . . Behold the birds of heaven, that they sow not, neither

do they reap . . . and your heavenly Father feedeth them". Has this advice saved either man or bird from starvation or cold?

"With what judgment ye judge ye shall be judged: and with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured unto you" (7: 2). Does not this sound rather like "an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth" (rejected at 5: 38)? Does it mean that if we judge our neighbour unjustly, we shall be judged unjustly by God?

It is not completely clear to whom all this is addressed. 5: 1 gives the impression that Jesus left the crowds and addressed only his disciples. 5: 11-12 reinforces this impression: "Blessed are ye when men persecute you . . . For so persecuted they the prophets which were before you". It is surely the disciples, not the multitude, who were the successors of the prophets, and also "the salt of the earth" (verse 13). However, at the end of the Sermon "the multitudes were astonished at his teaching" (7: 28). Whether it was addressed to them or to the disciples sometimes affects the interpretation. For instance: "Let your light shine before men that they may see your good works" (5: 16). Are these good works, which are to be shown to all the world, miracles which the disciples are to perform, or works of charity incumbent on all believers? The latter meaning seems excluded by what Jesus says in the next chapter: "When thou doest alms, let not thy left hand know what thy right hand doeth, that thine alms may be done in secret" (6: 3-4).

## Anger and Adversaries

More obviously sensible than anything I have so far mentioned is the injunction not to be angry without cause (5: 22)—until we discover that the manuscript evidence for the qualification "without cause" is poor enough for the R.V. and the N.E.B. to relegate it to the margin, and that commentators concede that it is probably a later addition to the original text. This is followed by the ruling: if someone has something against you, make haste to seek reconciliation with him in case he should take action against you. Luke's version of this saying (Luke 12: 58-9) makes Jesus advise us to be quit of our adversary before going with him to the magistrate. Are we to yield to our adversary whether we believe our cause to be just or unjust?

The dominant refrain in most of this Sermon is that the goods of this world are nothing in comparison with those offered by God in heaven to his faithful. Divine rewards are worth much more than human rewards (Matthew 6: 1-6). It is therefore the part of the sensible man to work for the former. The Christian who is aiming at everlasting life must

expect to wait. The New Testament sometimes suggests that the more wretched he is on earth, the more he forgoes, the more he suffers from the ingratitude or wickedness of his fellows, the more substantial will be his recompense in the other world. And perhaps part of the recompense will be the knowledge that those who had been more fortunate on earth had in due course been consigned to hell. Matthew seems to get a deal of satisfaction from flinging people into the outer darkness and listening to their weeping and gnashing of teeth. Commentators have noted his fondness for this phrase, which they call "typically Matthean".

The phrase is perhaps best known from the parable in ch. 22, where a man suddenly invited to a wedding feast is found not to be wearing a wedding garment, and is then bound and cast into the outer darkness. We are told that, after Jesus had told this parable, the Pharisees took counsel how they might entangle him in his talk. They were not very intelligent, if we can believe Matthew. They might, for instance, have asked him why the poor man was treated like a criminal because he had no wedding garment, or how he could be expected to have one if he was travelling on the road when he was suddenly bidden to the marriage. But the best the Pharisees were able to think of was whether it was lawful to give

tribute to Caesar.

In one passage, even the doctrine of great heavenly rewards is, by implication, queried. At Matthew 20: 20, Jesus is asked whether James and John may sit on his right and left hand in his kingdom. He does not ridicule the idea, but says that these seats are in the gift of his Father. But when the other disciples protest at the attitude of James and John, he suggests a different ideal, saying: "Whosoever would become great among you shall be your minister; and whosoever would be the first among you shall be your servant". Is this quite fair? The protesting disciples were, presumably, not speaking of the present life. They were willing to be humble now, but looked for dignity and authority in the kingdom of heaven. Jesus came to minister to men on earth and to die for them (verse 28), but he looked forward to sitting on a throne in heaven. Is he asking his disciples to continue their humble subservience in the next world, as well as in this? If so, that is the exact contrary of what he has been suggesting hitherto.

Christians are commonly offended if non-Christians query the sublimity of the Sermon on the Mount. But even apart from the fact that Luke gives a different version of it from Matthew, there are items in either version which are open to objection.

## "Babies for Burning" Exposed in Libel Case

The book *Babies for Burning* has become a classic example of throwing mud which sticks, influences politics, and takes years to remove. Even when the truth emerges, it is unsensational, sober and does not receive the publicity of the original scandalous allegations.

Susan Kentish and Michael Litchfield's *Babies for Burning* for a while became the Bible of the anti-abortion movement. It gave lurid accusations of "selling babies for soap", abortion horror stories, and "phantom" pregnancies. Some of the "evidence" related to the alleged diagnosis of Susan Kentish as pregnant, which she wasn't.

Since the original article *Phantom Babies* in the *News of the World* (1974) on which *Babies for Burning* (1975) was based, a saga of investigation, litigation and revelation has shown the book to be based on a string of untruths. *The Freethinker* criticised the book immediately it was published and was threatened by the authors with a libel case, to which we replied: "*The Freethinker* will not be muzzled". That threatened legal action was never taken.

The slow process of uncovering the flimsy evidence of the book has included a *Sunday Times* exposé headed "Abortion horror tales revealed as fantasies", and a libel action brought by the British Pregnancy Advisory Service (an organisation attacked by Kentish and Litchfield). The BPAS case was brought

to a conclusion when an apology along with a withdrawal of the accusations against BPAS was made by way of a Statement in Open Court read on behalf of Kentish and Litchfield in January 1978.

Further details of the way the authors gained their information was revealed in a recent court case brought by Mr Thomas Pond, who ran a small private pregnancy testing and information service in Ealing, London called Ladycare. In July 1980, he successfully sued the *News of the World* for libel and was awarded £40,000 damages and costs. Mr Pond was unable to employ lawyers and has spent years preparing his case. He claimed that conversations with Sue Kentish as reported in the newspaper were totally misleading. The jury unanimously found the libels on Mr Pond were proved.

Much of the case hinged round the diagnosis of Susan Kentish as pregnant. It became clear during cross-questioning that urine samples could have been changed. As Diane Munday of the BPAS has commented, "At long last, the story of lies, deception and fraud was brought out into the open".

The history of the book and its discrediting provide a case study in the origin of propaganda and its influence. The story is not quite over since the *News of the World* lawyers have served notice of appeal.

(continued on back page)

# Impressions of the Rationalist Movement in Peninsular India

G. N. DEODHEKAR

For most people in the West, India is a land of superstition, religions, cults and godmen, sometimes attracting followers in the affluent West. It hardly seems ground where rationalist ideas could exist or survive for very long. However, serious students of comparative religion must undoubtedly be aware of the fact that Buddhism and Jainism postulated no deity and constituted challenges to orthodoxy in ancient times, and down-to-earth materialist schools of thought also flourished in pre-Islamic India. The modern rationalist movement can be said to date back to the nineteenth century with the influence of English education.

Peninsular India consists of six states each based on a separate language with areas varying in size between that of England and Great Britain, and with populations ranging from around 25 million to 50 million. During a recent visit home, I took the opportunity to tour around Southern India using an India Rail Pass which gave me freedom of the first class railways for three weeks for under £40.

The state which interested me most was Andhra Pradesh — chief city Hyderabad — where my hosts were Mr Ramamurty and his wife V. Subbamma. He is the General Secretary of the Radical Humanist Association (followers of the late M. N. Roy) and the guiding spirit behind the well-organised Andhra Pradesh Rationalist Association. The three of us formed a speaking team to tour Andhra Pradesh. I spoke on secularism in Britain, pointing out that, though the Church was established and well-entrenched in the state in Britain, social issues such as family planning or abortion were generally decided by Parliament on secular or rational grounds, in contrast with the position of India where, in spite of its being a secular state, religious divisions and religious considerations were allowed to play too large a part in deciding social issues. Ramamurty translated my English speech into Telegu and also usually chaired the meeting. His wife, V. Subbamma, a powerful speaker in Telegu, spoke on Women's Rights and had the audience in stitches with her barbed shafts and homely satire.

When I spoke to the sociology students of Hyderabad University and to a group of lecturers at Warangal University, naturally, there was no need for translation. We spoke at a town meeting in Hyderabad, another in the twin city of Secunderabad, and then moved through Warangal to Vijaywada, Elhuru, Charala and Nellore. The last three places drew large audiences, the largest at Nellore being about 800 to 900 testifying to the

solid educational work being done by the Andhra Pradesh Rationalists. They have organised the state Association as a Federation of District Associations, which in turn have branches at Taluk level (about ten taluks to a District, which would be the size of two or three medium-sized English counties).

At Vijaywada, I was a guest of the Atheist Centre for two days. This is not affiliated to the Rationalist Association, but its work is of a complementary nature and intensive in form. The late Mr Gora left a large family, all devoted atheists, including two doctors. They form a unique team of social workers and the Atheist Centre is a beehive of social work of all kinds, like a Gandhian Ashram; only better for being based on non-religious, rational and atheist ideas. An unusual feature is the social support which the centre provides, when performing marriages across caste or religious boundaries. My visit happened to coincide with such a marriage and a suitable speech was required of me; I was happy to oblige.

## Acceptance of Rationalism

It is a measure of the acceptance of rationalism in the political life of India that an active and leading radical humanist and a distinguished lawyer was appointed, some years ago, as the Chief Justice of Andhra Pradesh. I called on Mr Justice S. Shivrao, now retired, but active in the movement, during my stay in Hyderabad. I expect it will be some time before we get a Lord Chief Justice in England who is also a well-known rationalist.

Further north in Andhra in the shipyard town of Vizag, there flourishes another Atheist Society, rather Marxist oriented I was told, but it did not lie on my route to Madras which is the headquarters of the Indian Rationalist Association, a Federation of the State Federations. The office is run from their home by a devoted husband and wife team as Secretary and Treasurer respectively. (They were my hosts.) The Editor of the Association's journal *Freethought* also lives within a few yards.

The organised rationalist movement in fact began in Bombay in March 1930 as the Anti-Priestcraft Association to be revived in Madras in December 1949 under its new name and the office has remained there ever since. Branches exist in different parts of the state of Tamilnad of which Madras is the chief city. However, the very wide and deep atheist-rationalist movement which spread across Tamilnad under the charismatic leadership of E. V. Ramaswamy ("Periyer") is outside the Indian Rationalist Association. It goes by the name of Dravid Kazhagam and has substantial premises and runs a

monthly called *The Modern Rationalist*. The movement is an expression of Tamil nationalism and is staunchly anti-North, anti-Hindi, and anti-Brahmin. Its political counterpart though split into two parts has formed the Government of Tamilnad for many years, despite the Indira-Janata waves in the remainder of India—no mean achievement. It has modified its anti-North stand and co-operates with All India Parties in electoral alliances. The ideological movement, the Dravid Kazhagam however seems to be enmeshed in its own slogans and therefore cannot appeal to the rest of India and has remained apart.

From Madras I went to Bangalore in the state of Karnatak (chief city, Mysore) and addressed a meeting of the city's rationalists. They and their leader Prof. Dharmalingam seemed to be mostly Tamils living in Bangalore, a spray from the Dravid wave, but still a part of the Indian Rationalist Association and therefore a bridge between the Indian Rationalist Association and the Dravid Kazhagam. There is a branch in the Kolar Goldfields, but otherwise the entire state seems to have remained impervious to any rationalist organisation.

Southwest of Karnatak lies the communist governed state of Kerala. I could not visit any part of Kerala, but I understand that the Kerala branch of the Indian Rationalist Association is stronger and more widespread than even the Andhra one. Kerala communists seem to have a benevolent attitude to the rationalist struggle against religion, whereas in the rest of India they give an impression of apathy. Many Keralites emigrate from the Kerala homeland into different parts of India and where three Keralites are gathered together, I was told, they tend to form a Rationalist Association, rather than a temple.

### Miracle Exposure Campaign

Bombay (in Maharashtra) and Ahmedabad and Baroda (in Gujerat) saw a revival of rationalist organisations in the early seventies, sparked off by the Divine Miracle Exposure Campaign led by the late Dr Abraham T. Kovoov, a Keralite emigre who was the President of the Ceylon Rationalists. I met the Bombay Association's Executive and was interested to find a judge of the Bombay High Court among them. They will be hosts when the All India Rationalist Associations' Congress meets there in December this year.

Last, but not least, is the Indian Secular Society at Poona (Maharashtra) led by Prof. A. B. Shah. While not neglecting the campaign against Hindu orthodoxy, the Indian Secular Society is perhaps the only organisation which has paid any serious attention to the need to spread rationalist and secularist ideas among the Muslims in India. To this end it has encouraged an association of forward-looking Muslims, the Muslim Truth Seekers Society. It has particularly highlighted the problem of

divorced Muslim women and campaigns for reform of Muslim Personal Law as an immediate measure and the introduction of a Common Civil Law for all citizens as a long-term measure. The strength of both organisations is in Maharashtra only and there seems to have been inadequate response from rationalists in other states who appear to be engrossed in the struggle against the Hindu caste system. The fact that the feudal and inegalitarian structure of Hindu society needs to be replaced by a modern one is accepted by most people.

The law recognises no castes and when governments do so it is for extending positive discrimination in favour of backward castes. Reforms in the Hindu Marriage Act and Interstate Succession have also made desirable changes. There is no corresponding change among the Muslims, who remain entrenched behind outmoded laws and ideas, nursing fundamentalist notions. The rise of the Ayatollahs in Iran and the recent "straying pig" riots in Uttar Pradesh suggest that all rationalists will need to pay serious attention to the problem of reforming Muslim attitudes, laws and institutions.

## OBITUARY

### Mrs. M. Millard

Humanists in the Brighton area were shocked and deeply saddened by the sudden death of Marjory Millard early on Bank Holiday Monday. She had attended a meeting the previous evening and became unwell on returning home. A heart attack followed and death took place before the doctor arrived.

Although Mrs. Millard was 78 she was very active and lively and her death was quite unexpected. She was involved in various organisations during her lifetime and was a staunch worker for the Brighton and Hove Humanist Group. She assisted her late husband, Cecil Millard, when he was group secretary and took over the post when he died in 1976. Last year she resigned the secretaryship but continued to serve on the committee and as social secretary.

Members of the family conducted a committal ceremony at Woodvale Crematorium, Brighton. Mr. R. J. Delaurey, chairman of Brighton and Hove Humanist Group, spoke of Marjory Millard's splendid work for the Group. She combined efficiency with a passionate concern for the welfare and happiness of others. Shortly before her death she suggested that the Group should adopt Chesham House, a local holiday home for mentally disabled children.

Mrs. Millard had requested that flowers should not be sent to her funeral and it was to Chesham House that memorial donations were made.

# The National Federation of Freethinkers in France

GUILLAUME ROBICHEZ

Continuing our occasional series outlining details of freethought and humanist movements throughout the world, Guillaume Robichez gives an account of the French Federation of Freethinkers.

The Fédération Nationale des Libres-Penseurs de France (or LP as it is commonly called) traces its origins back to the eighteenth century, when in 1794, during the French Revolution, a short-lived gazette, *Le Libre Penseur*, was produced. Ever since the Renaissance freethinkers have existed in France called "libertins" in the seventeenth century and *Philosophes* later (an appellation made famous by such men as Voltaire, Diderot and Rousseau).

It was not until 1881 that an organised association was founded. The LP afterwards took its part in the great struggles for the secularisation of the school and the state (an aim which was achieved in 1905), and has always been fighting to counteract the mischievous influence of religion. After the Second World War, it had to resist, albeit successfully, the attempts to restore the pre-Republican system of education, which culminated with the Debré and Guermeur Acts, all voted under the Fifth Republic.

The LP (a member of the World Union of Freethinkers) has a membership of around 10,000. It issues a monthly paper, *La Raison*, the circulation of which is about 30,000. It is allowed (as are other humanist societies) 15 minutes of radio broadcasting

## DISARMAMENT

There has been a revival of serious public debate about disarmament in recent months. A pamphlet published by the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament by E. P. Thompson, *Protest and Survive*, has provoked much public comment.

A large march and rally organised by CND will be supported by members of the National Secular Society. It is to take place on Sunday, 26 October, assembling at 11 am. at the Marble Arch end of Hyde Park. A rally in Trafalgar Square from 2.30 pm. will include speakers from all political parties. ("*Protest and Survive*" is available price 45p from CND, 29 Great St. James Street, London WC1).

## CAPITALIST CHRISTIANITY

Mr Lacy, a born-again Christian business man, said in an interview in "The Times" that creation itself was capitalistic in form. "Seed is capital. From the parable of the talents, it is very clear that Christ applauded the one who invested the talents."

a month, on Sunday morning; in addition, nearly every year it is given a 15 minute period on television. These conditions make it difficult for us to convey our message, but the trend is *not* towards the decline of the Association.

The platform of the LP includes the fight for the complete secularisation of school and state, the fight against religions, sects and irrational trends in general (in France that mostly means the Catholic Church), the furtherance of a rationalist and scientific approach to reality, and the consideration of all issues (including political) that concern defence of freedom at large. Incidentally, there are Annual General Meetings taking place at the end of August, to which NSS members are warmly invited.

The most recent Annual Report spoke of our primary aim as anti-religious and anti-dogmatic activity. This has included condemnation of the mullahs of Iran, protest at the use of public funds to welcome the pope, and participation in public debate on "religion and war", "atheism" and so on. More general themes have been the rights of women (especially in relation to abortion), freedom of information in a democracy, anti-militarism, and ecological concerns. The LP is also "a melting-pot of philosophical research and self-education."

In conclusion, on behalf of the Federation Nationale, I should like to extend my warmest greetings to all members of the NSS and readers of *The Freethinker*.

A survey conducted at Priestlands Comprehensive School in Lymington indicated that church-going is not a favourite Sunday event. Only 13 per cent listed going to church as a Sunday activity. Much more popular were eating a "special roast lunch" (89 per cent) and listening to the radio (78 per cent).

Catholic hospitals in the United States of America have been forbidden to sterilise women for contraceptive reasons by cutting or tying the fallopian tubes. The Catholic Bishops ruled that the operation is immoral and alien to the mission of Catholic hospitals.

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## "UPRIGHT CHRISTIAN" KILLERS

"You are upright Christian men acting, I am satisfied, out of misguided motives. . ." "These are two Christians in every sense of the word. . ." A judge used these words to describe two men who killed a mentally disturbed woman during a bizarre exorcism ceremony.

John Sherwood and Anthony Strover were members of a religious sect known as the Invisible Church and Mr Sherwood was an itinerant preacher. He met Miss Beatrix Rutherford while preaching at a bus queue. Miss Rutherford was suffering mental distress after the break up of a lesbian relationship. Mr Sherwood moved into her flat in an attempt to help her. She had been visited by her cousin, a Catholic nun, while in a disturbed state of mind: she claimed to be a black witch and thought she was responsible for radiating evil and was a mass murderer.

On the day of Miss Rutherford's death she had woken up appearing to be in a trance. Instead of seeking medical help the two men joined her in a prayer session and went with her to a religious meeting.

When they returned Sherwood said he had seen "another body over Beatrix's body". He thought it was a demon and "became filled with hatred for this evil spirit". "I remember his telling me his name, it was Jack the Ripper. . . I am not exactly conscious of what I did, but I know I was forcing the devil out through pockets of air, trying to push down." Mr Strover, described as a "Christian brother" of Sherwood, admitted she had been punched in the stomach and hit: "I think I was using quite a lot of force. At the end I was exhausted." Beatrix Rutherford died of injuries received.

After her death they prayed all night and next day, believing that the Lord would bring her back to life. Strover said: "I didn't believe that in exorcism the actual person could be hurt, that it was just the spirits being cast out."

The judge, who described them as "Christians in every sense of the word", said "on the other hand by sustained violence life has been taken. It is a difficult case." He sentenced them to three years jail each. Before sentence, Sherwood (a former actor) delivered an address saying that exorcism was becoming more and more important in the world: "We must consider that Jesus Christ has victory over the devil, and what an evil force the devil can be in causing things which were never intended to happen."

As Terry Mullins, Secretary of the National Secular Society, pointed out in a letter published in *The Guardian* (20 September): "If death had occurred during some political demonstration, would the judge have allowed one of those convicted to

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make a speech in justification from the dock?"

Tragic cases such as this have occurred several times in the last few years. The combination of mental disturbance and religious fanaticism can prove fatal. Perhaps the Bible should be marked with a Government Health Warning.

Would amateur exorcists embark on such awful experiments if the clergy did not give respectability to the idea and encourage belief in demons? A Benedictine monk, Dom Roger Petitpierre, told the jury that he believed there were hundreds of thousands of "little devils" on earth: "The New Testament is quite clear they exist."

In a letter to *The Times*, Cardinal Suenens commenting on possession said: "There is a serious need in the Christian Church to strongly affirm to today's world our common belief in the existence of the evil one." Of what use is his warning of an "unhealthy tendency to multiply exorcism and deliverance sessions" when he has encouraged belief in the evil one?

Commenting in the Letters column of *The Guardian* on the judge's reference to "these upright Christian men", Nicolas Walter, of the Rationalist Press Association, said that their behaviour was indeed directly inspired by the Gospels. He asked: "May we now be spared some of the traditional cant about the unique moral value of Christianity in education, in the media, and in society at large, and may we also be spared some of the traditional Christian demands for the suppression of other ideologies or publications held to be harmful?"

## SELF-PERSECUTION

Two Christian fundamentalists were found dead in their flat in New Castle, Pennsylvania, USA. A scribbled note on a calendar in their flat read: "Thank the Lord for two weeks without food and water. We could only do it with his strength."

Their flat-mate, described as a "minister of the Christian Charismatic Movement", found them. She said "They were fasting and praying for their families who have persecuted against them."

## MORAL EDUCATION CONFERENCE

An International Congress on Moral Education in Brussels in August called for a high level international Working Party to be set up to research European moral education and recommend what provisions should be made for children's moral



# S AND NOTES

education. The Congress was sponsored by UNESCO, the Belgian Ministry of Education and the International Humanist and Ethical Union, and organised by the Belgian Humanist Association.

The Congress dealt broadly with secular alternatives to religious instruction. Lectures and discussions dealt with "moral education" in society. Dr Harry Stopes-Roe spoke about the situation in England and James Hemming (President of the British Humanist Association) talked about "The New Man".

The resolution calling for a Working Party was drafted by Richard Benjamin, a member of the National Secular Society. Its aims are to ascertain "what is the current practice in different countries with regard to moral education and education in human relationships", to find out "the extent to which such education is controlled by religious or secular interests" and to establish how this is manifested in courses such as "Human Relationships, Citizenship, and Social Studies".

## SHROUD MAY BE FORGED

A leading American Scientist believes that the Shroud of Turin is a medieval fake. Dr Walter C. McCrone is a microscopist who has studied fragments of the shroud, and he announced his views, when lecturing to the British Society for the Turin Shroud. Dr McCrone said that he could not prove it was a fake, but thought that a carbon 14 date test would give a date of "August 1356".

He said: "It is entirely possible that an artist could have done it much earlier than that, but it was very fashionable to make frauds at that time." He added: "There is a great deal of artist's pigment on the Shroud. A major portion of the image is in artist's pigment. How he did it I cannot say." Dr. McCrone's research showed visible amounts of red oxide similar to artist's iron-rich earth pigments such as red ochre.

A group of scientists studying the Shroud are to release their results in October. It is expected that they will come to no conclusion about its authenticity. Demand for more tests such as carbon dating have been revived by the pronouncements.

## MAN BITES GOD

A religious couple in Nashville, USA, had a brain wave when they decided to make cookies with Biblical texts on them. The Scriptural cookies are selling well to ministers, religious camp directors

and choir leaders throughout the States. The couple, Mary and Frank English, have been delighted by the response: "One woman in our church starts each day with a Scriptural Cookie. For her it has become a sacred ritual."

The couple have many ideas for religious goodies and are thinking of starting a religious resource centre.

## ABOLISHING DEATH PENALTY

Amnesty International is organising an appeal to the United Nations General Assembly calling for the abolition of the death penalty throughout the world. Signatures have been canvassed and the statement emphasises that "the abolition of the death penalty in all countries would represent a great advance in the respect of governments for the human person." The statement also affirms that the "death penalty is incompatible with the right to life and the prohibition of cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment".

The British Section of Amnesty is organising a Prisoner of Conscience week from 12 to 19 October highlighting the different faces of imprisonment. (*Amnesty, Tower House, 8 Southampton Street, London WC2E 7HF.*)

Seventy-two per cent of Australians believe that if a patient suffering from an incurable and distressing illness wishes to end his life, a doctor should be allowed to supply the means. Twenty-four per cent of people disagree, while four per cent were undecided. A recent Australian Gallup Poll showed this large majority in favour of euthanasia.

## Freethinker Fund

The fund total for the summer months is usually lower than at other times of the year, but has been particularly disappointing recently. We are very anxious to increase publicity and activity as the centenary year approaches. Your donations enable *The Freethinker* to be kept at a very reasonable price and substantially contribute to costs. Please keep sending them.

Many thanks to the following for their generous donations: I. Barr, £3; D. Behr, 63p; J. W. Buck, £2; W. M. Duane, £2; D. Fyfe, £1; F. R. Griffin £7; F. C. Hoy, £5; J. Lippitt, £2; J. Manus \$3; J. Meldrum, £2; A. E. Morris, £2; F. Muniksmas, £3; A. W. Negus, £1; D. S. Pickett, £1; J. F. Simpson, £2; J. Sutcliffe, £1; P. Willig, £7; R. G. Wood, 50p; D. Wright, £3.

Total for the period 20/8/80 to 19/9/80. £45.13 and \$3.

# BOOKS

THE EXISTENCE OF GOD by R. Swinburne. Clarendon Press, OUP, £13.

At first glance this book may seem a rather profound philosophical attempt by a theologian to put forward arguments for the support of the existence of a deity. On closer examination I found the arguments used spurious and in no way convincing although a theist would doubtless claim there is evidence enough in this book for God.

Swinburne makes his task harder by trying to suggest the idea of God on an inductive basis rather than the normal theological approach of Aristotelian deductive logic. Put crudely, the difference between the two methods is that induction works from individual instances to a general concept, whereas deductive logic moves from an overall idea to seek justification in particular empirical investigation and is the method most widely used by scientists carrying out experimentation.

Swinburne attempts to use the old Aquinas chestnut of the existence of the universe being indicative of a creator, but he still does not answer the question if God made the universe who or what made God?—maybe another God?—and another God making that one. . .? To be fair Swinburne tries to use probability theory to suggest the idea of God, but his evidence is subjective and as he says himself, "When I come to discuss any argument I will consider what is the most appropriate division of evidence." When the arguments that Swinburne outlines are looked at there is a strong case for saying that they are deductive rather than inductive. After all, to conduct an enquiry on an inductive basis, it helps to have observed phenomena. As yet I have not seen or heard of anyone who can put forward convincing evidence of seeing God, apart perhaps from Moses who saw God's backside on a mountain top a few thousand years ago.

Nevertheless this is not sufficient to deter Swinburne from issuing pronouncements concerning the almighty. He accepts that the creator is omniscient, omnipotent and free and yet fails to see the apparent contradiction between this concept of the creator and man, presumably a work of creation being of limited knowledge, limited power and unfree. This issue becomes further blurred in chapters 11 and 12, when the author seems to support evolutionary and scientific models of the universe which are logically incompatible with the idea of God.

Throughout this book Swinburne suggests that it is best to opt for the simplest explanation. In chapter 5 he puts forward theistic notions as being relatively simple hypotheses. In a sense he is correct as theism is a simple notion, but I am highly critical of its ability as an idea, to explain experienced phenomena. I see no reason for assuming that the more simple and straightforward the hypothesis, the

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higher its probability of accurate prediction. Indeed, if anything the converse of this dictum is nearer the mark. As Swinburne himself elaborates, "In passing from Newton's laws to Einstein's there is I believe considerable loss of simplicity".

Early scientific explanations were simple, but, as mankind has made further discoveries over the centuries, myths such as the idea that the earth is flat and that thunder and lightning are the wrath of the gods have been dispelled. The more the accumulation of knowledge the better the predictive powers of a viable hypothesis. Swinburne is correct in suggesting that Einstein's laws on relativity are more complex than Newton's, since Newton had less background knowledge to formulate his theories from than Einstein. It is possible that in a hundred year's time mankind will look on Einstein's theories in a similar way to our present approach to Newton, that is valid in certain cases, but not as good in explanatory power as the current theorems on matter.

The idea of God is an outdated one which the overwhelming weight of scientific evidence rejects rather than confirms. It is all very well for Swinburne to claim "That if I have a glimpse of Heaven or a vision of God, that is grounds for me and others to suppose that I do," but that is personal subjective evidence which cannot be verified, just as it would be if I assert that I have seen a seven-footed rhinoceros trotting through the kitchen. Incidentally Swinburne does not think it odd that when people have religious experience of the dead, the dear departed spirit has a complete change of character and also acquires the remarkable ability to converse in a new language. The example he cites is the vision of Fatima in Portugal of the Virgin Mary. Not only was Mary conversing in Portuguese but was wearing typical Portuguese peasant dress. Heaven is truly a miraculous place. Not only are the world's languages taught free of charge; you can also do a quick change act in the heavenly wardrobe from Palestinian garb of two thousand years ago into early twentieth century Iberian peasant's costume.

As further evidence of God's miraculous powers, Swinburne cites the case of death! This he explains is a limit to the period of suffering on planet earth. But surely this poses the question: if God is omnipotent why allow man to suffer at all? Or does God indulge in the occasional act of sadism to relieve the boredom of being trapped for ever in an eternal heaven? Perhaps we shall never know.

Furthermore it seems we shall never know God, since, although Richard Swinburne has made a valiant effort to prove the existence of God, I am

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afraid to say that his evidence—to be kind—is very patchy. The only person who could confirm God's existence forgot to take his instamatic camera with him to the top of Mount Sinai so that we should have a picture of a posterior for posterity.

KEN WRIGHT

**THE BETRAYAL OF YOUTH** by James Hemming. Marion Boyars, £5.95.  
**THE TAMARISK TREE 2** by Dora Russell. Virago, £8.95.

The assertion implied in the title of James Hemming's book, that youth has been or is about to be betrayed, is matched by the firm statement in his sub-title, "Secondary Education Must Be Changed". James Hemming writes as a former teacher, who has worked in educational research, industrial relations and counselling and who has lectured on educational topics in this country and abroad. His arguments are supported by evidence about the constitution of the human brain and the ways in which different parts control the actions and reactions of the body. His principal contention in this respect is that excessive importance has been paid to the "left-hemisphere functioning" of the brain and not enough to the "right-hemisphere functioning". In other words, society has come to esteem academic values at the expense of more creative functions. The educational system is designed to develop left-hemisphere functions, which include logic, analysis and objective, intellectual and rational approaches, in contrast to the right-sided approach which includes intuition and synthesis and the sensuous, metaphoric and imaginative.

James Hemming would not claim that a great deal of this is new. Nevertheless, he presents his arguments in a lively and readable manner. He emphasises the well-known facts that the educational system is directed primarily towards the obtaining of qualifications and that universities and the world of employment between them exercise a stranglehold on the curriculum in the majority of our schools. He remarks that, in face of the waste of talent that all this implies and the failure to encourage ability or even interest among so many of the young, it is hardly surprising that some writers, and he names Ivan Illich, author of *Deschooling Society* among them, should "have given up hope of reform and called for an entirely fresh start, in which education grows not from schools, subjects and tests, as at present, but from the individual drives of curiosity and search, supported by networks of learning and teaching rooted in the com-

munity itself". Yet, even as he says this, he realises that "schools are not going to disappear overnight" and that the evolutionary changes desired by those who look for a radical transformation must still be a long way ahead. Accordingly, he suggests that changes of method and outlook must be considered that are reasonably feasible in the near future. If one wished to be unkind, one could say that all he has to offer is such ideas as that schools should be organised more intelligently and more sympathetically than at present, that head teachers should be chosen with more regard to what they will have to do in the school than in relation to those qualities which show to best advantage in an interview and that the curriculum should be reformed to take far more account of the essential development of "personal wholeness" than the mere accumulation of facts or academic ideas. Yet, such proposals, even if they are not unfamiliar to anyone who has thought about education in the last half-century or so, cannot be over-emphasised.

One additional element on which James Hemming insists is the great capacity that, despite all the discouragement in the educational system, he still finds in youth. He remains an optimist. Noting that conventional belief has ceased to have anything to offer, he looks at the interest which young people show in the excitement of a rapidly changing world and he says:

"I cannot believe that this 'mighty sum of things', which manifests itself through infinite energy, potential, wonder and beauty, as well as through our own being, does not carry within it enough excitement and inspiration to engage the imagination of the young and lift their awareness from absorption with the trivial into a sense of the deeper implications of existence, and so give significance to their lives. Modern youth are themselves eager to pursue the endless quest; it is they who have become engrossed by ideas of exploring inner space and consciousness raising."

On his last page, James Hemming calls for a vigorous, concerted drive to raise the overall educational quality of the secondary schools. Few would dissent. All that is now necessary is to persuade the various instruments of central and local government and the teaching profession, not to mention the general public, to agree on the means.

Dora Russell, the author of *The Tamarisk Tree 2* is not so directly concerned with theory of education as is James Hemming. Yet, she is as firmly convinced as he of the need for radical change. The second wife of Bertrand Russell, she founded with him an independent — and independent-minded — school at Beacon Hill in Hampshire at the end of the 1920s and, in this second volume of her autobiography, she tells the story of the school up to the first years of the war. The initial prospectus for the school outlines the kind of aims that would certainly chime

with James Hemming's wishes, but Beacon Hill was run for a small number of children of fee-paying parents only and, before the difficulties of war made it close, it did not have the opportunity to develop sufficiently to face the problems of older children and to contend with the examination system. Nevertheless, there is enough in the book to prompt any thinking teacher, or administrator, or, for that matter any parent or individual citizen, to ask whether all our schools could not learn something from the experiments of a clear-sighted pioneer who combined great understanding of children with a genuine sympathetic desire to discover the best means of enabling each one to reach as far as possible towards his greatest potential. At the end she asks, "Was it all worthwhile?" Her answer is, of course, that it was. The children in her school "were not fed illusions, but neither did they lack ideals. So equipped, children should be able to adapt to whatever kind of life the future might bring."

T. F. EVANS

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**LOUIS EVELY ONCE A PRIEST** by Neville Cryer, Mowbray, £5.25

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The smiling face on the cover seems to indicate that the story to be told will not be a Greek tragedy of frustrated ambition, but a Comedy of Errors, illustrating the unpredictable nature of human behaviour.

Louis Evely was ordained a priest of the Roman Catholic Church on the fourth of April 1937 in the Cathedral at Malines in Belgium. He remained a priest until 1968, in which year he obtained permission from Rome to return to the "lay state" within the Church. He did not marry until 4th December 1971.

As Mr Cryer writes: "one can appreciate the sense of triumph amongst Louis' critics when three years after his return to the lay state he announced his marriage to Mary van der Meersch, who was now divorced. For such critics it supplied the proof they needed that as always it was because of a woman that he had wanted to give up the priesthood". Louis and Mary had been friends for twenty years.

From the time of his ordination Louis had been employed as a teacher in Catholic schools for boys. During the war when the schools were compelled to close, Louis disappeared in order to render services to the Maquis. He provided them with the services of a chaplain and other services of a more military nature.

After the war the soldier returned to teaching boys. Apart from his scholastic activities he made quite a name for himself as a preacher and author of theological books. In 1948 Cardinal van Roey appointed Evely to be the principal of the Cardinal Mercier College — an important post which could have led to higher promotion in the church. We

know now that the priest was beginning to crave for something that no advancement in the church could possibly provide. The church was gradually becoming a spiritual prison from which his sub-conscious mind was seeking an escape. His life as a priest came to an end in 1968.

I cannot believe that any priest can find it perfectly easy to leave the priesthood. It is easier I imagine to leave the church altogether, than for a priest to return to the laity. I have no doubt that Louis Evely found the human situation quite impossible and this must have contributed to his final decision to find strength and companionship in marriage.

Louis, I fancy, was never entirely without money, and was certainly never without friends, and as a married man he could not fail to discover the supreme importance of both. Friends and money enabled Monsieur and Madame Evely to establish a comfortable home somewhere in the South of France where they still live happily together. The Evely home has become an unusual kind of guest house made use of by small groups of people who still regard the ex-priest as their spiritual leader and teacher. He and his wife provide a pleasant retreat for these chosen groups, and they help to keep the place going. Madame is said to be an excellent cook, there is a swimming pool and beautiful scenery. Regarded as a holiday home it sounds quite attractive. There seems no reason why the *Freethinker* should not wish them well in so brave an enterprise.

We can admire courage in any shape or form, but as a contribution to secular humanism we must question the value of this particular revolt against the authority of the Catholic Church. I cannot feel sure that the rebel priest has achieved complete freedom of thought. The fact that he insists so strongly that he has not "lost the faith" seems to keep open the possibility of reconciliation between priest and pope at some future date. For the time being he is willing to be misunderstood. Such a state of mind seems more like a conversion from Catholic to Protestant, than a movement in the direction of secular humanism.

The author of this little book makes it clear that he is writing of a personal friend, whom he likes and admires. Nonetheless his friend remains something of a mystery to him, being neither a good Catholic nor a bad one. The fact is not explicitly stated but the author is, I believe, a priest of the Church of England, and I suspect that he finds in the conduct of his friend some justification for liberal Anglican Christianity.

PETER CROMMELIN

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**An international Islamic conference on the mass media at Jakarta has called for censorship in Islamic countries of news unfavourable to the Islamic world.**

# CINEMA

**UNE SEMAINE DE VACANCES (AA)** Curzon Cinema, London. English subtitles.  
**MY AMERICAN UNCLE (A)** Academy Cinema, London. English subtitles.

Part of the charm of French films lies in that voracious appetite both for food and learning which seems to emanate from the screen, tempered by a finesse of the palate and the intellect. Since the New Wave broke, over 20 years ago, French and French/Swiss directors have devoted a large amount of footage to children studying at home and in the classroom. Over the past ten years or so, French teachers, students and thinkers have been reappraising their education system. The events of '68 raised many expectations, but achieved little of what was intended, and then there is the growing popularity of television, a mixed blessing.

Bertrand Tavernier addressed these problems, albeit superficially, in *A Week's Holiday*, set in his home town of Lyon. Nathalie Baye, luminous and totally believable, plays Laurence, a 31-year-old secondary-school teacher. Finding her overwrought, Laurence's doctor prescribes a week's holiday. During that time, she complains to friends about her pupils' telly-numbered minds and clichéd utterances, comforts Lucie, a pupil who comes to her with the pathetic confession that she thinks she is not intelligent, and visits her prematurely aged parents in a remote village. As a dissection of the French educational system or a study of nervous collapse, this film does not work, but that is not the aim. Tavernier is didactic, but in a gentle, humorous way, if marred by a tendency to gild the lily and to labour the point. In a scene where friends prepare a mouthwatering picnic and discuss educational theory (you see what I mean about French film!) Laurence's boyfriend says that children must be allowed certainty before they can be taught to doubt. The certainty of being loved for oneself, of being understood. This film makes a cogent plea to the older generation to love and know the young — and to stay young themselves.

One of the abiding images from *A Week's Holiday* is of a dank, unwelcoming back courtyard. A small boy clambers up the stairs, bent almost double by his load of groceries. There are strong images of isolated, hard-done-by children, too, in *My American Uncle*, the latest film by Alain Resnais, whose earlier masterpieces include *Hiroshima Mon Amour*. Two little girls at tenement windows, one above the other. Upper child lowers doll on a string to one below and hauls it up a few moments later, minus a leg. Grandfather to small boy: "Top of the class — fifteen francs; second place — ten; third place — five; fourth or below — my foot in your backside." Grandfather means business. These children are two of the three very different protagonists, whose lives

this film follows and who are destined to meet and clash. They are also fated, as happens in civilised society, to encounter rejection and betrayal and emotional blackmail, to fight and win and then lose their spoils, or lose the urge to keep them, to be driven almost to self-destruction.

This very watchable story, a sort of upmarket TV serial, is punctuated by comments from behavioural biologist Henri Laborit and by his practical demonstrations of creatures reacting to stress, using, or rather abusing, laboratory mice. What Laborit has to say is pretty old-hat and, if applied to human nature, reductive. He tells us we must learn to understand the workings of the human mind in order to prevent it from being used to dominate others. For years, practitioners of motivational research for advertising, and other brainwashers, have studied the mind. A scientist who sets himself above such "dominators" should perhaps not subject mice to electric shocks for the delectation of film buffs.

That said, Laborit's observations do serve to distance us from the action, letting us observe how the instinctual animal in each of us is smothered in layers of inhibition, potty-training and socially acceptable language. Resnais's direction, always assured, knowing and compassionate, makes for a film that is rich, fascinating and open-ended. As I read it, the beautiful, enigmatic coda suggests that human nature, perverse, resilient, ultimately defying science's generalisations, is capable of painting on the drab bricks of a tenement block the lush, upward-inspiring branches of a forest.

VERA LUSTIG

# THEATRE

**EDUCATING RITA** by Willy Russell. Royal Shakespeare Company, Piccadilly Theatre.

When Rita, an Open University student, breezes into Frank's study she brings a breath of vitality into his airless room and arid life. She is a Merseyside hairdresser in her mid-twenties as keen to give herself a new personality through knowledge as her customers are to acquire a new image by an hour in curlers. Frank is a university lecturer, cynical and disillusioned about his teaching of literature and damping his one-time poetic ambitions with endless swigs of whisky. As her excitement with theatre and poetry burgeons, he is moved by the freshness and honesty of her response; but as she acquires the apparatus of critical response and the life-style of a student he senses her slipping out of his limited orbit. Eventually their roles are almost reversed and she sits in his chair expounding on literature, while he probes angrily for details of her personal life.

The development of their relationship is the core of the play and is too firmly set in the stereotypes

of disillusioned middle-aged academic and bubbling, naive young woman to really convince. The off-stage husband burning her Chekhov and off-stage lecture in which he falls down drunk (but still talking) are rather hackneyed. They flesh an argument about class and education rather than spark the electricity of the emotions. But Julie Walters, as Rita, captivates the audience with her raw vitality. Moments such as the account of a first viewing of Shakespeare or a week away at summer school surge with excitement.

The piece had a slightly dated feel recalling Wesker, education for all and art for the trade unions. Don't Open University students (mainly middle class) have to contend more with suburban isolation and family distractions than hostile partners and unsympathetic work mates? Do even the most cynical of literature lecturers create such a false dichotomy between life and art? The failure to democratise knowledge and learning goes deeper than a mass indifference to William Blake and has deeper consequences for a future which threatens (promises?) unemployment and work sharing as a permanent feature of society. Still, it is unfair to criticise *Educating Rita* for not being a different play: it is a two-hander of good-hearted warmth and energy.

JIM HERRICK

## LETTERS

### REASON, EMOTION AND LANGUAGE

To supplement James Hemming's and Kathleen Nott's estimate (Letters, August) of the relationship between reason and the non-rational elements of the human mind, might I suggest that our humanist colleagues might like to see this vital problem discussed at length in "Science and Poetry" written by I. A. Richards? He tells us that to live reasonably is not to live by reason alone but to live in a way of which reason, a clear, full sense of the whole situation, would approve. And though his intellect is what is distinctive in man, he is not primarily an intelligence; he is a system of interests. Intelligence helps man but does not run him.

One of the paradoxes of the humanist movement is that none of our education committees have pointed out that the strict rationality of logic is the missing linchpin of education. Logic is a complete process of definition and an examination of translations. The philosopher has given up metaphysics and now devotes himself to producing a logical language through which, by definition and translation, it will be possible to detect in linguistic idioms the recurrent misconstructions and absurd theories prevalent in all the languages used by all the gods, gurus, prophets, sages, priests, scholars, etc., since the tower of Babel.

And this, of course, includes professors of English Language and Literature who have lost the logical part of their language work but are still important in their teaching of literature, a partial but important step forward in supplying a substitute set of values to fill the dangerous vacuum formed by the disappearance of church religions. The Ogden-Richards Basic art-technique is a demonstrably excellent method of teaching the good reading which could bring our best

literature and greatest thinkers within the range of the majority of our population. These new students, if trained in the multiple definition of their hundred concepts, would, for example, see and overcome the malpractice of using the word "truth" in its application both to the valuable pseudo-statements of religion, myths, poetry, etc., by which we live and the scientific statements which alone are true or false.

Education committees should appreciate the fact that it is only through their professional area of activity, education, that the humanists' unceasing advocacy of rationality can achieve success on a national — and then universal? — scale. No revolution in human affairs would . . .

S. B. WYNBURNE

The letter of W. H. Pemberton (September) challenging me to produce evidence of the differential functions of the two hemispheres of the brain drives me almost to despair. Where has he been these past thirty years?

Large numbers of able children with speech communication difficulties are right-hemisphere dominants. So — among many leading figures — was Einstein who thought in pictures and frequently stated that his discoveries were the products of intuition. Artists, too, are right hemisphere dominants. Intuition and pattern perception are both right hemisphere modes of interacting with the environment.

If Mr. Pemberton is prepared to do some reading, may I suggest he tries "The Right Brain" by Thomas Blakeslee, Macmillan Paperback, August, 1980. When he has read this resume and studied the forty pages of references, he will perhaps stop talking about lack of evidence.

JAMES HEMMING

### CELIBACY

The population of India has gone up to over six hundred million, not because of any obsession with or over-indulgence in sex, as Geoffrey Webster suggests (Letters, September), but because death control has been far more successful than birth control. The first health minister in independent India was a woman who was both a Gandhian and a Christian, combining in her attitudes both strands of celibate asceticism, and valuable time was thus lost before any serious practical birth control campaign was launched.

Traditional Indian physiology thought semen-retention beneficial because it thought one drop of seminal fluid the equivalent of 40 (or 80) drops of blood! It is now known that this is not so. The debilitating effect of sexual activity — even in moderation, which Webster writes about—is only a temporary effect and this again is something which no reasonable person can deny. For athletes, the tension produced by a period of abstinence may help produce good results and yet too long a period of abstinence may produce excessive and unhelpful tension when conscious sexual activity may be indicated. On this point I refer your readers to Pomeroy's "Boys and Sex" available from The Freethinker bookshop.

I use the term "undersexed" in a descriptive sense and not in a derogatory sense. Sexual needs vary and on this point a mass of data is available in studies such as the Kinsey Report. By any criterion, it is fair to suggest that those who claim that they do not need any conscious sexual activity are in the first place making claims which cannot be verified and are very likely to be undersexed. To suggest that they are undersexed is not to "charge" them, but only to describe them. I have not heaped any praise on

(continued on back page)

# PUBLICATIONS

- ALLEGRO, John. The Red Sea Scrolls. £1.25 (16p).  
 AYER, A. J. (Ed.) The Humanist Outlook. 95p (36p).  
 BROCKMAN, Chris. What About Gods?—for children. 75p (14p).  
 BLACKHAM, H. J. Objections to Humanism. 50p (18p).  
 BLANSHARD, Paul. Classics of Freethought. £2.60 (37p).  
 BROPHY, Brigid. Longford Threat to Freedom. 12p (10p). R.E. In State Schools. 12p (10p).  
 BUDD, Susan. \*Varieties of Unbelief. (Atheists and Agnostics in English Society 1850-1960.) £9.50 (70p).  
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(*Celibacy*)

those who might be described as "oversexed" i.e. whose sexual needs are on the high side. Equally well, I suggest that there is no need to build a halo round those who might be "undersexed".

Webster holds that the fact that coitus brings about existence (which is burdensome) is enough to condemn it. It is this thoroughly negative attitude to life, which is at the root of his tirade against human sexuality. Most of your readers, I hope, are quite content to have been born and to make the most of their faculties for the happiness of themselves and their fellow human beings.

AN INDIAN RATIONALIST

(*"Babies for Burning"*)

Diane Munday said "Whether the appeal succeeds or not — the truth is now out in the open. Those who have relied on these alleged scandals, in this country and abroad, to help with the attack on liberal abortion laws, can never do so again with any vestige of reliable evidence behind them. The Corrie Abortion (Amendment) Bill of 1979 had origins in the *News of the World* investigations of 1974: it will be interesting to see whether future Abortion (Amendment) Bills rely quite so heavily on these now completely discredited myths."

## EVENTS

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

**Brighton and Hove Humanist Group.** Arthur Latham: Capitalism and Ethics. Sunday, 2 November. 5.30 pm. The Queen's Head, Queen's Road, Brighton (Junction Road entrance opposite Brighton Station).

**ANNUAL DINNER.** Guest of Honour: T. F. Evans. Vegetarians catered for. Reservations with payment (£5.75) to Mrs K. Pariente, 97 Valley Drive, Brighton, Sussex, tel: Brighton 504007. Saturday, 15 November at 7 pm. for 7.30 pm. The Queen's Head, Queen's Road, Brighton.

**Harrow Humanist Society.** Angela Willans: The Humanist Approach to Problem Solving. Wednesday, 8 October, 8 pm. Gayton Road Library, close to Harrow-on-the Hill Metro. Station.

**Havering and District Humanist Society.** Arthur Latham: Sense About Defence. Tuesday, 21 October, 8 pm. Harold Wood Social Centre (junction of Gubbins Lane and Squirrels Heath Road).

**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.)

**Merseyside Humanist Group.** W. T. S. Gould: The Brandt Commission. Monday, 20 October, 7.45 pm. 46 Hamilton Square, Birkenhead.

**Muswell Hill Humanist Group.** T. Bloch: Bernard Shaw and Women. Thursday, 30 October, 8.30 pm. 5 Leaside Avenue, N10.

**South Place Ethical Society.** Sunday Morning Meetings, 11 am. 12 October, H. Stopes-Roe: Humanist Life Stances. 19 October, Peter Cadogan: Reverence for Life — Albert Schweizer's Ethics. 26 October, Ardon Lyon: Logic and Life. Sunday afternoon forum, 3 pm. 12 October, Paul Ekins: Can Ecology have politics? Tuesday evenings: 7 October, Jonathan Stopes-Roe: Social Rationality. 14 October, Anthony Chapman: Human Rationality. 21 October, Govind Deohdekar: Secular Rationality. 28 October, Nicolas Walter: Ethical Rationality.

**West Glamorgan Humanist Group.** Dr John Durant: Reason v. Instinct. Friday, 31 October, 7.30 pm. Friends' Meeting House Annex, Page Street, Swansea.

**Gay Humanist Group.** Discussion: Pornography. Friday, 10 October, 7.30 pm. Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London W1.

New and Secondhand Books on secular humanism, freethought, rationalism, ethicism, etc. from Meeting House Press, 24 Pitreavie Road, Cosham, Portsmouth PO6 2ST (Successor to Kit Mouat's Humanist Books.) Please enclose 10p stamp for Autumn sale catalogue.

Indian Humanist (Elan Govan, age 35) would like to correspond with someone in England or the USA. Please write to J. D. Elan Govan, 1/6 B Street, Cleveland Town, Bangalore 5, India.

The Case Against God by G. H. Smith  
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## THE FREETHINKER

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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  
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