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SUNDAY TRADING BILL FAILS, BUT LORD'S DAY IN DECLINE

The Lord's Day is under threat: 150 years after the founding of the Lord's Day Observance Society, an attempt has been made in Parliament to liberalise Sunday trading laws and a successful Sunday football match may lead to more Sunday sport. Sir Anthony Meyer's attempt to relax Sunday trading laws failed to gain a second reading, but there were MPs who said that the ridiculous anomalies about what could be sold on Sunday ought to be removed.

Sir Anthony Meyer's Private Members' Bill, presented to the House of Commons on 21 February, aimed to rationalise and extend the list of goods permitted to be sold on Sundays and sought to allow local authorities to permit the opening of shops in their areas. Exploitation of shop workers would be prevented by setting a normal working week at 40 hours and considering any extra time as overtime.

The 1950 Shops Act was "being flouted with increasing impunity" according to Sir Anthony Meyer. His measures were modest: "I am not trying to produce a free-for-all on Sunday, or to keep the cash tills ringing until midnight in every high street." Opponents of the Bill claimed that it would lead to High Street trading on a Sunday—something which traders did not want.

Sir Anthony said that he respected the Lord's Day Observance Society and those who would prefer Sunday without any commercial activity, but it was not possible to put the clock back. Thousands of workers now worked on Sunday and Britain's multi-racial society included Jews, Asians, Arabs and others for whom Sunday was not a special day. Mr Patrick Cormack (MP for South-West Staffordshire) said keeping the Sabbath was an important consideration and he would support any Bill abolishing all trade on Sunday, but the present situation needed

tidying up.

The main opposition came not from defenders of the Lord's Day but defenders of the shop-workers' union. The MP sponsored by USDAW (Union of Shop, Distributive and Allied Workers), Mr Thomas Turney, vigorously opposed the Bill, emphasising that many shop-workers were married women for whom Sunday working would be inconvenient. The Consumers' Association, the Institute of Trading Standards Administration and the British Tourist Board Authority all supported the Bill.

It is a pity that trade unions—once the spearhead of progress and new ideas—should now become the defenders of entrenched positions. Shop workers are often not well paid and work in poor conditions. This should change. But it should be possible to combine improvements in pay and working conditions with a more flexible and imaginative attitude to Sunday trading.

Out of Pace

A London trader, Dickie Dirts, has set an example in this field. He took out a large advertisement in national newspapers supporting change in the law and claiming that his staff were well paid and satisfied with a rotating shift. "The laws pertaining to shopping hours are out of pace with modern Britain," claimed Dickie Dirts and quoted a private opinion poll which showed 94 per cent of the public favoured a change in the law.

The Opposition spokesman on home affairs, Mr George Cunningham, opposed the Bill because it was not the best way to deal with the problem and because a Home Office report on the subject would be available for the House to debate at a later stage. However, he said that the present law "could not be

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tolerated much longer”.

Many of the ridiculous anomalies of the present position have been pointed out. You can buy gin but not milk, pornography but not Bibles, fish and chips from a Chinese take-away but not a British one. It is impossible to defend the stupidity of this situation.

The Bill failed when there were insufficient votes to carry a closure motion to end the debate. It now goes to the bottom of the list of Private Members' Bills and is unlikely to be given further time.

A more promising event for those wishing to see a more flexible Sunday was the first of the Football League's games to be played on Sunday, which took place in Darlington and had a much larger crowd than usual. The Football League said that there were not likely to be many games on a Sunday at present, because of arrangements with Pools companies. A spokesman said it is too early to judge the practicalities and popularity of Sunday football. The successful game at Darlington and the fact that the Football League have passed a motion permitting football matches on days other than Saturday point to moves towards more Sunday sport.

Despite these moves for change, the Lords' Day Observance Society battles on regardless of the realities of the second half of the twentieth century. A service held in All Souls Church, Langham Place, to celebrate the 150th birthday of the Society was attended largely by elderly, not to say geriatric, supporters. Men in joyless grey suits and women in dull jelly-mould hats sang a hymn of thanksgiving for the Society, whose journal is called *Joy and Light*. Great emphasis was placed on the need to preserve the English Sunday for the future generation; but the young showed their concern for this aspect of the future by a massive absence from the occasion. The members gave the impression of being patriotic to the point of xenophobia—fearing the horrors of the continental Sunday. The joy and light of the Lord's Day would be tempered with the pain and dark of punishment and severity for society's delinquents, if some of the remarks about law and order were anything to go by.

As *The Times* diary put it “Last night's celebration at All Souls Church, Langham Place, was not without incident. It was picketed by representatives of the forces of darkness—not the Yorkshire area of the National Union of Mineworkers, but the National Secular Society, who distributed cheerfully rude leaflets denouncing the LDOS as a joke organisation whose greatest contribution to civilisation had been to stop Sunday trams running in Edinburgh.”

“William McIlroy of the NSS said his society was 'a militant, freethinking, humanist organisation'.”

The leaflet stated: “The Lord's Day Observance Society, which celebrates its 150th anniversary today, has campaigned stoutly since 1831 for the protection of the British nation against the free-and-easy con-

tinental Sunday.

“In the nineteenth century, when Sunday was the only day that most of the population was free from drudgery, the Lord's Day Observance Society was always there, to tell them how to use that day of rest. The LDOS denounced the 'enormous evil' of Sunday newspapers, Sunday travel, Sunday band performances in parks, Sunday cycling, the Sunday opening of Kew Gardens, the Sunday opening of art galleries ('likely to inflame the passions'), the 'organised gigantic wickedness' of Sunday games at the Crystal Palace, the 'riotous pleasure' of rowing on the Thames, and the 'unseemly conviviality' of Sunday funerals.

“Undaunted by the failure of most of these campaigns, the Society has continued in the present century with its single-minded opposition to such enormities as Sunday cinemas, concerts, theatres, sporting events, and harvesting. And they have had their local successes: Sunday trams were stopped in Edinburgh, libraries closed in Cheltenham and Bermondsey, concerts banned in Worthing and Bath, tennis disallowed at Clifton, boating at Rhyl, golf at Cromer, and skating at Ilford. But their most remarkable success, perhaps, was when the *Lord's Day Magazine* was able to announce with glee 'that two Councils . . . have decided in the interests of the moral and spiritual welfare of the children to refuse to allow the games apparatus to be open for use on Sundays'. Children playing on swings on a Sunday? Whatever next?

“The sabbatarians' current campaign is for the preservation of our anomalous Sunday trading laws. But after 150 years, how can they be content with that?

Two-day Sabbath

“Now that most people have two days of rest each week, why does the LDOS not set its sights on the two-day Sabbath? Having devoted 150 years to trying to make Sunday as dreary as possible, they have let Saturday (the original Judaeo-Christian Sabbath) slip through their fingers.”

The leaflet quoted the former secretary of the LDOS's view that the National Secular Society “remains a persistent instrument of godless philosophy” and hopes that it may long remain so!

The leaflet continues: “The major difference of outlook between the LDOS and the NSS is not the only difference between them. Whereas the Lord's Day Observance Society tries to impose its gloomy godliness on everybody else (the actual title of one of their publications was 'Imposition of Christian Standards Upon Others'), the National Secular Society has no wish to impose anything on anybody. Let the sabbatarians spend all of Sunday, or the entire weekend, on their knees, if that is what they

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The Inspiration of Indian Atheism

HARRY STOPES-ROE

Harry Stopes-Roe, Chairman of the British Humanist Association, went to the Atheist Centre, Vijayawada (India) to represent the British Humanist Association and other humanists at the Second World Atheist Conference this Christmas.

is trying to reach. Demonstrations of the "supernatural" are a regular feature at the Atheist Centre. The method is most effective: do the trick—and explain how it is done. And, in the case of the fire walking, underline the "ordinary" quality of the performance.

The Atheist Centre at Vijayawada has a truly vital conception of "Positive Atheism". The inspiration of Gora, who developed this concept, has been realised by his children, with Lavanam as his oldest son, their wives, and their children, and the others who have become associated with the Centre. They make humanism visible; they give humanism the moral authority to legitimate the values felt by individuals, and also to legitimate the humanist influence in society. They make humanism available to ordinary men and women.

How shall I illustrate what they do, which leads me to talk of them thus? I will start with an example that will shock British humanists—perhaps it will shock secularists rather less. These Indian humanists organise fire walking demonstrations. I saw a woman MP (Lavanam's sister, the representative of Vijayawada in the Lok Sabha, that is their "House of Commons"), with her saree gathered high walking across glowing coals. About 100 other people, men and women, did likewise. The demonstration was accompanied by an explanation of the scientific principles, in terms the audience could understand. This was a public event, and there were perhaps 2,000 people present. The commentary was conducted in Telugu, the local language, and transmitted over loud-speakers.

Now, before you dismiss this as absurd, transpose your mind to India, a land governed by religious superstition. The underprivileged and suppressed, those who believe that god-given rules assign them an inferior status, believe that the fire walking by god-men manifests supernatural power. The demonstration of fire walking by the god-men reinforce the authority of the religious rules; the demonstration that the supposed "supernatural power" is a hoax undermines the faith of those who watch.

Atheism is fundamental to the liberation of women and of the "untouchables", and to the emergence in these people of a faith in their own power to control their fate, in place of the inexorable fate of karma. Think now of the effect of seeing 100 people walk over fire, including a young American, an English girl, and a woman MP! Two illusions are destroyed in this act: that fire walking is a supernatural power; that women are of a lower order, that they are essentially inferior to men. This is to operate in the idiom of those the Atheist Centre



Mrs C I Vidya, MP, walking on fire

One realises how effete religion has become in Britain! Its attitudes and values are a dead hand, particularly in education; it weighs on society, but its basic beliefs have lost all vitality. No mainstream British Christian now would claim that God, or the supernatural, actually has any practical relevance any more. It is all oblique, and immune from effective confrontation. We lose sight of the influence religion does have, under the skin of our society. In India, the evil is much cruder and clearer.

The inspiration of the Atheist Centre is "Positive Atheism". This clearing away of supernatural rubbish is the obverse of the establishment of self-respect and self-confidence, and the ability and preparedness of men and women, of castes and

"untouchables", to work together on terms of equality. The Centre conducts inter-caste marriages and inter-caste meals. It even has pork-eating and beef-eating events—which have caused considerable local upheaval. But the foundation for all this activity is the deep respect in which they are held by the local community. This is established by the more directly "positive" things they do.

The Atheist Centre has a hospital on the site, where a brother and sister of Lavanam, who are qualified doctors, work. (It is a "hospital" in terms of the devotion of those who work there; and the facilities are graded thus by local standards.) They do various forms of social work, and in particular criminal rehabilitation. The various members of the Gora family are active in local affairs. As I have said, one of his daughters was elected MP for their constituency.

There are three elements in the work of the Atheist Centre. They build in others the beliefs and attitudes which permit cooperation and confidence in two ways: by the destruction of superstition; and by direct work with depressed classes. And, by their activities they demonstrate their own style of confidence and manner of cooperation. All these aspects are essential, and they work together.

Moral Education

I was much impressed by the Atheist Centre's direct work with depressed classes. I was taken out into the rural villages where I saw schools for young children run by the Atheist Centre, and funded by Save the Children Fund. I was particularly interested in this, for I remembered the time when I was involved in the drafting of the Birmingham Syllabus of RE. The intent of the group with whom I was working was to produce a syllabus which was open, and avoided all religious bias. I was presented with a draft for some work for children of age 5-7 years, which was concerned broadly with "moral" education, without overt religious content. But I noticed that all the examples were directed towards wonder at the given-ness of nature, with a hint of gratitude. None established self-confidence in the face of nature. None established confidence in our human responsibility, and power to forestall nature. The authors were most upset when I pointed this out, for they really were convinced they had done well. I contrast this with this Indian village school. These little children sang songs about the *natural* processes of rain and weather, of *human* enterprise in the control of nature, and of the vitamins that are found in vegetables. This was true moral education. A few of the songs were in English, most in Telugu. The songs of these Indian village children would have been excellent material to add to the Birmingham syllabus!

In these same rural areas I was also shown farms run by "untouchables", with the guidance and moral

support of the Centre, and funding from Oxford. The land is within the area contained by the dykes which limit the flood of the vast Krishna river. It had been seasonal pasture, used by caste Hindus; and it continued thus after the redistribution of land, with merely a small rent paid to the "untouchables" to whom it was awarded. The Atheist Centre recovered control of the land, and set up the farmers—against protest that this was irreligious and improper, and forebodings of doom. And these forebodings were, at first, justified in the eyes of these simple people, for an extra large flood came in their first year, and washed away their crops. So, again, atheism was fundamental to the success of the venture. The Centre explained the natural causes of what had happened, persuaded the "untouchables" to try again, and gave them fresh support. Since then they have had a series of successful harvests. The soil, of course, has wonderful fertility, and I saw miles of land with crops growing.

For me, the main impact of the Second World Atheist conference was the practical effect of Indian Atheism. But this must not lead me to overlook the formal part of the Conference itself, with its contributions from all over the world. This too was very valuable, though world support was not as good as it should have been. I was particularly glad, therefore, that I had come, for my presence was much appreciated as an expression of international solidarity. I was privileged to chair the Inaugural Function, and to meet in that capacity the distinguished platform of speakers—including the Deputy Speaker of the Lok Sabha. I was asked to "release" the Conference "Souvenir", which was an impressive compilation; and I was asked to chair the session on "Atheism—morality, social work and culture", and to give short papers at other sessions. Most alarming, I was asked, at only a few minutes notice, to address one of the public meetings that were held in the evenings during the period of the Conference. Here there were 1,000 people, and of course my speech was translated into Telugu. The working sessions of the Conference were in English, and included much material on historical and contemporary issues. I myself particularly valued the papers on atheism in ancient Indian thought, the surveys of atheism in the different countries represented at the Conference, and the discussions of the practical relevance of Atheism-Humanism-Secularism.

After the Conference at the Atheist Centre, I was sent with Vijayam, Lavanam's brother, to Madras, to address the Tamilnadu Rationalists' Conference. This was a local conference, conducted in Tamil, with I believe 3,000 people attending. This movement is powerful in S. India, where it leads in the struggle for the rights of Dravidians against the Aryan invader. (I found it strange to realise that

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George Eliot: An Honest Agnostic

JIM HERRICK

The centenary of George Eliot's death was commemorated last year, and there is an exhibition of manuscripts and drawings relating to her life on view at the British Library until April 1981. She is renowned as a great novelist, but also brought her formidable intellect to bear on religion, rejecting Christianity and becoming an honest agnostic.

"What isn't honest does come to harm. . ." is a quotation from *Adam Bede* on display at this exhibition and it sums up a theme of George Eliot's life and work. Whether honesty has been so well served by some of the events marking the centenary of her death is another matter. Last year a service in Westminster Abbey and placing of a plaque there in her memory was in ironic contradiction to her "notorious antagonism to Christian practice in regard to marriage, and Christian theory in regard to dogma" as a contemporary wrote to the Dean at the time of her death. Also the *Church Times* published a curious article suggesting that George Eliot was deeply religious without knowing it and holding her up as a candidate for sainthood—by which standard many an agnostic deeply critical of the hypocrisy of institutional religion had better beware lest they be gathered into the arms of the saints by the future dishonesty of clerics. It is true that she was neither flippant, ignorant, nor militantly anti-religious in her attitude towards Christianity; nevertheless both her life and writing display a decisive rejection of Christianity.

A copy of her translation of D. F. Strauss's *The Life of Jesus Critically Examined*, which played an important part in shaping George Eliot's and Victorian England's understanding of Christianity as a historical rather than a divine phenomenon, is on display. (Curiously, since it was translated from German to English, it lies open at a page of Latin.) Those who know Mary Anne Evans only through her novels may not realise how formidable was her intellectual development. She was thoroughly acquainted with European, especially German, literature and philosophy and wrote essays on figures such as Heine, referring with amusement to the claims of Protestant and Catholic camps that the irreverent iconoclast had been converted and suggesting that his eventual theism, if it was to be taken seriously, was a consequence of his long final illness. For a short period she was editor of the *Westminster Review*, a leading quarterly, but it was as a novelist that she achieved fame and financial security.

The exhibition contains a portrait of George Henry Lewes, the man who encouraged Mary Anne Evans to become the successful novelist George Eliot.

Their partnership, though there was no wedding, was to give a love and mutual support deeper than many marriages. The exhibition displays original manuscripts of her novels, with a commentary which outlines her career as a novelist. Her masterpiece, *Middlemarch* (recalled recently in a leisurely and enjoyable radio adaptation by Hallam Tennyson) gives a detailed picture of a small town community at the time of the Reform Bill of 1832, offers a subtle psychological understanding of the frustrations and disappointments of marriage, and, incidentally, gives, in Bulstrode, one of the most piercing portraits of protestant religious hypocrisy in all of literature. It also traces how people's sense of ambition and ideals are compromised with the realities of human achievement. Other novels, arguably less successful, tackle equally weighty themes: *Daniel Deronda* depicts the position of the Jewish community in England; *Romola* deals with Florence and the life of Savanarola (although popular with contemporaries, it is not now thought to have brought renaissance Italy alive). The exhibition displays some attractive woodcut illustrations by Frederic Leighton for *Romola*.

Among the curiosities of the exhibition is a quotation from her last work, a collection of essays entitled *Impressions of Theophrastus Such*, in which one essay "Shadows of the Coming Race" imagines the development of the machine to supersede human beings. The commentary on the exhibits, presumably by Dr Daniel Waley, who has written a useful introduction to an accompanying brochure, are clear, if a little scant at times. I would have liked, for instance, to know what exactly was the "pop" concert which George Eliot attended at St James's Hall, 1880, of which there is an ink sketch.

Rejection of Miracles

An extract from one of her critical essays would have been welcome. Something like, for instance, these perceptive sentences from her sympathetic, but not uncritical, review of Lecky's *History of Rationalism*: "The supremely important fact, that the gradual reduction of all phenomena within the sphere of established law, which carries as a consequence the rejection of the miraculous, has its determining current in the development of physical science, seems to have engaged comparatively little of his attention; at least he gives it no prominence. The great conception of universal regular sequence, without partiality and without caprice—the conception which is the most potent force at work in the modification of our faith, and of the practical form given to our sentiments — could only grow out of that patient watching of external fact, and that silencing of preconceived notions, which are urged upon the

mind by the problems of physical science.”

An aspect of George Eliot's writing which, perhaps fortunately for her reputation, is little known is her poetry. At one stage she wrote a great deal of verse and her poem "O may I join the choir invisible" was a Victorian favourite. The religious tones combined with a thoroughly secular message that she wished to survive in the minds of others are typical of her writing; maybe this tone, so different from some polemical freethinkers, explains why readers have subsequently been reluctant to recognise how trenchant were her ideas. "O may I join the choir invisible", which was performed at her funeral at High-

gate cemetery (apparently an Anglican service with "discreet Unitarian omissions") represents with ponderous honesty the width of her ideals and her emphasis on human life, not anything beyond:

"O May I join the choir invisible
Of those immortal dead who live again
In minds made better by their presence! live
In pulses stirred by generosity,
In deeds of daring rectitude, in scorn
For miserable aims that end with self,
In thought sublime that pierce the night-like stars
And with their mild persistence urge man's search
To vaster issues. . ."

Call for End to Segregation in Scotland

A new leaflet produced by the Scottish Humanist Council calls for an end to segregated schools in Scotland. The leaflet attacks segregated schools saying that they are divisive, unpopular and unfair. The system of segregation also leads to discrimination in employment and is expensive and uneconomic.

The 1918 Education Act allows for any religious denomination to be provided with a denominational school if it asks for it. Last year in Strathclyde the Council assumed responsibility for a private Jewish primary school. This retrograde step towards sectarian schooling could lead, as elsewhere in the country, to an increase in the number of denominational schools and schools for groups devoted to other than Christian religions. It is a sad irony that humanists, whose consistent defence of human rights includes the civil rights of Jews and all minorities, should oppose setting up schools for such groups; but civil rights are best preserved in a context of integration and understanding, while separation breeds misunderstanding and prejudice.

The system in Scotland has mainly benefited the Roman Catholic church, and has resulted in divided communities. The Scottish Humanist Council point out in their leaflet that "It creates a divided society and fosters suspicion and antagonism between different cultural groups. Locally, if the catchment area of the denominational school is compact, it can easily become gang-disputed territory; if it is extensive, the school itself can be seen by the local community as an intruder, especially if many of the pupils have to be bussed in from outlying districts."

History and the present state of affairs in Northern Ireland provide ample evidence of the dangers of religion's divisiveness. "In a multi-religious society, which consists not only of different denominations, but of different religions, there is a great need for each group to understand and tolerate others. The

influx of alien cultures and religions to Scotland has sharpened these divisions, creating an even greater need for cross-cultural and non-religious education."

Unpopular System

There is evidence, according to the leaflet, that the system is unpopular. An opinion poll in 1976 showed that 82 per cent of the population were opposed to separate schools for different religious groups. Even 69 per cent of Catholics opposed it.

Religious groups are given an unfair financial advantage by the system. It is impractical to arrange for separate schools for all religious groups at public expense, now that our society consists of not just Protestants and Catholics, but Jews, Moslems, Hindus and Buddhists. "Before all the immigrant communities demand their own schools, the system should be abolished," claim the Scottish Humanist Council.

(Lord's Day in Decline)

want. All we ask is the same freedom to spend our weekends in our own way.

"After 150 years of preaching, praying and exhortation to 'remember the Sabbath day', the Lord's Day Observance Society faces a bleak future. Most of the laws relating to Sunday observance have been swept away; the LDOS is a joke organisation to the public and an embarrassment to the majority of Christians; its only remaining strongholds are in the Scottish Highlands and in Northern Ireland."

Despite the failure of Sir Anthony Meyer's Bill, the signs are that the present ridiculous Sunday trading laws cannot last much longer and that a more varied Sunday is on its way. As the NSS's leaflet concluded, "It is the supporters of freedom, not the Lord's day Observance Society, who have something to celebrate in 1981."

AN OCCASIONAL COLUMN

JOTTINGS

WILLIAM McILROY

The three eyes of T. Lobsang Rampa have closed in death. The mystic, clairvoyant and Tibetan lama who made world headlines, and a considerable fortune, as a teller of tall tales, recently shuffled off this mortal coil at the age of 70.

During the 1950s, when *The Third Eye*, T. Lobsang Rampa's first and most sensational book, was published, there was growing Western interest in Oriental religions. Rampa and later gurus soon discovered that the more high-faluting the medium and obscure the message, the more readily disciples parted company with their critical faculties and their cash.

In *The Third Eye*, Rampa relates that he was born of wealthy Tibetan parents, and at the age of seven was selected by astrologers for training in a lamasery. Life in the institution was rather tough, and while still a boy he underwent an operation to open the inner "third eye", the supposed centre of all psychic powers. The description of this operation is not recommended bedside reading for those of a squeamish disposition.

The book contains many colourful and seemingly authentic accounts of life in Tibet, and of its author's extraordinary career, which included a nodding acquaintanceship with the Abominable Snowman. The reviews were ecstatic: "An extraordinary and exciting book", trilled the *Sunday Observer*; "Even those who exclaim 'magic, moonshine or worse' are likely to be moved by the nobility of the ethical system which produced such beliefs and such men as the author", gushed *The Times Literary Supplement*.

Secker & Warburg had a sales winner, and within several months *The Third Eye* became the mystery-mongers' handbook. During the next year it was published in a dozen countries, and its spiritual author raked in royalties of £20,000.

But it was not all the Tibetan equivalent of cakes and ale. Publisher Frederick Warburg had reservations about the credibility of Rampa's story, and referred his masterpiece to a panel of experts. Most of them condemned it out of hand, but when Warburg invited the author to admit that the book was a work of fiction, Rampa resolutely maintained that it was completely true.

The next move was made by a group of people, referred to at the time as Tibetan scholars, who engaged the services of a private detective named Clifford Burgess. He set about earning his fee with

considerable zeal. Mr Burgess discovered that the person he was investigating was not named T. Lobsang Rampa, but Cyril Henry Hoskins. Furthermore, he did not hail from the Mystic East, but was a native of Glorious Devon. During the period when the guru was supposed to be serving his apprenticeship in a Tibetan monastery (and, presumably, recovering from his "third eye" operation), Cyril was working at his father's plumbing establishment in Plympton.

After his father died in 1937, Cyril Hoskins moved to Surrey. According to people who knew him at that time, he was interested in the occult, and claimed a close association with China. Profoundly dissatisfied with his earthly lot, he experimented in astral travel, an activity which was probably regarded by his less ethereal friends as an extreme and futile endeavour to escape the mundanity of Thames Ditton.

The investigator's revelations would have shaken the nerve of the most brazen charlatan, and undermined the faith of all but fanatical devotees. But Rampa/Hoskins brushed aside the embarrassing biographical discrepancies, claiming that his body had been subjected to a successful take-over bid by a real adept at astral travel, who rejoiced in the name of Tuesday Lobsang Rampa. This Oriental gentleman had been trained as a lama, and had had his "third eye" opened. He made the psychic journey from Tibet, and took over Hoskin's body on 13 June 1949, after the Plympton plumber, who had been trying to photograph an owl, had fallen from a tree and was rendered unconscious.

Undaunted by this *exposé*, Rampa went on to write other books (for other publishers) under such titles as *Living with the Lama* and *My Visit to Venus*. After living for a time in Ireland and in the United States, he finally settled in Canada. He climbed on to the meditation bandwagon, and advertised what was described as "The Complete Home Meditation Kit". It included his long-playing record on the subject, a meditation robe, incense and a copy of two prayers composed by the mystic himself. Nineteen of his books are still in print.

T. Lobsang Rampa was the daddy of all the mystics, gurus and religious charlatans of the last quarter of a century. Human gullibility, sensational journalism and commercial interests will ensure his successors a wide following and a lucrative return on their "spiritual" gifts.

It can do truth no service to blink the fact, known to all who have the most ordinary acquaintance with literary history, that a large portion of the noblest and most valuable moral teaching has been the work, not only of men who did not know, but of men who knew and rejected the Christian faith. "On Liberty" by John Stuart Mill.

INDECENT DISPLAY

A Bill to prohibit the display of pornography passed its second reading unopposed in the House of Commons on 30 January. The Private Members' Bill was presented by Mr Tim Sainsbury, Conservative MP for Hove. In advance of the debate, he was reported as saying that the Bill has a "limited objective" with precise and modest aims: "The major handicap facing Private Members' legislation is time and for that reason I have restricted the target of my Bill to the area of pornography which is the one which most concerns ordinary, decent people."

The Indecent Displays (Control) Bill covers "indecent" magazines where they can be seen openly by those aged under 18 and carries penalties of up to two years' imprisonment. It does not cover places where the public pay to enter, nor shops where customers are given adequate warning notices, nor places where only people over 18 are admitted. Television, plays and films are not included, though there have been demands during the committee stages to widen the Bill's scope to cover these areas.

"Indecency" is not defined and will have to be tested in the courts—a weakness which gives much leeway for heavy-handed interpretation of the Bill. Mrs Shirley Summerskill pointed out during the debate that "Indecency, like beauty, lies in the eye of the beholder and it cannot be defined."

Mr Wheeler, MP for Paddington and a former prison governor, said that he was not convinced that pornography depraved or corrupted: "From my knowledge of criminality, it may well help potential sex criminals to substitute fantasy with what might otherwise be horrifying realities." He did not oppose the Bill.

Mr Sainsbury said: "This Bill, far from denying freedom reinforced freedom — the freedom for people to live in an environment that others have not polluted with pornography and filth." There may be some justification for the argument that people are entitled to shop without being confronted with things they dislike. But his words perpetuate the idea that sexually explicit material is "filth" and makes a presumption that we should be able to move about in society and always avoid that which we dislike. Breasts of chicken and thighs of pig are offensive to a vegetarian, and bottles of coke and mounds of cake are distasteful to the health-conscious, but Mr Sainsbury is unlikely to "clean up" the displays of meat and starch on the counters of Sainsbury's supermarkets.

The case for prohibition of public display could be accepted more easily if there was greater assurance that sellers of explicit material would not have their stock impounded by the police (and often not brought to court) from inside the shops, and if the Bill were not seen, as by some of Mr Sainsbury's

NEWS

supporters, as an interim measure until more comprehensive prohibition is brought in.

All these issues were dealt with intelligently and humanely by the report of the Williams Committee. Why are thoughtful and wide-ranging government-sponsored reports left to gather dust without debate or action?

EXIT

On February 14, Exit (the voluntary euthanasia society) took a step towards publication of their controversial pamphlet, *A Guide to Self-Deliverance*. At a well-attended Extraordinary General Meeting, two resolutions (proposed by Barbara Smoker on behalf of the Exit executive committee) were passed by a decisive 306 votes to eight (the required majority being 75 per cent) with the effect of extending their constitutional objects to include assisted suicide.

Hitherto, their official aims had been confined to getting the law changed so as to allow doctors to carry out active euthanasia where patients requested it and had made a prior declaration to that effect. The society is still campaigning for that, but there was an increasing demand in the society for DIY euthanasia (ie suicide by the terminally ill) to be made easier, and for the production of a booklet (for "members of mature years and reasonable length of membership") that would help to prevent the many bungled suicides that result in even greater suffering than before.

One member of the society who opposed this extension of the society's objects had sought an injunction against the publication of such a pamphlet, on the dual grounds that it would be illegal and that it was not in accordance with the society's constitution. The second obstacle has now been removed, and the pamphlet is likely to appear soon. If it is then challenged in court, at least it will be on the main legal issue.

As the law stands now (in England, but not in Scotland), suicide itself is not a crime, but to help or advise a would-be suicide is a crime punishable by 14 years' imprisonment. In other words, the law allows us to kill ourselves, but not if we are paralysed or too ill to go to the library to look up lethal dosages or to go to the chemist for a required drug. While permitting suicide, the law does its best to make it impossible for those who need it most, and to ensure that many of those who attempt it will be forced to use methods that are messy, painful, distressing, or hit-and-miss.

AND NOTES

In generations to come, this saga of the Exit pamphlet will probably be looked back upon with the same kind of amazement that the story of the conviction of Charles Bradlaugh and Annie Besant for publishing the Knowlton pamphlet on family planning arouses today.

PARLIAMENTARY GROUP

It is some years since the Humanist Parliamentary Group, sponsored jointly by the British Humanist Association and the National Secular Society, has been active. But a meeting to revive it was held in a parliamentary committee room on February 12, with promising results. Three representatives of the BHA and two of the NSS (the President and Secretary) had a useful discussion, on matters of secular humanist concern, with Renée Short (our parliamentary convenor, who hosted the meeting), Shirley Summerskill, John Dormand, Ted Fletcher, Stan Newens and Chris Price—all Labour MPs. We were a little disappointed that no other Party was represented, as it is advantageous to have an all-party nucleus. However, it was suggested that we might have a specifically humanist issue raised as an Early Day Motion, so as to flush out any other supporters. Another disappointment was the fact that no peers attended the meeting—but we already have a good idea of our supporters in the House of Lords.

After Barbara Smoker had detailed the main legislative issues of current humanist concern (the religious clauses of the 1944 Education Act, the increase in church schools, Sunday restrictions, abortion, euthanasia, the unfair charity laws, and the disestablishment and disendowment of the Church of England), one of the MPs commented drily, "You expect us to get a lot done!"—to which the reply was, "Well, not all in the present session perhaps."

Several ideas for action were mooted, and will be followed up. But the main advantage in the resuscitation of the group is that whenever any particular issue crops up we will know which members of both Houses it would be most effective to contact for parliamentary action.

POPE IN PHILIPPINES

The pope has visited the Philippines, ruled by the dictator, President Marcos, and containing some of the worst poverty in the Far East. The pope defended human rights in general terms, but vigorously

opposed birth control and abortion—in a region with one of the highest birth rates in Asia.

In a talk to the Sutton Humanist Group recently, Barbara Smoker said that there were analogies between the pope's behaviour and that of Hitler. The pope, like Hitler, is often photographed with children, "which betrays a sentimentality that is allied to cruelty. Just as Hitler's love of children stopped short of little Jewish children, whom his racialist policies condemned to death, so the pope insists on birth-control strictures that condemn millions of children to life without the means to support it. In both cases, absolute ideology is put before humanity."

DIVORCE FOR EIRE

The Eire Government is to be brought before the European Court of Human Rights because of its refusal to provide divorce facilities. The Divorce Action Group, an organisation formed by separated people, has instructed senior counsel to initiate action in Strasbourg in an effort to force the Government to hold a referendum to amend the 1937 Constitution which prohibits divorce.

Freethinker Fund

We thank readers for their generous contributions to the fund, which is particularly important this year to support the centenary events and publications. Thanks to the following: T. Aston, £2; T. Atkins, £2; N. G. Baguley, £2; P. Barbour, £7; E. Barnes, £1; N. I. Barnes, £2; S. J. Barnes, £2; G. H. L. Berg, £1.50; I. F. Bertin, £3; A. G. Brooker, £1; A. C. F. Chambre, £1; P. R. Chapman, £2; J. H. Charles, £5; B. E. Clark, £1; H. L. Clements, £2; A. Douglas, £2; A. C. Fancett, £2; K. R. Gill, £2; G. Glazer, £2; W. J. Glennie, £12; J. S. Hamilton, £2; V. Hassid, £1; G. Hibbert, £3; P. J. King, £3; E. Litten, £1; P. D. C. Longstreath, £2; J. Massey, £1; R. Matthewson, £7; C. J. Morey, £2; D. J. Morgan, £7; P. S. Neilson, £5; D. Nickson, £2; A. Oldham, £7; J. R. Riding, £2; E. Royle, £2; W. Shinton, £2; D. E. Shoemith, £1; G. A. Stowell, £6; J. Vallance, £7; A. Williams, £7; D. Wright, £4; J. Yeowell, £1; I. Young, £1; Anon, £10; Anon, £25.

Total for the period 20/1/81 to 18/2/81: £165.50.
Total for the year to date: £342.40.

The Cotswold Humanist and Rationalist Movement have devised an ingenious and enjoyable method of raising money for the Freethinker Fund. An evening of mentalism and magic was presented—a form of honest mystification infinitely preferable to the hocus of religion. A collection was taken and £7.70 donated to the Freethinker Fund.

BOOKS

**RADICALS, SECULARISTS AND REPUBLICANS:
POPULAR FREETHOUGHT IN BRITAIN, 1866-1915** by
Edward Royle. Manchester University Press, £19.50

In the 1960s there were many people active in the freethought movement who had forgotten—or never known — its history, its endemic faction-fighting, when and why it climaxed and declined, and what membership and finance could be expected to materialise from so many hundreds at public meetings and so many column inches of reportage. They simply would not believe warnings given by historians within the movement. It may be late in the day, but I hope they will now read Edward Royle's *Radicals, Secularists and Republicans*, which relates the fortunes of secular humanism to those of the churches, radical politics and "the kind of liberal society" which John Stuart Mill had defended so eloquently in his essay *On Liberty*. In passing, Royle's book challenges a species of trendy sociological analysis, particularly associated with Susan Budd, which also arose in the sixties, underplayed or distorted secularism's political role, overplayed its "bible-bashing" and implied that members of the National Secular Society were almost entirely male, manual workers, maladjusted and repudiated by their own families.

Much of what has hitherto been written about the movement has necessarily concentrated on its leading personalities and central organisations, and it is appropriate that Royle, born, bred and now lecturing in the provinces should call attention to the many colourful societies, NSS branches and local leaders throughout the country and especially the north. In the first draft of my biography of Bradlaugh I had included details about many "lesser lights" that I was asked to remove so as not to interrupt the story line, and it is good to see them flourishing in this latest work: Wheeler, the Standrings, Moss, Ball, Forder, Cattell, W. W. Collins, Symes, Law, Austin Holyoake, Reddalls and many others. Of course every book has its spatial limits, but I should have liked more credit to be given to James Thomson (irritatingly misspelt), W. E. Adams ("Caractacus"), Moncure and Ellen Davis Conway, and Edward Truelove, whose Reformer's Library prefigured the Thinker's Library of the RPA.

Though the Preface contains questionable generalisations such as "'Secularism' . . . had little in practice to do with modern notions of the secular", the bulk of the book itself is not arcane and, with ample scholarship, gratifyingly confirms my own views of the cause's political, social and religious significance and the character and achievements of its protagonists. Thus "the strength of the NSS, and its weakness, lay in its close identification with the personality of Bradlaugh" and what interested the

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Bradlaugh-Besant partnership; and the fortunes of the organisation rose and fell with those of the partnership. But even in their heyday Bradlaugh and Besant—to say nothing of G. J. Holyoake, Foote, Cohen, Charles Watts ("always more sinned against than sinning"), the other Wattses, Aveling, Rose, the Bradlaugh girls, Robertson and the secondary leadership—sometimes attracted only tiny audiences and habitually either declined to discuss or exaggerated membership figures. Yet the societies and "the periodicals of the freethought movement did succeed in making an impact out of all proportion to their size", achieved a "record in matters of benevolence . . . as extensive as their limited means would allow" and "made an honourable contribution to this chapter of educational history".

"Amongst many Christians one can detect a growing appreciation of the Secularist position," and a deserved tribute is paid to the pioneering in this direction by the Rev Stewart Headlam. Secularist support for ongoing civil liberties and birth control is well-documented, but the movement's "golden age" is clearly linked to non-recurring political events in England between 1866 and 1884. Yet the NSS adapted "to become a twentieth-century pressure group with a progressive approach to sexual questions, beyond anything that Bradlaugh, Foote and their generations would have dared—or desired—to see".

Perhaps it would be more useful for me to name the infrequent occasions on which I am not in agreement with Dr Royle. Apart from minor dates, spellings and printer's vagaries there are a few questions of fact. It is a great tribute to Bradlaugh's knowledge of the law that he conceived more legal tactics than his chroniclers have generally been able to describe accurately. Even Robertson's extensive account of his parliamentary struggle, which was included in his daughter's biography, contained notable errors and omissions on the legal side. Similarly, the current work contains a somewhat garbled account of Bradlaugh's early tussle with the oath issue during the De Rin case and seems to confound the taxes on knowledge with the security laws. In outlining personal disputes involving secularist figures, Royle tends to err on the side of kindness. He rightly observes that "the heaviest financial burdens of all were borne by the leaders themselves" for the movement, but unfortunately it is not true to say that "allegations that any of them profited by it seem totally unfounded".

Certainly Bradlaugh and Foote were unjustly maligned. Though they made money by their

REVIEWS

secularist lecturing and publishing, they lost more by personally underwriting the cost of litigation and capital investment. But, despite lean times, Ross, Holyoake and Cohen — against whom less was publicly alleged — were more vulnerable to such charges. In collaboration with Mackay and Griffith-Jones, Ross prospered for a time by “milking the Bullock” (Glegg Bullock, a wealthy supporter). As exemplified by his involvement with the Fleet Street House and the *National Reformer*, Holyoake had a special talent for conducting profitable ventures in his own name and unprofitable ones in the name of the movement. (Papers in the Bishopsgate Institute show how he transferred that talent from secularism to the co-operative movement, to which he sold at inflated figures some of his numerous publications when they started to lose money.) Cohen and his family lived comfortably all their lives, and when he died a discrepancy of several thousands was found in the assets of the Freethinker Endowment Fund. Of course, all three could have prospered had they devoted their energies to the commercial world.

Though there was no dynamic leadership, and few court dramas, between the eras of Carlile and Bradlaugh, it is perhaps unfair to say that between 1826 and 1861 “there was little direct association between freethought and birth control”. This period saw the publication of a number of contraceptive tracts written by and owing their distribution to acknowledged freethinkers: *Moral Physiology* (Robert Dale Owen, 1831), *The Fruits of Philosophy* (Charles Knowlton, 1832), *Notes on the Population Question* (“Anti-Marcus”, possibly John Stuart Mill, 1841), *The Elements of Social Science* (George Drysdale, 1854), and *Medical Common Sense* (Edward Bliss Foote, 1858). Nor can I agree that “in the end the secularisation of society made Secularism redundant”, though many secularist “good causes” were taken over by the State (as “positive” humanists appear not to have noticed).

These objections are, however, relatively minor in consideration of so far-ranging and useful a book. If it provides no major new insights, it gives unparalleled documentation of the old ones and helps to remove many academic misconceptions of the movement. It concludes that the *Gay News* trial “may serve to remind the historian that his subject, however remote, is never dead”. DAVID TRIBE

A SEASON IN PARADISE by Broyten Breytenbach.
Jonathan Cape, £8.50.

As I sit here writing this, and as you sit there reading

it, Broyten Breytenbach is still in prison in South Africa, serving his nine-year sentence on extremely dubious charges. *A Season in Paradise* is the poet's first prose work to be published outside South Africa and it may be the last book we see from him until after 1984, when he is released. This book is his account of his return to South Africa after a twelve-year, partly self-imposed exile in Paris. He returns on the last day of 1972 after tedious negotiations for visas for himself and his Vietnamese wife, whose skin colour is what South Africa chooses to call “non-white”. He left as an obscure ex-art student but he returns a famous writer whose homecoming is big news. Nosey journalists (or “whornalists”, as the gifted translator, Rike Vaughan, renders his Joycean Afrikaans) and press photographers dog their tracks. (“If you cross an ass with a shark, you get a journalist,” he remarks bitterly.) Finally the sensation he inadvertently causes by merely revisiting the scenes of his youth and associating with a few dissidents produces such consternation on the part of the authorities that they forbid him ever to return. But two years later, disguised and carrying false papers, Broyten Breytenbach went home again and before he could get back to Paris was charged with terrorism. *A Season in Paradise* concerns the first trip, the joyous but perplexing homecoming to the much loved land of his childhood and youth. The litany of place names will bring mist to the eye of any homesick South African, but for the rest of us there is a helpful glossary in the back and a map in the front.

The title is meant to echo Rimbaud's *Une saison en enfer*, and Breytenbach's paradise has its hellish side too. Returning home after twelve years excites all the poet's deep feeling for his native country. This is the only respectable kind of patriotism—the memory of getting up before dawn to drive the pony trap to school; remembering how things tasted and smelled in childhood. Much of the book is a recollection of childhood scenes and brilliant descriptions of the present moment. Flying from a grey wintry Paris to the lush midsummer of the Cape, Breytenbach, a painter as well as a poet, gives us such a vivid impression of the place that actually going to South Africa seems superfluous. Flying to a remote farm he sees mountain peaks popping above the clouds “like elderly colleagues sharing a steamy sauna”. The dark summer nights and the hot, colour-drenched days are given us in all their visual and tactile reality. In the evening “the sun puts beds down behind the house” and the dawn is “very early . . . well before the sun is properly hatched”. There is a funeral at the village church, and “bells toll the air to shreds”. Breytenbach has a playful sense of humour. He devotes a page to describing the kinds of dreams pine trees have. Later, at a game farm near Vryheid, he sleeps in an isolated rondavel “which also happened to be

inhabited by bats, mambas, and mosquitoes equipped with the most up-to-date arms supplied by the French sanction-breakers”.

Breytenbach is in the sad position of loving his country but hating what the powers that be have made of it. South Africa, he says, is “surely the only country on earth where there are more ghettos than normal residential areas”. White Afrikaner though he is—he would say “whitish” or “off-white”—his sympathies are all with his oppressed, less white fellow citizens. Like Joyce before him lambasting Ireland as an old sow that eats her farrow, Breytenbach says South Africa “devours its young like a tigress demented with pain”.

South Africa is now busy trying to devour Breytenbach. He seems to have had a premonition of his incarceration, which in South Africa does not require psychic powers if you oppose the government. The police never seem very far away. Breytenbach is followed and interviewed; he gets into trouble for being the second person in a room with a banned person who is not allowed to see more than one person at a time. Some of his old college friends are in prison or in exile. “I have never really been locked up—excepting the confines of the word,” he muses in 1973 when he is still free.

Breytenbach’s first book of poetry was published in South Africa in 1964 and immediately won a major literary award. Other books and awards followed. All the time that Breytenbach was being hounded by the authorities the literary establishment praised his writing. His conviction for terrorism carried a minimum sentence of five years. Both the public prosecutor and the Security Policeman in charge of the investigation offered pleas in mitigation and asked for a minimum sentence. Even the prosecution was amazed when the judge sentenced Breytenbach to nine years. The first two years were apparently spent in solitary confinement. He is allowed to write in prison but not to paint. Everything he writes must be given to the prison authorities for “safe keeping”. And all the time he is required reading in South African schools.

If Breytenbach seems to have a premonition of his imprisonment, the reader of *A Season in Paradise* knows the details of it from the excellent introduction by André Brink. Throughout this diary of his first visit we have a strange double perspective. Breytenbach, however, writes with a triple perspective: his memories, the impressions of the present, and his fears and speculations about the future of South Africa. The combination of all these points of view makes the texture of the layers of time interestingly complex.

Embedded in the narrative along with numerous unexpected poems, is the text of a controversial paper Breytenbach read at the annual Summer School of the University of Cape Town in January 1973, “A View from Outside”. Ostensibly a literary

discussion of the Afrikaans writers of the 60s, the paper turned into an extraordinary polemic. How long can you stay out of jail in South Africa after you’ve said *this*? “To me what matters is a quest for, an opening up toward a society in which *each and every one of us* may have his rightful share, within which we may accept responsibility for each other on an *equal footing*. Because, to me, it’s a question of combating those institutions and edifices and myths and prejudices and untruths and idiocy and greed and self-destructive urges and common stupidity which render such a community impossible. *That’s* my loyalty. That is the substance of my South Africanhood.”

SARAH LAWSON

THEATRE

MAN AND SUPERMAN by Bernard Shaw. National Theatre.

Bernard Shaw was always a passionate advocate of the idea of a national theatre. At the end of a speech to a large and enthusiastic meeting in the Kingsway Hall on 31 January 1930, he declared:

“I want the State Theatre to be what St Paul’s and Westminster Abbey are to religion—something to show what the thing can be at its best.” A little while before, in the same speech, he had referred to his own play, *Man and Superman*, into which he had put an act which everyone connected with the theatre had said it was impossible to perform. He himself had not expected it to be performed but his friend, Esmé Percy, had insisted on learning the act and playing it. Shaw, so he said, had tried to sit through it once and had nearly died afterwards. Nevertheless, the fact that the long play had been performed induced him to write *Back to Methuselah*, “which lasts a week”. The point of these remarks, not all of which can be taken at their full face value, was to emphasise that a healthy theatre could not rely on the policy of giving the public what it wants. The public does not always know what it wants. If, argued Shaw, it had only been given what it wanted, or thought it wanted, it would never have seen *Man and Superman*. Hence, there should be a theatre which should frequently put on what people do not want, because then they would find that they want it after all. This was the justification of a national theatre.

The themes of Shaw’s speech now unite in the production in the Olivier Theatre of *Man and Superman* in its entirety. The play that is normally produced with that name is a three-act modern comedy, full of wit and sparkle and based on one of Shaw’s most celebrated and characteristic inversions. Not only theatrical cliché is turned upside down, but the conventional view of sexual rela-

tions. The common theory is that the man, of whom the prototype is Don Juan, pursues the woman. This is a romantic activity, in which the handsome male chases the beautiful female he has chosen to be his love. Not so, says Shaw, it is the other way round. It is woman who is the pursuer because she is driven by the force of life itself which requires her to find a mate with whom to produce the new generation. The play is called "A Comedy and a Philosophy" but, while there is plenty of comedy, there is not much philosophy apart from the main idea. An incidental point of interest is that the word "superman" is never once used in the three acts, although it occurs in the preface.

The play was first performed (in the three act version) in 1905. The missing act was performed as a one-act play in 1907 and it was not until 1915 that the entirety was performed. It has not been seen many times since and the present production is the first since 1951. Yet, the missing act adds much more than an extra hour and a half to the play. It adds breadth and depth and richness and, as Shaw put it, in a special preface to the "popular edition" of the play in 1911, it adds something to the comedy and the philosophy:

"It might have been called a religion as well; for the vision of hell in the third act . . . is expressly intended to be a revelation of the modern religion of evolution."

In the hell scene, which is presented as a dream sequence, four of the characters who have been seen in the first two acts, reappear as characters from Mozart's opera, *Don Giovanni*. Tanner, the Don Juan of the earlier acts, appears as Juan, Ann, the woman who pursues him in the modern play, is Dona Ana and two other characters appear as the Statue and the Devil. The act consists of a brilliant passage of sustained dialogue in which Juan and the Devil present opposing views of the meaning of life and the purpose of existence. To summarise, where a summary can only disappoint and possibly mislead, Juan declares that hell has nothing to offer him because it is the home of the idle pleasure-seekers whose only wish is to escape from reality. For him, it is heaven that is "the home of the masters of reality" and that is why he is going thither. Juan thus stands for man, not the lover but the man who strives for something better than himself. He has found

"religion . . . a mere excuse for laziness, since it had set up a God who looked at the world and saw that it was good, against the instinct in me that looked through my eyes at the world and saw that it could be improved."

One method of improvement is to breed the superman and Ana is left at the end of the act, realising that her mission in life is incomplete and she must seek a father for the superman, thus linking the third act with the remainder of the play.

There are those who say that Shaw's ideas and arguments have lost their cutting edge. His biology, they have decided, is out of date. Creative evolution never had much in it and that little has been exploded. This may be so. Perhaps Shaw did not succeed in doing what his teacher Samuel Butler wanted to do, to put back into the universe the mind that Darwin had banished. In his preface, Shaw recognised that ideas might not last but said that a dramatist had to have ideas. "Disprove his assertion after it is made, yet its style remains." It is the style of *Man and Superman* that is overwhelming. The argument between Juan, the world-betterer, and the Devil, who, if he does not have all the best tunes, has some of the best arguments and accepts the world as it is, is a magnificent example of intellectual vitality expressed in an operatic verbal technique.

The production and performances on the South Bank are worthy of the play. It is long, nearly five hours in all, but it sweeps the audience with it. The immense Olivier stage is superb for the hell scene (which is introduced incidentally by an episode in which Tanner and his travelling companions are captured by a gang of politically philosophic bandits, including three Social Democrats with "three distinct and incompatible views of Social Democracy"). Daniel Massey as Tanner/Juan performs the great arias of rhetoric with energy and style, Penelope Wilton is little behind him as the predatory Ann and Michael Bryant as the Devil is outwardly subservient but plausible and persuasive. The supporting players are admirable and, because Shaw's dramatic method stands firmly on the conflict of ideas as revealed in and expounded by sharply different characters, special praise must go to Violet Robinson, played by Anna Carteret, who presents a brisk, hard-edged, material, almost mercenary view of love and marriage to contrast with the biological imperative of Ann.

Shaw's alternative to God is life itself. It is the Life Force that drives Tanner/Juan to seek perfection and Ann to find her mate. She does not understand; "it sounds like the Life Guards" she says, but it throws them into each other's arms. The play ends ironically, of course. Tanner, who has tried to avoid marriage, is led to it and the Devil's reality may be just as important as Juan's. There is life, however, in the final laughter and the producer, Christopher Morahan, finding that life on the page, has given it to us again and more abundantly.

T. F. EVANS

RADICAL POLITICS 1790-1900 RELIGION AND UNBELIEF by Edward Royle. £1.15 (19p postage). From G. W. Foote & Co, 702 Holloway Road, London N19 3NL.

NATIONAL SECULAR SOCIETY. Membership only £1. Support secularism. Forms from 702 Holloway Road, London N19 3NL.

CINEMA

PROSTITUTE (X) directed by Tony Garnett (UK 1980).
At selected cinemas.

The name of Tony Garnett has long been associated with social realism as a means of agitating for change (*Kes*, and more recently the TV *Law and Order* series). *Prostitute* is his latest work, and one on which he did not collaborate with Ken Loach. Garnett used a cast of professionals and non-professionals and chose the subject of prostitution, "... out of sheer curiosity, rather than from any high-falutin' ideals". The period covers one summer in the life of Sandra, a Birmingham street-walker who graduates to rubbing clients off in a massage parlour and from there goes to work for an exploitative madame in London, where things go very wrong for her. Sandra's flatmate in Birmingham, Louise, a social-worker, takes up the cudgels on behalf of the prostitutes—and I use that clause advisedly because she works *for* the women, even *against* them, rather than *with* them—organising them into a pressure-group to prod lawyers and parliamentarians into an awareness about the iniquitousness of the law on soliciting.

Louise initiates her campaign when Rose, a friend of Sandra's, is once again arrested for allegedly soliciting. Garnett has been criticised (in *Time Out*) for his "determination to represent prostitution as 'a job like any other', when it so clearly isn't. . . ." Garnett himself, on the other hand, has said, "... fundamentally I don't think (prostitutes) are more exploited than anybody else. . ." He goes on to point out, though, that they *are* persecuted by the police and the law and that our attitude towards them is "intensely hypocritical". It is not fortuitous, then, that the film is framed by instances of this persecution. Rose's arrest gives the film its impetus. A woman magistrate sends her down for three months, thus separating her from her children. Towards the end of the film Sandra's dingy flat is raided by two detectives, ostensibly looking for drugs. One of them demonstrates why detectives are often nicknamed "dicks" by ramming his penis into Sandra's mouth and forcing her to suck him off.

While Garnett is engaged in a very specific struggle, to gain reforms in the law on soliciting, he also sees prostitution as society in miniature, with its own codes, traditions and taboos, its clearly-defined pecking order. Some of its practitioners are, and will always be, down-at-heel and cowed, too fearful to fight for change. They are society's losers and victims, the natural prey of the law. At the other end of the scale are the sleek aristocrats of the profession. Garnett seems to be of a socialist-feminist persuasion rather than a radical-feminist one. He believes, to put it crudely, that it is class

rather than gender rôle-conditioning which divides us. Some of this film's detractors may well argue that Garnett is not a feminist at all. . . . Talking of aristocrats, there is a scene which is a fine example of Garnett's deceptively understated, relaxed style, a style which carries great rage and despair. A young lord throws a stag-party, and the "attraction" is a ritualised lesbian coupling, for which each partner earns £50. Garnett quietly signals that the white woman is the "butch" and black one the "fem". Precisely because the emotional charge behind that scene is tightly contained, it became for me an image of degradation and waste I found almost too angerring to watch. Despite its *ciné-vérité* "naturalness" it is one of those scenes in the film which build up, brush-stroke by careful brush-stroke, a picture of a deeply-divided Britain.

Language forms and reinforces those divisions; the diction of the magistrate, of sociologists. "You must've swallowed a dictionary," one of the prostitutes complains to Louise. The language of colour and light, of flowing camera movement, Garnett's humour and strong, no-nonsense narrative line transcend class barriers.

Garnett also shows the hollowness of words and of received ideas. At a reception, visiting businessmen make painful small-talk in broken English with their hired hostesses, merely as a prelude to an expensive fuck. Griff, a sociology lecturer Louise meets at a conference, answers her question, "Why do (prostitutes) do it?" with a dry little summary of the two prevailing and conflicting theories on the subject, while Louise laughs behind her hand. Griff's cerebral masturbation is a prelude to sex, too, to an encounter devoid of warmth, lust or mutual respect. It seems that sex which is not sold is not necessarily given away. It can be thrown away too.

VERA LUSTIG

LETTERS

ASTROLOGY

In his review of Michel Gauquelin's book on astrology (February issue), Dr Cherfas says he does not know what to make of the apparent correlation between the leaders of certain professions and their birth signs—particularly sports champions and "the Mars effect". At the same time, he dismisses as "petty wrangling" the question raised by the American Committee for the Scientific Investigation of Claims of the Paranormal as to which sports champions are the more eminent. But a statistical survey is only as good as its selection procedures. And if Gauquelin was aware of the birth signs of some of the sports champions from whom he was selecting the most eminent for inclusion in his survey, this awareness could well have affected his decision in border-line cases, thus significantly affecting his "statistical" conclusions.

The apparent correlation is thus discredited, as Dr Cherfas supposes it might be—but what discredits it is the very argument that he dismisses as irrelevant and "petty".

BARBARA SMOKER

FILM CENSORSHIP

Your issue of November 1980 carried a reference on page 169 to criticism by the British Board of Film Censors of Cardiff City Council regarding the ban imposed on the film "Pretty Baby". The sentence in question reads as follows: "The Secretary, Mr James Ferman, claims the ban brings the system of local council certificates into disrepute."

This is a misrepresentation of the point made in my letter to Cardiff City Council, which recognised their right to ban any film if they see fit but criticised their judgment in doing so sight unseen. This, I argued, is contrary to the principles of British justice, in which hearsay evidence is not allowed. Only six of the seventy-five councillors saw the film, and those who did not see it overruled the judgment of those who did, presumably on hearsay evidence.

JAMES FERMAN

CURIOUS CHURCH

The Catholic Church never fails to interest and baffle me. The Catholic Church has for many years claimed infallibility and certainty when teaching about matters of faith and morals. The Catholic hierarchy have repeatedly condemned artificial birth control, homosexual acts and masturbation. But when it comes to the nuclear deterrent the Catholic bishops reply "It is often supposed that the Church can provide an immediate answer to every moral question. . . This is not the case."

JOHN WATSON

HUMANE-IST VIEW

Colin Mills' letter (January, 1981) on animal experiments prompts me to proffer a humane-ist view on our relations with animals.

I have a pet and I do eat meat. I see it is a fact of life that some species kill and eat other species—and even some plants eat meat too. We are omnivores. I believe we are within our rights to eat meat, provided we slaughter by the most speedy and humane possible means and provided that the animals we eat, while alive, live in conditions which cause them no suffering. Practising this attitude, I make some effort to buy only "free range" poultry and eggs, and I do not eat whale meat, paté de foie gras or white veal because of the abominable cruelty in their production.

On experiments, I hold similar principles; I cannot accept that any ultimate good can justify quite any means. Testing the effect of a new drug on an animal which has cancer seems to me to be reasonable; torturing the animal to cause a cancer to test the drug seems to me comparable to the work of the Nazi doctors who experimented on concentration camp victims.

I can see no justification for pouring cosmetics into animals' eyes, nor for force-feeding a poison (say a cleaner, or a photographic chemical) to find out what quantity is lethal (the "DN50 test").

Could my humane-ist view also be a humanist view?

PETER DANNING

MARXISM A RELIGION?

In response to B. B. Dale's letter (January 1981) I fail to see how he can assert that Marxism is a religion, when surely even the briefest analysis of Marx's works would show it to be a wide-ranging philosophy.

Like any other philosophy it has its strong points and its faults. As a blueprint for socialism, it is somewhat weak; as a historical analysis of the development of

capitalism it is first class. But in no sense could Marxism be conceived of as a religion.

I daresay B. B. Dale is correct in assuming some adherents of Marxism treat it as a religion, but that would be to regard Marxism as a theology when in fact it is essentially an empirical philosophy based on man's interaction with his world and it follows therefore that as a philosophical viewpoint it is materialistic and atheistic.

I am puzzled by the expression "where Marxism has come to power", since Marx himself was of the opinion that after the transitional period from capitalism to socialism there would be no essential need for government to control the means of production.

Presumably the expression used refers to the Soviet Union where, of course, there are some restrictions on liberty, but I don't think that freedom of thought is a good example. After all church and state are separate in the USSR, which is something which the NSS has been campaigning for since the last century.

With the grocer's daughter firmly entrenched in Downing Street, B. B. Dale would be better occupied in safeguarding the precious few civil liberties we have left in the UK, rather than making protestations about the lack of freedom in Eastern bloc nations.

KEN WRIGHT

May I answer the question put to Ken Wright by B. B. Dale in January—which Marxist State allows Freedom of Thought?

The answer is, of course, most of them. It is firmly stated in their State Constitutions, as it is in that of the United States. The problems which arise on both sides of the Curtain are not those of thoughts, but of actions. How does any State deal with those who are dedicated to overthrowing it, such as the inhabitants of the Maze prison?

S. W. ASHTON

ERRATA

We reprint the third paragraph of Barbara Smoker's letter about Religious Education, which we regret was badly mangled by printer's error in the February issue.

In particular, I am opposed to the REC demand (endorsed by the BHA) for the recruitment and training over the next few years of thousands of extra teachers specialising in RE. If their brief is to be "genuine education about religion, philosophy and morals", why not recruit teachers qualified in philosophy rather than theology? How can a radical change be expected if the new wine of a broader syllabus is to be left in the old bottles of RE departments, manned by the same teachers, many of whom specialised in theology and most of whom are committed Christians (often with missionary inclinations), and augmented by new teachers, similarly self-selected and similarly trained in the same old colleges with the same, or largely the same, faculty?

(Indian Atheism)

these battles, that one hears of in the Vedantas, are still being fought!) It was founded by Periyar, a grand campaigner for self respect amongst the underprivileged, who died seven years ago (still campaigning) at 94. It is called the Self Respect Movement, and one of its slogans is "There is no God. There is no God. There is no God at all. He, who invented God is a fool. He, who propagates God is a scoundrel. He, who worships God is a barbarian."

**NATIONAL SECULAR SOCIETY
ANNUAL DINNER**

Speakers:

Baroness Wootton
Maureen Colquhoun
Harold Blackham
Rita Craft

21 March 1981

The Devonshire,
Bishopsgate, London EC1.

Further details from NSS,
702 Holloway Road, London N19 3NL.

EVENTS

Belfast Humanist Group. Dr James Hemming: Religion—the Humanist Alternative. Thursday, 12 March. Secretary: Wendy Wheeler, 30 Cloyne Crescent, Monkstown, Co Antrim. Tel: Whiteabbey 66752.

Berkshire Humanists: Dr Donald Hughes: The Brandt Report. Friday, 13 March, 8 pm. Friends' Meeting House, Church Street, Reading.

Brighton and Hove Humanist Group. Does the team think? Members' Forum. Sunday, 5 April, 5.30 pm. Queen's Head, Queen's Road, Brighton. (Junction Rd entrance opposite Brighton Station.)

Having and District Humanist Society. Christopher Elson: Childless or Childfree? Tuesday, 17 March, 8 pm. Harold Wood Social Centre (junction of Gubbins Lane and Squirrels Heath Road).

Leeds and District Humanist Group. Jim Herrick: A Hundred Years of the Freethinker. Friday, 13 March, 7.45 pm. Swarthmore Institute.

Lewisham Humanist Group. John Roberts (Lord's Day Observance Society): Challenge for the Lord's Day. Thursday, 26 March, 7.45 pm. Davenport Hall, Davenport Road, Catford, SE6.

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. Jim Dawson: The Work of the National Schizophrenia Fellowship. Sunday, 15 March, 7.30 pm. BHA, 13 Prince of Wales Terrace, London W8.

Merseyside Humanist Group. Desmond Kelly: The Last Right—Exit. Monday, 16 March, 7.45 pm. 46 Hamilton Square, Birkenhead.

South Place Ethical Society. Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, WC1. Sunday Morning Meetings, 11 am. Ronald Mason: Gerard Manley Hopkins, 15 March. Harold Blackham: Five Cardinal Activities, 22 March. W. H. Liddell: What Happened in the Peasants Revolt?, 29 March. Peter Cadogan: Nietzsche—Arch-Prophet of Modern Humanism, 5 April. Sir Alfred Ayer: Three Types of Moral Philosophy. Sunday Forums 3 pm. Dr Michael Brown: Open Marriage? 22 March. Tuesday Discussions 7 pm. Theme for March: Social Responsibility—Statutory and Voluntary.

Sutton Humanist Group: David Flint: Privacy and the Computer. Wednesday, 8 April. Friends' Meeting House, 10 Cedar Road, Sutton.

Tyneside Humanist Group. A. C. Hobson: Unemployment—Curse or Blessing. Wednesday, 25 March, 7.30 pm. Friends' Meeting House, 1 Archbold Terrace, Newcastle upon Tyne.

West Glamorgan Humanist Group. Dr P. J. Walters: The Origin of the Universe. Friday, 27 March, 7.30 pm. Friends' Meeting House, Page Street, Swansea.

Worthing Humanist Group. Dr James Hemming: Education in Human Competence. Sunday, 29 March, 5.30 pm. Worthing Trades Council Club, 15 Broadwater Road.

Gay Humanist Group. Peter Danning: Esperanto. Friday, 10 April, Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London W1.

Humanist Holidays. Summer 1981. St Leonards-on-Sea, E. Sussex. 1-8 August, £63. Enquiries to Mrs B. Beer, 58 Weir Road, London SW12 0NA. Tel: 01-673 6234.

Scottish Humanist Conference 1981. Guest speaker, Jim Herrick: The Freethinker—Yesterday and Tomorrow. 10.30 am-5.30 pm. The University of Stirling. Saturday, 25 April. Further details from 4 Dovecot Loan, Edinburgh EH14 2LT.

The Freethinker Centenary. A Celebration will take place at Conway Hall, on Saturday 16 May at 7 pm. Tickets (free) will be available from 702 Holloway Road, London N19 3NL.

In Chicago a woman, who has been charged with murdering her room-mate, claimed to be a witch. Her room-mate died after he was scalded with boiling water and left naked and unfed on the floor of the flat for six days.

THE FREETHINKER

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