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DO WE NEED THE MONARCHY?

This month a future British monarch marries a future British queen. It is a good time to ask whether we need the monarchy any more. As one graffitiist put it: "London is drowning in a sea of kitsch". There will be some who enjoy the rigmarole and mumbo jumbo of the royal wedding, some who hate it, and others who use the day's holiday to get on with their gardening or home decorating. But do we need a head of state who is linked with a hereditary aristocracy, entwined with the church, and who embodies mystical, hierarchical notions about society?

Secularists were strongly linked with republicans in the nineteenth century. Bradlaugh, the first President of the National Secular Society, was thought by some to be a likely candidate for the first President of a British republic. The queen is known as defender of the faith and it is her role as head of church and state that secularists will particularly challenge. Kingcraft and priestcraft, as Paine frequently pointed out, have combined to repress the people. The origins of priestly and kingly roles go back to the most successful members of the tribe's determination to dominate others. The first kings were pirates and buccaneers; the first priests were charlatans and mystifiers.

The monarchy no longer plays such a repressive role in the UK today. But its psychological and symbolic effect remains strong and detrimental to a modern society. And it is an expensive way of sustaining peripheral entertainment.

The cost of the royal wedding to the nation is not the strongest argument against it. It is miniscule in comparison with the cost of armaments. Presumably, many people will get good entertainment value out of it. Perhaps the monarchy should be relegated to a ministry of arts and tourism. The popularity of the monarchy is undeniable; they have become a sort of aristocratic Archers, whose

romances and mishaps enter the daily chit-chat.

But by no means everyone shares in the adulation. The leader of the Labour-controlled GLC, Mr Ken Livingstone, refused an invitation to attend the wedding. He said: "The idea of getting dressed up in some funny suit and queueing around for hours and then barely seeing anything does strike me as some form of self-inflicted torture. . . I found my own wedding enough strain without going to any more."

A number of Labour MPs have also refused invitations. The Shadow Education Minister, Mr Neil Kinnock, said "I am otherwise engaged on the day". When asked what the other engagement was he said "I am not exactly sure yet". Mr Stanley Orme, Shadow spokesman on Industry, and Mr Roy Hattersley, Shadow Home Secretary, both found they would be engaged on constituency work on the day.

Republican Day

A town in Derbyshire, Clay Cross, is holding a Republican day on July 29. Councillor Cliff Fox, one of the 11 Labour members of the local council, said "I do not support the monarchy and neither do any of my colleagues. The amount of money that is being spent by some local authorities and the Government for this wedding is a sheer waste of money. It would be better used to assist the 2½ million unemployed." The council was hoping to find a theatre group to stage a play to demonstrate "the other side" of royalty, depicting them as "riding on the backs of working-class people and not realising what a mess the country is in".

Although the cost of the wedding is not a major argument v the monarchy, the cost of the monarchy as a permanent feature of our state expenditure is worth considering. It is not just that

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CENTENARY YEAR

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the civil list pays to keep in clover a large group of courtiers and hangers-on. (The queen herself puts in quite a hard day's work and certainly deserves danger money and boredom money—almost no-one can ever have attended so many boring functions.) Maybe a majority of the country would vote to keep the civil list going. But the private fortune of the royal family is secret and reckoned to be enormous. The crown is also one of the largest land-owners in the country. Also the royal family, though their tax position is not revealed, are presumably free from tax, and that means enormous exemption from capital gains tax, death duties and so on.

It is sometimes argued that the monarch is an excellent sales representative on her travels round the world, and an excellent draw for tourists who bring an income into the country. As far as tourists go, the quaint and outmoded customs of the English are no doubt of curiosity value; not many such anachronisms as changing the guard have survived elsewhere in the world. But it is hard to believe that that is the prime reason for visiting the country and that an end to the monarchy would mean an end to tourism. If the queen is a good sales rep for British industry, she hasn't been doing a very good job in the last few years, and should perhaps be replaced by someone more effective. The reality, of course, is that the state of the pound and the competitiveness of British goods are the prime factors in British exports.

Presidential System

It is sometimes argued that it is necessary to keep the head of state as a monarch to avoid a presidential system such as the American one. But there are many ways of devising a non-hereditary head of state with a basically non-intervening and ceremonial function. In fact, if the monarchy were not so constricted and limited in its interference it would not be tolerated. It has only survived by being emasculated of day to day power. While we have inoffensive and dutiful characters around such as most of the present royal family provides, there will be less incentive to end the system. But it should be remembered that there have been English monarchs who have been both bad and mad. The monarchy may be a non-functional appendix, but even appendixes can get infected and need excision.

A principal argument against the monarchy is the same as that against all hereditary position. There is no justification for passing on power and position by family; authority should be earned by wisdom and ability, not passed on to the first baby. The same goes for the peerage, with which the monarchy is associated. Oscar Wilde said: "You study the peerage. . . It is the best thing in fiction the English have ever done."

It is a fiction that the monarchy provides a bulwark against dictatorship. They might equally provide a cradle for it. And if they were to interfere substantially in political events they would not be tolerated. They remain on sufferance, in a peripheral entertainment role. They are not allowed to step out of the strict bounds of conventionality (not that the present family seem to have sufficient imagination to want to). When Edward VIII fell in love with an unsuitable divorcee, he was forced to abdicate. Perhaps Prince Charles's slow progress to married bliss has been due to the difficulty of finding a candidate suitable to all parties.

Although the political views of the royal family are supposed to be neutral, they occasionally let slip remarks which give a clear indication of where their sympathies lie. Prince Philip has developed a line in gaffes which his eldest son has generally avoided (but does he hold similar views?). Last month Prince Philip caused MPs to ask questions in the House. Interviewed on a radio chat show he said: "A few years ago everybody was saying we must have much more leisure, everybody is working too much. Now that everybody has got so much leisure—it may be involuntary, but they have got it—they are complaining they are unemployed. People do not seem to be able to make up their mind what they want, do they?" A Labour MP, Mrs David Stoddart, said "It is quite amazing, and quite insensitive to the real needs of the unemployed".

Willie Hamilton, a courageous and outspoken opponent of the monarchy, has put his finger on the real damage of the monarchy. He wrote in his book *My Queen and I* that the monarchy was part of a "deferential, class conscious, irrational society. . ."

Secularists want to encourage all individuals to feel their own worth: they oppose deference. We oppose the divisiveness of a class-obsessed society, and the survival of the monarchy symbolises that. In mystical attitudes to a king as god's representative on earth (yes, the queen was crowned as divinely chosen) the monarchy is profoundly irrational; and cannot be defended.

The official guide to the royal wedding says ". . . the Prince and Princess of Wales will symbolise qualities which are too frequently decried in this increasingly materialistic and irreligious world". Will Runcie mouth similar nonsense on the day? By this kind of sentiment the wedding and the monarchy become abhorrent to the secularist. We don't want to drown in the materialistic welter of tee-shirts, mugs, special issue coins, silver platters . . . nor to suffer the idea that two people live together or marry for mystical not human reasons. There is no sign that the monarchy is likely to be voted out in the near future. But do we really need it?

It's Silly to Tell Lies to Children

ALAN BOOTH

The author is a school teacher who has attended numerous morning assemblies. He suggests that the Bible is not suitable educational material for children.

The Bible doesn't tell the truth. All the silly stories about apples, arks, lions' dens, burning fiery furnaces, whales, water and wine and Gadarene swine are at best either myths or well-meaning historical inaccuracies; at worst they are crude propagandist lies. In either case they are wrong. Being wrong they ought to be presented as simple primitive fiction, but in 17 years of teaching I've never heard them presented that way. Headmasters read them solemnly to silent children at morning assembly apparently regarding the stories as accurate historical records or founts of eternal wisdom. A recent Scripture paper asked children what "lessons" they could draw from the story of Jonah and the whale. How many marks for saying that the writer's knowledge of marine biology was deplorable?

All establishment comment on Bible stories seems only to serve to draw a dubious "moral" or to show what an awfully bright and decent chap God was when he smote Egyptians, Philistines, Amalekites, etc—splendid lessons for our multi-racial society! The good Samaritan is trotted forward for his annual reminder of the importance of loving one's neighbour—but doesn't the sermon on the mount talk of loving one's enemy? Hurray for the Priest and the Levite?—not a chance! Come back, Pharisee, all is forgiven?—not on your life! We can't have the Gospels being logically self-consistent; they would not be religious if they were. Have any of you tried reading John XI critically? To a critic's mind the hero is a charlatan with a good line in PR.

The story of the raising of Lazarus is a lie. But if it were true, what a filthy story it would be! I can imagine no greater horror than dying. When I was 19 I saw a man drown in his own blood, saw the dumb, helpless, agonised appeal in his eyes. Lazarus died, we are told. What must he have felt when he came back to consciousness in a tomb, blinded in the muffling grave cloths that bore the stains and the stench of his own putrefaction? What must he have felt for the man who, for his own self-glorification, had deliberately let him suffer the horror of death once and had condemned him to suffer it again at an unknown time in the future? No scripture teacher poses these questions; no headmaster attempts to answer them when the story is read aloud in morning assembly.

Has anyone ever heard a headmaster comment

that the book written by this same John who claims to have been present at Jesus's crucifixion can be proved to have been written at least 80 years after Jesus's death? I bet no-one has. Christian lies are like the lies about Santa Claus, respectable lies, nice lies, pretty lies, lies hallowed by centuries of tradition, lies that must be kept as invisible to impressionable young minds as . . . the Emperor's new clothes?

It's silly to tell lies to children.

One of the lies they are told is that the language of traditional Christian worship is beautiful. Sometimes it is, I suppose. Most of the time it isn't, but no-one ever says so. Let me say now that the narrative technique of the four Gospel writers is dimly crude: the action stumbles, the characters are left almost entirely undeveloped. The 23rd Psalm, so often praised, starts off by referring to "the Lord" in the third person; three verses later he's referred to in the second person. How crude! How clumsy! It's the kind of basic mistake we rebuke a 10-year-old for, but no 10-year-old preparatory schoolboy ever has the psalm's crude clumsiness pointed out to him—he just has to learn the silly thing off by heart, or sing it, or stand up when someone else sings it—and he must never, never actually think about it.

Primitive Literature

I suggest that the reverence that is shown day by day, Sunday by Sunday, to primitive literature in creaking transliteration damages children's critical faculties. They are made to mumble words thoughtlessly, like the child under the Wilson administration who recited every morning, "Our father which art in Heaven, Harold be thy name". Take another example: in my own school the acoustics are poor. Thus for years the children muttered every Monday, "O God, who art the author of peace and lover of God". They couldn't hear the headmaster saying "concord"; he couldn't hear them muttering "God". I've straightened them out now, but the fact remains that for years the children paid not the slightest attention to the patent meaninglessness of their mutters; they were "religious" mutters, so they had to be right, and to Hell with such trivial matters as a thoughtful consideration of the way words are used! That's only important in English lessons after all.

I loathe the silly, confusing words that religion has spawned, words empty of any kind of referential significance. It's hard enough to explain even to an adult that abstract nouns are mere semantic labels which have no actual referent in the physical universe; what on earth are children suppose to make of such abominable religious words as "bless-

ing" and "holiness"? Why should children be confused by such absurd sentences as "In God's service is perfect freedom"? Children's critical faculties are tender plants and need careful nurture—they will have desperate need of them when they grow up. English teaching fosters them; religious teaching poisons them.

These thoughts appeared in a slightly condensed form, in the Autumn 1980 edition of the English Broadsheet of SATIPS—The Society of Assistants Teaching in Preparatory Schools which I edit. They produced a storm of letters for publication, three of which were so clumsily argued that in a fit of kindness I returned them to their authors with a gentle hint that by allowing their letters to be published they would be doing their cause and themselves considerable harm. I have heard no more from these prudent gentlemen.

The burden of most of the others was epitomized by the following quotation from one of them:

"As for your endpiece it is nothing if not provocative. I like to think I'm a Christian or at least trying reasonably hard to become one but I can't refute some of your arguments. I feel that much of your disenchantment (to use a fairly mild word) might come from the observance of too many school assemblies and chapels, and I can begin to see what you mean. But I can't believe that underneath it all the Christian ethos isn't a 'good thing' (what-

ever that might mean) and that even if we only give the children in our care a very vague conception of what it's all about then that isn't a bad thing. But to bore them rigid with meaningless 'Our Father, which chart in heaven' etc—well, I have to agree with you without really having thought of an alternative answer."

How can such a man give anything *but* a "very vague conception of what it's all about"? I feel sorry for him. How horrible it must be to be shackled to a creed that so numbs the mind and impoverishes the imagination.

Another letter was more intellectually respectable. One prep school headmaster played the mediaeval dialectical game of citing authorities: St John, J. R. Green, Sir Arthur Quiller-Couch, E. V. Rieu and Lord Hatherleigh—an eclectic little posy who have in common only that they were all Christians and are all dead. Lord Hatherleigh apparently wrote: "I have just finished reading the Bible through for the forty-fourth time. I immensely prefer it to all other good books whatever, it will be spirit and life to me until time be no more." You'd think that forty-four readings even of the Bible would teach a man the difference between a full stop and a comma, wouldn't you?

English is a matter of telling the truth, elegantly: religion is a matter of telling lies, clumsily. One of them has to go.

Is Christianity Played Out?

"LAON"

This article, reprinted from "The Freethinker" of 18 September 1881, provides a revealing contrast between the attitude towards religion then and now. Readers will make their own comparisons, but it may be noted that the description of "modern" versions of Christianity remain apt, while the vision of "This dying of an old faith" seems somewhat over-optimistic. Feminists will observe how little their cause was advanced 100 years ago. "Laon" is a pseudonym of J. M. Wheeler.

Christianity played out! What nonsense! Look at its missions, its churches and chapels, its array of priests, ministers, and street-corner preachers, with their devout and devoted followers. What better evidence of vitality could one have than the strife that rages between its rampant sects? Christianity is the greatest fact of the world's history; and the wilfully blind individual who asserts that the religion against which Prophyry, and Julian contended in vain, is effete and unable to overcome all its enemies, deserves execration here and will receive execution hereafter.

But soft awhile! So many and various are the

statements of Christian doctrine by its professors that the outsider may surely be allowed to ask for a definition. What is meant by Christianity? In an historic enquiry as to whether Christianity has had its day and is passing away, for that is the most unfrivolous purport of our question, it is obvious it will not do to accept as Christianity all choosing to call itself by that name. We must have something distinctive. We cannot, for instance, allow leading a moral life to be Christianity; for in that case many heathens who have never heard of Christ would be Christians. The average Protestant evangelical, who blusters about Christianity being the friend of progress, civilisation, and what not, will probably define Christianity as a following of the life and teachings of Christ. This, again, will not do. Apart from the difficulty of getting at the genuine doctrine of Jesus, as distinguished from the errors, exaggerations, and misstatements of his reporters; and the additional difficulty of the totally different ideas of Christ and Christianity exhibited in the earliest Christian writings, those for instance of Paul and those attributed to Matthew and John; there is no possibility of tracing in history the genuine doctrine of Jesus, even if that could be arrived at. For historic purposes Chris-

tianity must be considered as those distinctive beliefs which have come down the ages embodied in the Christian Church.

We have felt it necessary, in consequence of the pretensions of an entirely new firm trading under the old name, to premise that we mean by Christianity what the world has meant by it for the past eighteen hundred years,—a supernaturally established system of dogmas intended to save men from suffering after they are dead. This scheme of salvation includes the belief in a Trinity, in man's inheriting sin through Adam, in God having become incarnate in Jesus, who was prophesied as the Jewish Messiah, wrought miracles, was crucified by the Jews as a substitute for human sin, resurrected and went up through the clouds: whence he will come to judge the quick and the dead; belief in all which will bring eternal happiness to the elect, while the rest will go to everlasting punishment. With the new firm trading under the old name, of which the late Dean Stanley was an amiable specimen, we have no present concern, except to adduce its appearance in confirmation of our contention that the old and genuine article is played out. In studying the history of the decline of religious beliefs two phases may always be observed. At first the priests stoutly defend the dogmas and practices which the world is outgrowing, and finally, when well outgrown, they declare they form no part of the original faith. The fact that we have reached the second phase, when the original faith is usually confined to what the pious old Scotchman called "the mere cauld morality of the Sermon on the Mount", renders our preliminary definition necessary.

How Religions Die

Religions, as Heine said, die of but one disease, that of being found out. In the accelerated march of humanity a larger and larger quantity of superstitious *impedimenta* gets left behind. The place that Christian doctrines will hold in the mind of coming generations is best measured by their estimation by the thinkers of this. With one notable exception the Christian Church cannot boast an intellect even of the second order, and John Henry Newman is today a cardinal only because his penetrating mind saw no logical halting-place between Catholicism and the rejection of all theological dogmas. The late Earl Beaconsfield, whose freethinking opinions have been so interestingly exposed by the Marquis of Queensberry, makes one of the characters in his last novel, Endymion, say, "Sensible men are all of the same religion."—"And pray what is that?" enquired the prince. "Sensible men never tell." This, like many of the same author's brilliant sayings, is a plagiarism. The epigram here recorded was uttered by Lord Chesterfield. It expresses a deal of truth. Educated men are agreed in the main as to the worth and weight of Christian dogmas; only some, a very few,

of them tell out plainly what they think. But the Christian creed is of that nature that if really believed it must evidence itself in the life. By their fruits ye shall know them. And what class in Europe, save a few ignorant peasants, really show in their lives that they believe in Christianity?

Creeds of Idlers

The creed of the aristocratic set of idlers that calls itself "Society", would seem, since the days of the Second Empire at least, to be, "There is but one goddess, *Fashion*, and one prophet, *Worth* (the tailor)." Feminine deities have usually been the worst, and this one is worshipped nightly with most questionable rites. So truly sincere, however, are her devotees that wives and daughters are constantly self-immolated or ruthlessly sacrificed at her shrine. As regards any other God, unless with a few it be Power they worship, the lives of the upper scum go to prove them practical Atheists. To the large crowd of respectabilities that strive to follow in the wake of "Society", Position serves as God and Push as Gospel. The aims of the true nobility (who are far removed from the nobs) are quite other than the save-your-own-soul-alive-oh creed of Christianity. They have a new ideal and a new gospel. Their aims are human, not divine; and they seek to divert the wealth and energies that have been wasted in striving to grasp another world to the practical amelioration of this. And their influence is being felt. Faith is no longer the standard virtue. Few now consider it enough to allege God's word for any institution. The Sabbath, for instance, is defended on the ground of its human utility and not because "God rested on the seventh day and hallowed it". It is seen that if a coach-and-six can be driven through any Acts of Parliament, whole sects can ride roughshod over any Biblical text. The old words may be indeed retained, but they no longer have the old significance nor the old influence on the life. We have no Christianity, but a Sunday playing at pretending to be Christians. The endeavours of all religionists to reconcile their beliefs with science sufficiently shows who is victor. Scientific men do not stoop to try and reconcile their conclusions with Christianity. They rest on their own evidence and need no anathemas to protect them. Creeds, from having been convictions, are becoming curiosities, and, among the cultured, are relegated duly labelled to their places in the department of extinct mythologies in the great museum of human history.

On the Continent, Christianity is perceptibly fading. The visible head of the great Christian Church only exercises his spiritual authority by resigning temporal power, just as among many Freethinkers the heavenly Pope remains untouched in his celestial Vatican only on condition of never meddling with

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CENTENARY CELEBRATIONS

The centenary party was a great success with nearly 100 people present. There has been some substantial coverage of the centenary in the media.

The editor was interviewed for the Atticus column of *The Sunday Times* (24 May). Despite the mildly satirical tone adopted by the columnist towards all subjects, a fairly accurate and sympathetic piece was published. It was headed "*Freethinker still chasing a cause*" and opened with the implication that free-thinking causes were all won. "Herrick rejects the assertion that we are all freethinkers now and that the magazine, with its unpaid contributors, has outlived its usefulness. 'We are not all freethinkers. . . What is more, religion is making a comeback. There is the rise of Islam, the papacy and born-again Christianity. A revival of religion would expand our circulation, but I wouldn't want it to come back all the same'. . ."

The Times contained a serious article by their religious affairs correspondent, Clifford Longley (2 June). It was headed "Harder targets for freethinkers"—referring to the change from nineteenth

century dogmatic Christianity to current superstitious deism. Clifford Longley wrote of *The Freethinker's* "courageous and at times outrageous tradition which has been handed on through successive editors to the present day. . ." and commented "there is still no sharper eye for moralistic hypocrisy than *The Freethinker's*, which delivers its punches with rather less respect than *Private Eye*".

The BBC religious television programme "The Heart of the Matter" took *The Freethinker* centenary as its starting point on 7 June. The programme showed the centenary number and the first page of the first *Freethinker*, as well as some of the original Bible Cartoons. An interview with Margaret Knight was included and the firmness and clarity of her views on religion came through very strongly. The programme examined the fundamentalist and humanistic strands competing in present-day Christianity. The divided, muddled and contentious state of Christianity revealed in the programme became an implicit, if unintentional, argument for freethought.



Three Editors Cut the Cake. Left to Right: William McIlroy, Jim Herrick, Kit Mouat.

(Photo by Barry Duke)

AN OCCASIONAL COLUMN

JOTTINGS

WILLIAM McILROY

For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also. Matthew 6-21

Recent revelations in the High Court concerning the Unification Church's dubious methods of raising funds caused jurors to urge an investigation into the Moonies' registration as a charity. But the attitude of the public to religious entrepreneurs has, in the main, been one of snooty indifference—after all, what is to be expected from foreigners with funny names like the Rev Sun Moon? So it was something of a jolt when that splendid British institution, the Salvation Army, was given a severe drubbing in the television programme, *For God's Sake Care!* Serious accusations levelled at the Army by social workers, hostel residents and former officers were backed up by solid evidence collected over a period of 12 months by ATV producers David Jones and Claudia Milne.

General Arnold Brown, the Salvation Army's top dog in Britain, imperiously refused to be interviewed on the grounds that he was "too busy". He had every right to do so, but in view of the vast amount of money that his organisation receives every year from the public and from Government bodies like the Department of Health and Social Security, his refusal smacked of arrogance.

The General did, however, find time to write a long letter to *The Times* newspaper informing readers that the Salvation Army "is a movement for Christian evangelism taking the Gospel to the unchurched". No doubt he was "too busy" to add that it is also the country's richest charity, holding capital assets of £48 million, stock market investments of £20 million and short-term deposits of £8 million. Yet according to hostel residents: "They treat you like dirt . . . they wouldn't give a blind man a light."

Two days later a supporting letter from Michael Turnbull, Chief Secretary of the Church Army, was published. This friendly gesture may be accounted for by the fact that earlier in the year both armies of the Lord launched a joint public relations exercise aimed at obtaining considerable sums of money from the Housing Corporation to build more hostels. This venture was condemned by the Rev David Moore, Chairman of the Campaign for the Single Homeless and Rootless, as an attempt to secure resources that had been earmarked for small housing associations. Mr Moore asserted that "the perpetuation of large hostels is a major obstacle to

developing the new community-based housing schemes which are required urgently".

The Salvation Army public relations department has an annual budget of £300,000. It is money well spent. The image of a caring, charitable body of Christian men and women given to good works is so assiduously and successfully promoted that the sound of their band or the sight of their uniform prompt most people to feel automatically for a coin or a banknote to deposit in the collection box.

Every week Salvationists visit thousands of public houses, ostensibly to sell the *War Cry* but in fact to collect money from customers. In contrast to the brash, unpleasing young zealots who raise funds for fringe cults, many Salvationists are pleasant, friendly old ducks who inspire confidence and appeal to public generosity. The majority of people part with their cash under the impression that it will be used to help the poor and needy. Until *For God's Sake Care!* it is highly unlikely that any contributor, or even the unpaid collectors, realised that only 14p in every pound is spent on social work, and that by far the largest proportion, 67p, is devoted to "taking the Gospel to the unchurched".

When Christmas shoppers are serenaded by Salvationists the collection boxes are soon filled; £500 can be taken during an afternoon in London's West End. But the money does not, as most people suppose, provide Christmas dinners for the hungry. It pays for the upkeep of band instruments and the local corps. And how many firms and organisations which send gifts of food and clothes to the Salvation Army are aware that these are not given away, but sold at hostel shops?

For God's Sake Care! shattered many illusions about the Salvation Army's "good work" for the homeless. There is an almost Dickensian regime at most of the hostels, with virtually no amenities or recreational facilities. These buildings could, in line with the Army's usage of military terms, be aptly described as barracks.

At Manchester, residents who do not attend the morning service have to leave the premises and spend the day walking the streets. Those who hold to the precept, "Cleanliness is next to godliness", should at all costs avoid the Great Peter Street, London, hostel, an establishment which boasts one bath-tub for 376 men. That unsalubrious object must surely be the Ultimate Deterrent to the use of soap and water.

"To tell the truth, I sit on the only bench in the House of Lords which has arms—because one of my predecessors was so consistently drunk that he was in the habit of rolling off." The Archbishop of Canterbury at the National Press Club of America in Washington.

POLITICAL CONTROL OF TV

Censorship of television programmes is a slippery slope—it can easily slither into state control, as is seen in most countries with a national television network. BBC television, never without censorious tentacles in its upper echelons, shows signs of increasing political control.

The king of Saudi Arabia was paying a trip to London and expected to chat with Mrs Thatcher, the queen and other such celebrities. No doubt the price of oil and the sale of arms were on the agenda. Perhaps with memories of Saudi Arabia's sensitive reaction to an ATV showing of *Death of a Princess* last year, the BBC suddenly stepped in and cut a two-part film based on Harold Robbins' book *The Pirate*, "because of the possibility that some parts of it might have been thought to have been offensive to King Khaled". *The Pirate* is a rubbishy tale of a jet-setting Arab, who turns out to have been a Jew, and it upset many Arab diplomats when it was first shown.

The BBC has long exercised control of a more pervasive kind in preventing information about the horror of nuclear war to be disseminated—presumably for fear that such awful facts would encourage people to campaign against successive Governments' escalating arms purchases. The case of the refusal to show "The War Game" is notorious. It has now been revealed that an overwhelming majority of the General Advisory Council of the BBC voted in favour of showing the film when it was discussed again. A Council member, Nicholas Horsley, wrote in a letter to the *Guardian* that there was "an overwhelming majority in favour of showing an updated version to provoke public debate". However, the Director General and the Chairman of the BBC are alleged to have made remarks which suggested that it was highly unlikely that the decision could be reversed. Will high-handed indifference to advice continue to suppress public viewing of important documentaries of our time?

Another example of political sensitivity preventing the showing of a documentary was the recent Granada TV World in Action programme about the propaganda war in Northern Ireland. The Independent Broadcasting Association asked for a 20-second shot showing the "lying in state" of the dead hunger striker, Patsy O'Hara, to be cut. The sequence was shown in the context of an attempt to show how the IRA made propaganda by attracting media attention. Use of television for propaganda is a serious issue, but by all accounts the World in Action team had taken it seriously and they withdrew the whole programme rather than accept the cuts. There have been indications that broadcasting networks have come under increasing pressure over the coverage of the hunger strikers' deaths.

NEWS

"TOO ABSURD"

The fuss which Christian busybodies have been making over organisations concerned with the family was highlighted in an article "Family Furore" by Antony Grey in *The Freethinker* (Century issue). It is good to see that the Government can give short shrift to this kind of obsessive determination to make outdated Christian concepts relevant to social work.

Lord Houghton asked in the House of Lords (1 June 1981) whether Her Majesty's Government had had their attention drawn to "the statement in a leaflet published by the Nationwide Festival of Light which lists the Health Education Council among other bodies and alleges that 'None of these bodies is favourable to the Christian way of life'"; and the questioner asked the Government "what action they propose to take". The bald reply came from Lord Cullen of Ashbourne: "Ministers had not previously been shown the statement to which the noble Lord draws attention because it was regarded as being too absurd to warrant the expenditure of ministerial time".

TOO SMALL

Barbara Smoker, President of the National Secular Society, wrote to the Home Secretary about the charitable status of religions after the public discussion of whether the Moonies should have obtained charitable status. In her letter Barbara Smoker pointed out that although political activity disqualifies an organisation from receiving charitable status the political activities of the churches are exempt from this condition.

A reply from the Home Office said that "Taken in the context of the total work of the Church of England, the Roman Catholic Church or other recognised Christian denominations for example, any political activities they may undertake would form such a small part of their total function as to be unexceptionable." The political activities of the major Christian denominations are so considerable that it is amazing that the Home Office has the effrontery to make so ridiculous a statement.

According to the annual report of the Charity Commissioners, complaints about the administration of the charities have greatly increased over the past

S AND NOTES

six years. This is not surprising given the inconsistencies and injustices of the law which the Charity Commissioners are obliged to operate.

TOO SUPERSTITIOUS

A Gallup Poll survey of religious belief conducted for the *Sunday Telegraph* shows that 73 per cent of people in Britain believe in God. This shows little change from a similar poll in 1968 and 1975 where the proportion believing in God was 72 per cent and 76 per cent respectively. However, there has been a decline in those who believe that Jesus was the son of God from 71 per cent in 1957 to 52 per cent today. Women are seen to be more religious than men, with 64 per cent of men and 82 per cent of women believing in God. Church attendance is no indicator of the state of belief, since 52 per cent of those who said they had faith in God never, or almost never, went to church. A sign of scepticism in a sea of superstition was that 34 per cent of people considered the Bible to be "mostly a collection of stories and fables".

INCONSISTENT

The leader of one of the largest landowners in the country, Mr Runcie, head of the Church of England, took part in a ceremony to commemorate the six hundredth anniversary of the Peasants' Revolt. Runcie stood on a lorry on the spot where the rebel priest, John Ball, is thought to have delivered his famous sermon declaring: "Things will not go well in England until all things be held in common." Consistency was never a Christian virtue.

BHA LEAFLET

An excellent new leaflet has been produced by the British Humanist Association. The leaflet points out how certain actions are "Not Allowed" in our open democratic society. You are not allowed to choose when or how you die, even if you are dying of an incurable disease. You are not allowed to give physical expression to your affection (even in private) if you a 20-year-old man—and you have fallen in love with another man. You are not allowed to celebrate New Year's Eve at a public dance if it

falls on a Sunday (or after midnight if it falls on a Saturday!).

The leaflet explains what humanists believe in and outlines some of the issues such as women's rights, education, family planning, and euthanasia, with which they are concerned. Copies are available on request from the BHA, 13 Prince of Wales Terrace, London W8 5PG.

Centenary Appeal

Donations to the Centenary Appeal have generously begun to roll in. The appeal will remain open until the end of the year. All donations to the Free-thinker Fund for this year will be added to the Centenary Appeal total.

Many thanks to the following: J. Ancliffe, £2; D. Baker, £10; P. Barbour, £100; E. L. Barnes, £5; J. Barr, £5; C. Bayliss, £10; G. Beeson, £4; S. Berry, £5; J. A. Blackmore, £5; H. & C. Bondi, £5; C. Briery, £15; J. L. Broom, £5; P. B. Brown, £2; G. A. Bull, £5; J. Busby, £6.50; B. A. Burfoot, £5; I. Campbell, £10; E. Cecil, £10; A. C. F. Chambre, £2; A. R. Cook, £2; E. Crossland, £2; P. D. Crowden-Longstreath, £10; C. J. Davies, £10; M. Davies, £10; A. H. Douglas, £5; T. H. Ellison, £5; S. Exley, £10; D. Flint, £10; D. Forbes, £1; D. Fyfe, £1; C. Gardner, £5; J. Gibson, £7; R. M. Gilliland, £2; J. S. L. Gilmour, £20; B. M. Goodale, £5; A. Grey, £4; O. Grubiak, £10; R. J. Hale, £2; L. Hanger, £1; E. S. D. Haslam, £3; Mr & Mrs Henry, £10; S. Hillier, £3; R. Humphries, £6; L. F. Jacot, £5; G. Jamieson, £3; E. & E. Jennings, £5; B. A. Judd, £2; J. W. Krugel, £10; J. Labouchardiere, £1; O. Kaplan von Lang, £3; N. L. Levenson, £5; J. Little, £5.50; J. Lippett, £5; M. G. McIver, £5; C. Marcus, £7; B. W. Mills, £10; F. J. Muskett, £5; E. A. Napper, £3; L. G. Packham, £5; N. Paton, £2; P. Ponting-Barber, £5; W. J. Preston, £15; N. Ramage, £5; J. C. Rapley, £5; R. N. Raven, £2; K. C. Rudd, £10; J. V. Ruffell, £2; R. N. Rycroft, £5; F. E. Seward, £2; C. A. M. Seffen, £1; J. Severs, £3; A. Shore, £1; W. M. Shuttleworth, £10; E. W. Sinclair, £10; S. Smith, £5; R. Stubbs, £2; "Spartan" £100; D. Swan, £5; J. Todd, £2; M. Villiers-Stewart, £5; S. Williams, £7; Lord Willis, £25; C. R. Wilshaw, £5; D. E. S. Wimble, £10; A. E. Woodford, £5; D. Wright, £4; Anon, £500.50.

Total for the period 20/5/81 to 18/6/81: £1,240.50.
Total for the year to date: £2,303.40 and \$39.

A parish magazine is reported, in the "Church Times", to have appealed for new trebles for the church choir. An announcement invited choir members to "bring something to eat which can be heated in the oven. This includes children."

BOOKS

BLACK AND WHITE by Shiva Naipaul. Hamish Hamilton, £8.50

Cults there have been in plenty: the Moonies, the Harekrishnas, the Children of God. One thing they all have in common is the loyalty they have engendered in the hearts of their followers by methods which are being questioned successfully by the outside world. But of all the cults none has been as spectacular as the People's Temple in its demonstration of loyalty. Its 900 members drank (or were pressurised to drink) cyanide-laced lemonade in November 1978 in Jonestown, Guyana. The armed guards of the People's Temple also pursued a visiting Congressman and a party of defectors to the airstrip in the jungle and killed and wounded many. Pastor Jim Jones was a faith-healer, a preacher of Christian love, racial justice and socialistic ideals. He was commended by politicians of a radical hue in California. How could his movement end up as it did? How could so many people be deceived?

In the first part of his book Naipaul deals with Guyana. Here Naipaul, a Guyanese of Indian origin, is on his home ground. He investigates not only the activities of the People's Temple but the background of the Co-operative Republic of Guyana under Forbes Burnham, which provided a congenial atmosphere to the paranoid Jim Jones, who saw hostility growing against him in California. Naipaul indicts Burnham's Party, the People's National Congress (PNC) as a "black supremacist party" and the People's Progressive Party under Dr Chedi Jagan as "prisoners locked up beyond hope of rescue in the cages wrought by their Marxist ideology". It is not for him to offer solutions to the Guyanese tragedy; it is enough for him to depict the reality that the people of Guyana are "transported Indians and Africans, locked in poverty, resentment, ignorance and delusion" and that the socialism of comrade leader Burnham is highly suspect.

Jonestown is portrayed through the eyes of admirers and critics, defectors and at least one follower who escaped the massacre but shot himself later on in America. The picture is so full of contradictions: an agricultural co-operative with an elite at the core and workers who laboured hard in the field, some through deluded devotion and others through fear. There was no lack of love and yet people could be starved, punished and supervised by armed guards supposed to be defending the commune from the hostile intentions of America. There was talk of "revolutionary suicide" and daily harangues were given by Jones. It is significant that the Guyanese act of the tragedy opened with a great healing meeting in December 1974, in Georgetown, the capital of Guyana, when the miraculous power of Christ channelled itself through Pastor Jones and

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"cured" people of various diseases.

For the second part of his book Naipaul goes to California where, "in the battle for votes, Jones's support could make all the difference between victory and defeat". Hence the support he received in his career in San Francisco. Naipaul also offers an analysis of the Californian scene in the sixties and the seventies: the revolts and the enthusiasms of the seventies; the cults, some plausible and some thoroughly irrational, thriving on these disappointments. One does not have to agree with every detail of Naipaul's strictures or jibes, but it is useful to be reminded that the revolt of the children of the prosperous middle-class was "underpinned by privilege".

Finally, for freethinkers, Naipaul's neat summing up of the People's Temple is worthy of a full quotation:

"People's Temple was laid out on the latitudinal and longitudinal grids of the Fundamentalist imagination: an imagination obsessed with sin and images of apocalyptic destruction, authoritarian in its innermost impulses, instinctively thinking in terms of the saved and the damned, seeking not to enlighten but to terrorise into obedience. Fundamentalism has no respect for the human personality because to be human is, by definition, to be sick. It was upon such a framework that Jim Jones . . . grafted his primitive vision of socialist sharing and racial justice. The result was neither racial justice nor socialism but a messianic parody of both."

G. N. DEODHEKAR

THE PEOPLES' UPRISING 1381 by Leslie S. A. Jones. Introduction by F. A. Ridley. Museum of Labour History, 50p.

This year is the six hundredth anniversary of what is called the peasants' revolt. As Leslie Jones suggests in the title of this fact-packed little pamphlet, a more apt name for this important historical event would be the people's uprising. Not only did peasants take part in this revolt, but also fishermen, artisans, townfolk and even impoverished members of the gentry. What all these social groupings had in common was the oppression they suffered at the hands of the feudal aristocracy and the church which was (and still is) one of the country's biggest landowners as well as the ideological buttress of feudalism. The Church, far from being the solace of the poor, burdened them with tithes and exploited their ignorance and superstition. A list of "peasant sins" drawn up to guide priests hearing confessions put refusal to pay tithes at the top of the list.

R REVIEWS

For secularists the most interesting items in the pamphlet's wealth of historical facts will be those which shed light on the activities of the revolutionary "hedge priest", John Ball, and on the political significance of the Lollard Heresy. Leslie Jones locates John Ball in the tradition of Christian Socialism rather than that of the Protestant reformers. Certainly, Ball was the polar opposite of the anal-fixated Luther, who took time off from his excremental visions to incite the princes of his day to strike down revolting peasants and exterminate Jews, and Calvin, whose theology made a perfect ideology for an individualistic and acquisitive bourgeoisie. Ball, I would contend, belongs to another tradition — that of the millenarian and mystical sects such as the Bogomils, the Brethren of the Free Spirit, and the Ranters whose visions of a New Jerusalem were enthusiastically received by the disorientated poor of the late middle ages.

The Lollards were originally not part of this tradition, but Wycliffe had attacked the wealth and worldliness of the Church and had preached "that all good things of God ought to be in common". It is not improbable that among Wycliffe's students were those who spread such ideas in the form of revolutionary slogans such as the famous "When Adam delved and Eve span, who was then the gentleman?" Certainly, as Lollardism lost its respectable supporters it became more and more a movement of the poor, a movement which in its content was anti-feudal, anti-clerical and democratic. It may be that the true facts of the ideological influences on Ball and the revolt will never be known. However, there is one fact which secularists should note: John Ball was executed on the same spot as the Christian martyr St Alban.

While the pamphlet manages to pack an amazing amount of information into a small space, it does have some faults which could have been avoided. Firstly, the small type face and poor quality paper make it difficult to read. Secondly, no attempt is made to relate the events of 1381 to other outbreaks of jacquerie such as those in France and Flanders in the fourteenth century, those in Germany in the sixteenth century and those in Russia in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

Having said this, the pamphlet remains worthy of our attention not only because it deals with history in an interesting and thought-provoking way but also because the process of social revolution which commenced in 1381 is yet to be completed. At a time when tyranny and oppression are as widespread

as ever, when taxation grows ever more burdensome, when the power of the Church remains unbroken, we may look back on the events and people of 1381 and draw inspiration from their example.

TERRY LIDDLE

DICTIONARY OF MEDICAL ETHICS, Revised and Enlarged Edition. Edited by A. S. Duncan, G. R. Dunstan and R. B. Welbourn. Darton, Longman & Todd, £12.50.

Is disease a punishment for sin? Christians may think so, and some Hindus. Or might it be caused by evil spells? Animists from Chad to Haiti would say yes. Few people now think with Galen that it consists in a derangement of "humours".

The beliefs people hold about the nature of disease are their own affair—until they assume the role of healer. From such beliefs spring medical ethics. These concern us all, for we are all patients at some time. In this book they are exhaustively set forth in entries contributed by 148 experts, edited by a triumvirate of professors.

The Hippocratic oath (dating from 400 BC) is still the cornerstone. "To please no one will I prescribe a deadly drug, nor give advice which may cause his death." So much for voluntary euthanasia. "Nor will I give a woman a pessary to procure abortion." So much for the woman's rights over her own body. Declarations of the World Medical Association provide updated detail. There are six of them, beginning at Geneva in 1948: "I will maintain the utmost respect for human life from the time of conception. . ." For euthanasia and abortion, no progress in 2,300 years.

The flavour of the collection can be given by paraphrasing some of the 342 titles, which cover what the TES reviewer of the first edition justly described as a rapidly-expanding field.

Animal experiment. Used (1) for testing new medical products and implants, (2) for assessing danger in non-medical products, and (3) for furthering knowledge as a basis of medical or surgical advance. Most people consider these uses justified if pain is avoided (where possible). Hostility varies according to the degree of affection felt for the species involved (lapdogs come top). Research workers prefer specific pathogen-free animals, removed from the uterus in a sterile manner and reared in isolation. Work is in progress on a European Convention to protect "experimental animals".

Castration. Use of this to provide attendants for harems or treble-voiced choristers is now regarded as unethical.

Christian Science. Adherents hold that "healing is an aspect of Christian regeneration, a natural effect of drawing closer to God in spirit and in the comprehension of the infinitude of His goodness and power". Nevertheless "it is fairly common for

adherents to have a broken bone set by a doctor".

Counselling. Advice given to patients or parents. [Not a good definition: the essence of modern counselling technique is to draw out rather than put in.]

Fluoridation. Raising the fluoride content of a public water supply to the optimum level required to reduce dental caries. Opponents argue that it is unethical as (1) removing the right to pure water, (2) contravening the right to choose medication, and (3) constituting a health hazard. Proponents retort that it is more unethical to deprive people of a remedy scientifically proved to halve the incidence of tooth decay.

Homosexuality. A practising psychiatrist discusses the ethical dilemma involved in "treatment". If the condition is accepted as treatable it is being looked on as an illness. So the psychotherapist or behaviourist aiming at re-orientation is tacitly accepting, even encouraging, society's stigmatising attitudes towards homosexuality. The answer suggested is for the therapist to encourage "genuine involvement and self-determination on the part of the client in designing the treatment contract".

Hospices. As with education of the young, care of the dying, when administered by a Roman Catholic or other sect, raises ethical problems. They are not discussed in this entry. The nearest we get is in the eleventh and last of a list of principles said to apply to hospices: "Affirmations of faith may be made but never imposed; each individual has to grow into a fuller (though never complete) realisation of the truths he accepts." An admirable sentiment, if hopelessly impractical. To ensure a lingering death in an odour of sanctity is at last to be overwhelmed by it.

Human rights. Maurice Cranston contributes an entry suggesting that human rights are scarcely more than matters of opinion. When the right to life conflicts with the right to liberty which should succeed? "Life," says Hobbes. Locke insists on liberty. The right to life may justify capital punishment (because a murderer forfeits his own right by taking away that of another), or justify its abolition. It may, as the Stoics held, embrace the right to take one's own life, or may deny it. It may extend to the foetus (and so forbid abortion) or begin only at viable birth. And what of the pregnant woman's right to liberty?

Spiritual healing. Healing power may be a gift from God, or may be derived from spirits. Alternatively it may be claimed by individuals without any overt religious belief. There is difficulty, in both theory and practice, in distinguishing between the spiritual and the psychological. Yet, whatever its basis, spiritual healing can exert a beneficial influence on the patient's emotional state, and so contribute to recovery.

This is a fascinating, if untidy book. The un-

tidiness comes from presenting opinions derived from many different viewpoints with no attempt at integration. The entry on hospital chaplains is written by one of them; it would have been very different if the author had been a long-stay patient. Others are similarly one-sided, for example *psychopathy* (by a prison doctor), *moral autonomy* (by a lecturer in Christian ethics), *truth* (by a Lord of Appeal), *Judaism* (by a rabbi), *Christian Science* (by a Christian Scientist), *hospices* (by a hospice director). But at least the names and qualifications of the contributors are openly given. Many of them are highly distinguished.

The book would be improved by an index. If we can't have this in the next edition, a list of the entries would help. That there will be another edition is not in doubt. The work is a valuable sourcebook on many vexing issues of modern life.

FRANCIS BENNION

Francis Bennion is the author of *Professional Ethics: the Consultant Professions and their Code* (Charles Knight, 1969).

BASIC BELIEF OR THE FAITH OF AN AGNOSTIC. A Rational Approach to the Irrational by A. E. Clark-Kennedy. £1. (Available from Corpus Christi College, Cambridge.)

Although only a short pamphlet (22 pages of text) and written by an octogenarian medical Fellow at Corpus Christi College, Cambridge, and although more theistic than agnostic, this essay is in fact quite a tour de force. What the pamphlet lacks in length it gains in clarity and cogency. The lucidity of the central argument merits an equally clear response and I shall therefore devote most of this review to countering the argument.

Briefly, Clark-Kennedy argues that if we start our metaphysical enquiries by asking ourselves what we are, our initial response should be in terms of consciousness, without which we would not appreciate our body or mind. The problem is that consciousness is a mystery not easily understood. Clark-Kennedy suggests "Just as we enter into the three dimensions of space and into time — sometimes thought of as a kind of fourth dimension—at our conception it is possible that at a certain stage in our physical development we enter into a sort of fifth dimension in consequence of which (by virtue of our cerebral machinery) we become conscious (and within limits set by our bodies) free to control our thoughts and actions."

Our body and mind combine to keep us in the fifth dimension of consciousness. Clark-Kennedy goes on to argue that it is in this dimension that telepathy and so on may exist and religious phenomena are experienced. In fact this fifth dimension, he argues, is "God".

It will of course be appreciated, as Clark-Kennedy

himself appreciates, that this explanation of God is as unacceptable to orthodox theologians as it is to freethinkers. At most it is driving liberal theology to its logical extreme. Fundamental concepts such as God as good, creator and provider of the after-life (where Clark-Kennedy's view would be acceptable to most secularists) are absent.

The first problem of treating God as a mere fifth dimension of existence is that even if we granted Clark-Kennedy his case, there would be neither need for, nor sense in, religion. For instance "gravity" may exist as a force but what use or moral justification can there be in praying to it? Likewise if "god" is merely used as another name for an element of nature within which "evil" may exist, why pray to it? True, Clark-Kennedy says morality is important but that can be practised without being prayed for.

There are many difficulties with Clark-Kennedy's thesis. One is that the idea of a fifth dimension seems to occur to Clark-Kennedy as a revelation and not as a result of logical thought. Even worse, having experienced this revelation he cannot or does not justify it in logical terms. All he says is "I cannot conceive of matter, however complex, making me conscious. . . I remain convinced that I entered into a sort of fifth dimension at a certain stage in my physical development."

Having plucked his basic notion out of thin air, he goes on, "it is this (consciousness) which—within limits set by my cerebral machinery—enables me to think conceptually, appreciate value and form moral judgments". This process is taken to such an extreme as to make the fifth dimension seem attractive as a neat way of providing an explanation (without evidence) for almost everything of ultimate importance.

Clark-Kennedy even admits it is a possibility that "our bodies make us conscious and are responsible for our thinking" but seems to believe the notion distasteful and dismisses it without real evidence. Since the fusion of material components can produce remarkable results (eg electricity, salt from hydrogen and sodium, and not least our remarkable bodies) I fail to see why our often inadequate consciousness cannot arise in the same way.

I have disagreed with Clark-Kennedy's thesis, but it is important to point out that it is possible to consider and even accept a fifth dimension of consciousness roughly along his lines without in any way equating it with God. There are in fact two separate questions to be asked:

- (1) Is there a fifth dimension of consciousness?
- (2) If there is, is that dimension necessarily God?

Perhaps, though I am far from convinced, there is a fifth dimension of consciousness. Consideration of that question may be valuable without allowing equations with God to obscure the argument.

If the pamphlet leads to a closer consideration of the nature of consciousness, it could be of value. And at least the pamphlet puts what have tended to be mystical ideas into clear, non-religious, non-Jungian and non-mystical language.

GEOFFREY H. L. BERG

CHRISTOPHER UPTAKE by Susan Price. Faber, £4.75 —fiction

An Atheist defending the *right* to believe as a Catholic in the time of persecution by Protestants, is certainly an intriguing theme. But *Christopher Uptake* is an unusual yet credible story. The roots of Atheism are developed through his short university life, where, as a scholarship student son of a joiner, he is forced to obey the rigorous routine without question. Because he does question, and finds answers that do not conform, he leaves university before being expelled, only to get caught up in a greater conflict. His rational approach to the religious dilemma that surrounds him leads him into further contention, with blackmail, torture and treachery, so that his own life, as a non-believer, is at risk. Although written for young people, *Christopher Uptake* is compelling reading for all ages.

MARGARET SIDDALL

LETTERS

Many thanks for the most interesting reproduction of the first two pages of the very first number of "The Freethinker", a truly historic document. There is I believe more need now for "The Freethinker" than there was one hundred years ago. Although there is more scope for free enterprise there are also many more obstacles to freedom of thought, the freethinking individual in 1981 is confronted not only by religious sects. Political parties, trade and professional associations control the life and thought of the individual far more than religion ever did.

A hundred years ago many honest persons believed religion to be the only obstacle to the perfect liberation of the human mind from bigotry and superstition. We are now painfully aware of the fact that religion is only one form of human error. Human error and crimes against humanity have not diminished with the decline of religious belief. The godless State can be just as cruel and oppressive to the dissident as the Church has been to the heretic. If men and women are happier now it could not honestly be attributed to the lack of religious belief. Life for most people continues to be a hard journey and if it is a hard journey that leads nowhere, it is difficult to see how it can be justified by any form of rationalism. But nonetheless the rationalist must do his best to provide a philosophy of life that completely excludes God and heaven and hell.

I was first attracted to "The Freethinker" by its title. I had recently liberated myself from a religious faith that had dominated my life for more than fifty years. I was curious to meet a freethinker who did not pretend to be anything else. I have not been disappointed. My only objection to "The Freethinker" is that it does not seem quite so much in love with

liberty as I am. I want freedom for all, including Roman Catholics.

I left the Catholic Church because it seemed to be the only honest course for one who had lost the Christian Faith. When I left the Catholic Church I was not seriously tempted to explore the possibilities of any other religion. It is none the less a fact that Christianity is only one of a vast multitude of religious beliefs that have haunted the human imagination since the beginning of recorded history. From the human point of view, it is impossible to understand why such exaggerated importance has been attached to the Jesus story. But if the religions of mankind can teach us anything about anything, it is that all human gods are false gods. False gods can only be condemned as false because they falsify something inherent in human experience, and that something can only be that mysterious entity that has been called the human soul. Whether we possess a soul that can survive the death of the body to which it has become attached must remain a doubtful matter so long as soul and body are joined together in life. They appear to be one and indivisible, but this may be an illusion.

In so far as "The Freethinker" is anti-Christian it has my full support. I firmly believe that Christianity has done far more harm than good in the world. It ought to have been allowed to die a natural death ages ago. It is kept alive or given the appearance of life by artificial means that in humanist terms must be regarded as a waste of effort and a waste of money.

If, however, "The Freethinker" is out to deprive me of my "soul" I really must call it anti-human.

PETER CROMMELIN

("The Freethinker" wants freedom to extend beyond professed atheists to religious groups which will be criticised but allowed freedom and toleration. Editor.)

IMMORTALITY ON ICE

A Cryonics society has recently been formed in Britain. Our aim is to live for ever and we therefore seek to have members frozen when they die, in the hope that one day medical science will be sufficiently advanced for them to be revived. We accept that revival is highly problematical, but since the alternative is certain death we don't see that we are risking anything.

We don't expect to be able to provide a freezing service for quite a few years yet and the society exists at the moment merely to try to put people interested in a rational form of immortality in contact with each other. Since I expect cryonics only to have an appeal to atheists and agnostics, I imagine Freethinker readers might be interested in the idea. Would anyone interested please contact me.

MICHAEL PRICE

36, Abinger Road, Chiswick, W4 1EL

IRISH WAR

In the centenary issue of *The Freethinker* Jim Herrick said that "world politics is conducted in secular terms"—Ireland being an exception. This just reinforces the myth, which the government would like us to believe that the war in Ireland is between religious bigots and that the troops are just the "peace-keepers".

The war is the struggle of the nationalist people against 800 years of British oppression. Religion is just the badge which distinguishes the native Irish (mainly Catholic) from the invading British (Protestants) who through a policy of "plantation" threw the native Irish off their land and to this day claim it as part of Britain.

ROGER LEWIS

WHITE LIGHT

Some years ago I saw a dazzling white light and heard a voice talking to me. Naturally I consulted a doctor and eventually obtained treatment for my condition.

It takes religion to spread the idea that visions, voices and vivid dreams all have a divine origin. I believe that if the Yorkshire Ripper had not been under the influence of Christian teachings, his many victims would still be alive today.

DAVID FORBES

MORMONS' VIEWS

I enjoyed Margaret Knight's article in your May issue. I found it a most perceptive piece of writing—but feel I would like to put the record straight on one or two points.

It is implied that Mormonism is a recent "cult", unlike "... the older and more respectable forms of bunkum like freemasonry and Christian Science". May I respectfully remind your writer that Mary Baker Eddy's "Science and Health" was published in 1875. The Mormon church, properly titled the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, was founded in 1830, and came to Britain in 1837! I leave it to your readers to evaluate "respectability"—but I do know which is the older!

It is asserted that the Church forbids "not only alcohol, tea and coffee, but also television and radio". It is certainly true that the Church's health code does advise against the substances mentioned—and has done so since 1833. It is interesting to see how modern scientific research has underlined the value of such a regime.

There is, however, absolutely no truth to the assertion that radio and TV are banned. In fact, thinking about it, I seem to have acquired four TVs and three radios at home!

In no way does the Church "forbid". The founder of the Church, Joseph Smith, summarised the whole approach by saying:

"I teach them correct principles—and they govern themselves."

The free agency of the individual is a priceless principle—a sentiment with which, I suspect, your readers would find much sympathy.

BRYAN J. GRANT

Director, Public Communications.

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints

DISESTABLISHMENT

The editor of *The Freethinker*, Jim Herrick, spoke about the need for separation of church and state in a programme put out by Bristol local radio. He pointed out that disestablishment had long been an aim of freethinkers, and that to give special privileges—such as seats in the House of Lords for some bishops—was quite unfair in an age when only a small minority were practising Anglicans. The fact that Christianity was seen as the established religion gave it an influence out of proportion to its importance, for example in sustaining religion in schools and religious broadcasts. The alternative view was put by Mr T. E. Utley, a leader writer of *The Daily Telegraph*, who called the Church of England a "great synthesis".

(Is Christianity Played Out?)

earthly affairs. There the churches are left to the women and the weak in intellect. Everywhere it is gradually coming to be thought that the brand of intellectual inferiority, as Colonel Ingersoll says, is stamped on the believers in orthodoxy. They have the choice of being considered dull or dishonest. The best intelligence in France and Germany is not only not in harmony with Christianity but in direct opposition to it, or subtly undermining while ignoring it. Unbelief is rampant in all classes. Here we have nominal Christians, but no Christianity save a few shreds, left with the Peculiar People, the Millenarian maniacs, the Salvation Army, the Hallelujah Lassies, Showman Charlie, and the editor of the Armageddon Almanack. We have a High Church, whose virtue lies in vestments, trying to galvanise the corpse by furbishing it up with ecclesiastical machinery. An evangelical Low Church, built on particular texts of Scripture, canting their little bit of lopsided Christianity in most pharisaic fashion, and a Broad Church, trying to palm off new wine in the old theological bottles. A change has come over all the sects. The road to the celestial regions has widened, and the temperature of the infernal ones decreased. Satan is superannuated. His long forked tail is atrophied into the mere semblance of an anthropoid *os cocyx*. The Revised Version cannot revive "the evil one". The stern old Jehovah seems to have retired in favour of his son and partner, Jesus, whose virginal disposition is more in accordance with the mildness of the age. The claims of Jesus are no longer based on his sovereignty as God, but on his sweet reasonableness as a man. The third partner in the triune theological company, though represented fluttering about vaguely in pigeon form on church windows, is so seldom heard of that he is supposed, like the archangels and cherubim, to be on the moult. In short, Brimstone has departed, and Treacle and Water reigns in its stead.

The real old genuine Christianity is as played out as the belief in Osiris, witchcraft, or Bonaparte. Its miraculous narratives are discredited, its petrified dogmas denied, its ascetic morality disregarded as impracticable, and its sanctions as inefficacious. The oriental trumpery of its heaven has lost its blandishments on the active western mind, and the horrors of its hell are heard of with laughter instead of terror. It is not only assailed, but explained. Christianity is seen to be but one of a number of religions that have in succession garnered up the thoughts and aspirations of various races of men. The undateable collection of documents upon which it is founded are known to be neither the oldest, the widest believed, nor the best of the sacred books of the world. The tawdry trappings of its church cannot hide the rottenness behind. Its dark crypts, foul with the dust and cobwebs of ages, will not bear to

be seen in the electric light of science. Ichabod is emblazoned on its portals. Its columns totter at the breath of criticism, and the dead cold ashes on its altar proclaim that the presence of the Highest is no longer there. It has served its purpose, and is passing away.

There is something touching in this dying of an old faith. Its ghastly attempts at revivalism may provoke more ridicule than sympathy. Yet we cannot forget that this decrepit frame once lived and flourished, and, let us own it cheerfully, did some good work in its day. A deeper pathos lies in the fact that still among the myriads of adherents who profess homage with their lips to the departing religion, but whose minds are far from it, there are some few who have given it their whole hearts and to whom its departure will seem as a personal bereavement, yea, as the extinction of the light of their lives. With these we have all sympathy. They cling to Christianity because unaware of hope and consolation elsewhere. To them, Freethinkers must show they hold a nobler faith that pretends not to finality, a higher hope that rests not in self-salvation, a wider charity that damns no unbelievers. Religions perish, Gods come and go, but Humanity abides, ever extending its powers over nature, ever seeking new solutions of the old, old problems of its mysterious life.

HUMANIST VIEW

"I am a humanist but I do not think human beings are rational: their greed and passions are not quickly outgrown. We have now to school ourselves to deal with danger and tragedy." V. S. Pritchett in an essay "As Old As the Century", Observer, 14 December 1980.

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The Editor of The Freethinker is completing a short history of the journal's first hundred years. He would be very interested if any readers have letters from G. W. Foote or Chapman Cohen, or any documents of relevance to The Freethinker's history. All material would be returned and any quotations used acknowledged.

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THE FREETHINKER

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EVENTS

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

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.)

Portsmouth Humanist Society. Counselling the bereaved. Friday, 31 July. 8 pm. 8 Court Lane, Cosham.

Merseyside Humanist Group. Denis Green: Christianity and Humanism: is there a meeting point? Monday, 20 July. 7.45 pm. 46, Hamilton Square, Birkenhead.

South Place Ethical Society. Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London WC1. Sunday morning meetings, 11 am. Anthony Quinton: Madness as a Philosophical Problem, 12 July. Peter Cadogan: "The Apocalypse" of D. H. Lawrence, 19 July.

Humanist Holidays. Yuletide Humanist Holidays. Coast of South Spain. 20-27 December 1981. £149 half board. Brixham, Devon, 24-28 December 1981. £72. Enquiries to Mrs B. Beer, 58 Weir Road, London SW12. Phone: 01-673 6234.

Gay Humanist Group. Wine and cheese social. Friday, 14 August. 7.30 pm. Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London WC1.

A new humanist group has been formed in the Kingston and Richmond area. A preliminary autumn programme has been arranged and further information is obtainable from Peter Danning, 44 Morley Road, Twickenham, TW1 2HF.

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