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NSS AGAINST "NEW CRIME" PROPOSAL

The National Secular Society has responded to the Law Commission's invitation to comment on their Working Paper, "Offences against Religion and Public Worship", which was issued earlier this year. There has been a general welcome by humanists and libertarians to the Commission's views, and in due course a final report will be published with recommendations and a draft Bill to be laid before Parliament.

The NSS notes that the weight of expert evidence quoted in the Introduction to the Working Paper agrees that the original purpose of blasphemy laws was not to protect the alleged godhead from irreverent words or scepticism, but to prevent them from causing civil strife or shaking the fabric of society. This original purpose has no validity in modern life, yet the blasphemy laws have not been allowed to sink into natural obsolescence, in spite of the repeal of all the relevant statutes.

As recently as 1977 the common law offence of blasphemy was revived and used successfully against *Gay News* and its Editor, not for anything that would have been recognised as blasphemy in the heyday of blasphemy trials, but merely for offending against the emotions of some individuals in a particular section of the population.

No civil strife, no shaking of the fabric of civilisation, was ever threatened by the James Kirkup poem in *Gay News*. So why should its publication be illegal? The case apparently rested on the view that certain deep emotions experienced by those with particular beliefs (in principle, religious beliefs; in practice, those of the Church of England only) should be protected by law from verbal offence. In the opinion of the National Secular Society, no such special protection is warranted or has been convincingly argued.

We must all accept the existence of many things that we find offensive in one way or another, and

we cannot expect everything that offends us, however deeply, to be banned. On the other hand, it is reasonable to argue (as it was by the Williams Committee on Obscenity) that works of art likely to offend many people should not be on open display without warning.

If this principle were adopted, it would not prohibit something like the Kirkup poem from appearing in a specialised paper for homosexual readers because it might offend someone like Mrs Whitehouse who is presumably not homosexual. After all, she had to open *Gay News* in order to find it.

Something offensive displayed in the street, however, is an entirely different matter, and possibly should be illegal. For instance, atheists and other non-Christians cannot avoid seeing, as they go about their daily business, the obscene life-size depictions of torture to death by crucifixion outside many church buildings, in full view of the public pavement and roadway.

The Law Commission provisionally propose a new crime to penalise anyone who uses threatening, abusive or insulting words or behaviour in any church, synagogue, mosque, temple or burial ground, "with intent to wound or outrage the feelings of those using the premises concerned". The National Secular Society does not consider that a "new crime" is necessary. It comments: "Behaviour in places of worship should be subject to the usual laws against behaviour likely to cause a breach of the peace, etc., but not to any extra laws. We do not see why a church should require any legal protection beyond that afforded a theatre or art gallery".

The NSS statement concludes: "We applaud the good sense and reasonable tone of the Working Paper, and trust that the Law Commission will follow it up with a strong recommendation to Parliament to do away with all the remaining laws that give religious bodies special protection against verbal offence and offensive behaviour".

1881

CENTENARY YEAR

1981

AUNTIE BEEB SPURNS THE PROFESSOR

When Sir Ian Trethowan applied the axe to this year's projected Richard Dimbleby memorial lecture by E. P. Thompson, hackles rose in some highly unlikely places. *The Times* did not like it; the BBC's managing director disapproved—even the Dimbleby family voiced their dissent. "We do not want our father's name to be associated only with his Establishment role", said Jonathan Dimbleby after hearing the news of Sir Ian's veto. And perhaps his own name could be put forward in that case. Like it or not, someone in the BBC seems intent on keeping Richard Dimbleby's name and reputation exactly where they have always been—this side of decorum.

What is most disturbing about the whole issue is not the midsummer madness of the decision to gag Britain's foremost social historian and CND activist. But in the intimations that the decision was not Sir Ian's alone—that he may have been only the Establishment's talking head—we again detect the omnipresent fact that free speech in this country is both arbitrary and relative.

The comfortable stance to take here is that the BBC, anxious to secure an increase in the licence fee this autumn, did not want to compromise their position with a controversial broadcast. It was not the time to break new ground. The comfortable stance, alas, affords as incomplete a view of the truth as the one Richard Dimbleby has from his comfortable Valhalla.

True, the perennial Dimbleby lecture has had the bite of "an ITV bean feast", to quote from a *Guardian* leader. Equally, Professor Thompson's theme of The Cold War is hardly unexpected for those who have followed his persistent onslaught against the proliferation of nuclear armaments. Those who haven't would either not bother to switch on or be left gasping from the breathtaking speed of Thompson's argument, if a synopsis of it that appeared in the *Sunday Times* is an accurate gauge of its consummate thrust. We shall never know for certain.

The nub of the controversy was left for E. P. Thompson himself to pinpoint, and it was a master stroke of subtlety, timing and deadly aim. Through the vehicle of *The Times* letters column, Professor Thompson began by thanking those readers who added their weight behind the paper's support of his suitability as a lecturer. He then duly deferred to the BBC's right to select whom they liked, adding sagaciously: "It is possible that I was regarded by someone in the BBC as an unacceptable dissident, and the impartial BBC staff will know better than I do whether, in this particular case, normal internal procedures were abused". Fair comment, reflecting

all too favourably on the man at the centre of the row and on his ability to extricate himself from the cabaret that attended the serious business.

His letter continued by shifting attention to the plight of Czech dissidents who did not enjoy the same freedom of speech in their own country that we enjoy in the West and who were robbed of their citizenship, and given asylum in Britain. His projected lecture would have been particularly apposite to these and other infringements of freedom going on in the East, and, "I had hoped to discuss such questions in the Dimbleby lecture", he said.

Professor Thompson concluded his letter by saying it was wrong to compare his situation with that of the Czech "dissidents": he had not, after all, been sentenced to seven years in prison or lost his citizenship. He was free to speak his mind, to one audience or another, and there were other engagements to replace the one the BBC cancelled. He was not, he assured readers, speaking in protest against any injury done to him: "My duty this week is to make my protest . . . to Prague". The BBC, "home" to millions all over the world during the last war, was inexplicably mute on this one occasion when they should have spoken out in the cause of free speech.

The *coup de grace* came some three weeks after the initial veto when Edward Heath, the front-running replacement, spoke out in arch reproof of the Corporation's bungling. "I shudder to think what Richard Dimbleby would say if he were alive", said the former Conservative Prime Minister when it was announced that the lecture would be held over until the New Year, with no credible reason offered for the postponement. These off-camera antics read like the best impromptu version of *I'm Sorry, I Haven't a Clue*, with everyone heaping abuse at one another and no one assuming overall responsibility for the egg on Auntie's face.

Paradoxically, and predictably, with the massive Press coverage of the affair, more people became aware of "the lecture that never was" than ever would have done if the broadcast had gone ahead on schedule.

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Actions Would Speak Louder

MADELEINE SIMMS

"Life-at-any-price" campaigners have been exploiting the tragedy of the Down's syndrome baby who was operated on against her parents' wishes. They assert that the final decision in such cases should not be left to the parents acting on medical advice. Madeleine Simms suggests how "pro-lifers" could provide a solution to the problem of handicapped children rejected by their parents.

Readers of this journal will not need reminding of the Hammersmith mongol baby case that dominated the headlines in early August. Only one aspect of this case has received too little attention, and it is this.

In the *Sunday Observer* on 25 January of this year, Katherine Whitehorn, in one of her characteristically shrewd and perceptive articles, relating to a similar case in Derby, remarked that she would have more respect for the "pro-life" (i.e. anti-choice) lobby if each member of it offered to take over one affected baby "day and night for 15 or 20 years". Then she might believe they were genuine, "and not just manipulating human suffering to make a case".

Since the Hammersmith case became public knowledge, the Press has published a considerable amount of material from members of anti-abortion groups, questioning the concept of parental consent in such cases and indulging in what one national daily described as "persistent calumny against the medical profession".

Campaigning or Caring?

What can be preventing "pro-life" organisations from compiling a register of their members who are willing to adopt the most seriously handicapped babies? The babies would thus be saved from an institutionalised existence, or being brought up by parents who had rejected them in the first place. What is preventing the "pro-lifers" from making the heroic sacrifice and taking such babies into their homes and families? I am not privy to their inmost thoughts so cannot answer this question. But I can guess what the answer might be.

If a "pro-life" couple adopted such a baby their whole life would have to revolve around it. They would have to give up or seriously restrict their fascinating work for Roman Catholic front organisations campaigning against abortion, contraception and sex education. This is hard when they prefer campaigning to caring.

And if they do, who can blame them? Certainly I do not; campaigning is much more fun than caring,

and interesting careers, holidays and freedom are more fun than watching over a mongol child day in, day out. But I do blame them for blandly foisting on others burdens they are apparently not anxious to take upon themselves.

I very much hope that the brave parents of the mongol baby stick to their declared resolution not to accept responsibility for the child, despite the disgraceful pressures being brought against them. It is only by forcing local authorities to pay the full costs of this exercise that the truth will be brought home to the ratepayers, that if every severely abnormal child is heroically kept alive in defiance of parental consent, then virtually every other social service in the borough will have to be curtailed.

Mrs Thatcher will not be cutting defence expenditure or police pay to underwrite these heavy costs. And the money has to come from somewhere. Challenged by a correspondent in the *Guardian* newspaper to state which social services the London Borough of Hammersmith and Fulham would now be cutting to accommodate this new policy, the Director of Social Services wisely maintained an enigmatic silence.

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Following on the Independent Television programme, "For God's Sake Care", the Salvation Army's image has taken another knock. The Advertising Standards Authority has upheld a complaint that its fund-raising bumf is misleading. The Sally Army is Britain's largest religious charity, and the complaint related specifically to collection envelopes which are delivered to millions of homes every year. It was claimed the advertising on these envelopes implied that most of the money received would be spent on social welfare work, when in fact only 14 per cent was used for this purpose. There will be a new design for the fund-raising campaign to be launched later this year. But nevertheless it is likely that the largest proportion of the money collected will still be devoted to "taking the Gospel to the unchurched", as General Arnold Brown put it in a letter to "The Times" during the "For God's Sake Care" rumpus.

In this Centenary year of "The Freethinker" we remember G. W. Foote and his colleagues who founded and maintained the journal during the early, difficult years. But the freethought Press had been established in Britain long before 1881. In this article, Dr Royle, Lecturer in History at the University of York, examines the activities of those pioneers who published anti-religious pamphlets and periodicals, and their courageous defiance of repressive and persecuting elements within Church and Government.

When G. W. Foote began *The Freethinker* in May 1881, it was intended to be a different sort of free-thought paper from Charles Bradlaugh's successful *National Reformer*. The latter, with the exception of occasional columns of humour (such as Austin Holyoake's *Facetiae for Freethinkers* in the early 1870s), was an extremely sober production, weighed down with reports of Bradlaugh's political and parliamentary struggles. The contents of *The Freethinker* were more direct and hard-hitting, lighter and wittier. Eager to expose the fallacies of the Bible and to ridicule the foibles of the Church, Foote was in part returning to an earlier tradition of freethought journalism.

Unlike Foote, most of the earlier freethought editors (until Bradlaugh) had been self-taught working men. Their humour was often as ponderous as their style. Even G. J. Holyoake, who did possess a light, dry wit, comes over in his early journalism as a pedantic auto-didact. But if Foote's predecessors lacked polish, they made up for it with a rugged honesty and bluntness of speech which more than satisfied the appetites of their readers.

Eighteenth-century works of popular freethought were published in pamphlet form; the newspaper and periodical were then only in their infancy. The popular press really began to develop only with the ending of the Napoleonic Wars in 1815, when William Cobbett dropped the price of his *Weekly Political Register* to twopence and began to reach a readership which could be counted in tens of thousands. He soon had his imitators, including W. T. Sherwin, a young admirer of the writings of Thomas Paine, who began his own *Weekly Political Register* in 1817. Sherwin took as his partner in this venture a young unemployed tinsmith from Devon, Richard Carlile.

Although most of the outpourings of the radical Press during the period 1816-20 were anti-clerical in outlook, Carlile was undoubtedly the leader of the "blasphemous and seditious Press" in these years. Both he and those who hawked his works were repeatedly imprisoned for their pains. Carlile first

went to gaol in 1817 for re-publishing William Hone's *Parodies on the Book of Common Prayer* while Hone was awaiting trial. Hone's work was witty—and the jury agreed as they acquitted him. In August 1819 Carlile took over *Sherwin's Register* and renamed it the *Republican*, around which he built his freethought propaganda over the next six years. The response to his efforts to circulate Paine's *Age of Reason* was a further prosecution, resulting in his being detained in Dorchester Gaol until November 1825.

The identification of blasphemy with sedition, assumed by the prosecution counsels of the day, was accepted by the radical publishers themselves. Because Christianity was "parcel of the laws of England", to attack the Christian religion was to undermine the basis of civil government. Paine, and Carlile after him, agreed. They not only saw religion as a nonsense but, far worse, they saw it as upholding the political nonsense which conservatives glorified as the British Constitution. Reform was to be effected by a thorough-going attack on "Kingcraft" and "Priestcraft". Carlile used his publications to achieve this in three ways, especially when the *Republican* re-appeared after a year's break, in 1822. First, he published serious items on political and religious questions; secondly, he rallied his supporters to found Zetetic societies, the first explicitly freethinking local groups; and thirdly, he used every opportunity to stick pins into the balloons of religious pomposity and pretension. Thus he rarely wrote the date, without embellishing it in some minor but telling way: for example, not A.D. but "1822 of the fabled Carpenter's Wife's Son"—employing just four words to deny the Virgin Birth and the historical reality of Joseph, Mary and Jesus!

Attacking the Church

The *Republican* ended in 1826, already long past its best. Freethought flourished when the general tide of radicalism was high, as in the years 1815-20. Carlile continued with other journals—the *Lion*, the *Prompter*, the *Gauntlet*—but they all lacked the fresh appeal of the *Republican*. His attack on the Church never abated, but he was being drawn into a mystical interpretation of Christianity which puzzled many of his followers. When the political temperature rose in the early 1830s, though, there was plenty of scope for attacks on the Church as the radical Press swelled again to a new height of excitement. Even friends of the Church of England admitted it needed reforming, and the radicals revelled with such papers as *A Slap at the Church*, which attacked bishops and tithes.

There was little that was distinctively freethinking

about all this. Anti-clericalism was not the same thing as rational disbelief in religion, and a vague deism was not the same intellectually as outright atheism. Carlile was an innovator in the early 1820s when he espoused atheistic materialism, taking his arguments not from 18th-century English deists but from French Enlightenment thinkers like the Baron d'Holbach. Most of the periodicals of the period 1815-35, which we might recognise as ancestors of the later freethought Press, were political rather than theological in inspiration.

A new departure came in the 1830s with Robert Owen's "Rational Religion". He was himself a deist, who attacked all existing religions because they blinded men to the truth of his own system, but among Owen's followers were those who took their freethinking a stage further, and it is with these that the true origins of the British freethought Press are to be found.

Imprisoned for Blasphemy

On 6 November 1841 there appeared the *Oracle of Reason*, edited by a London Owenite, Charles Southwell. In style and content it was a return to the *Republican* of 1822. Southwell was convinced that religion had robbed Owenism of all principle, and he was determined to root out the evil at its source. He stripped Christianity of its capital C, and in the fourth issue denounced "That revoltingly odious Jew production called BIBLE". The article was sufficiently provocative to earn him a year in gaol. The second "priest of the *Oracle*", G. J. Holyoake, was also soon in prison, for a blasphemous comment at a lecture in Cheltenham. The third editor, Thomas Paterson, outdid Southwell in his bluntness of language and was twice imprisoned. It is no coincidence that this time of revived blasphemy prosecutions was contemporary with a period of severe political unrest during the early Chartist movement.

Southwell's journalism was always lively. His later periodicals—the *Investigator* (1843) and the *Lancashire Beacon* (1849)—are still readable, though perhaps a little crude for modern taste. G. J. Holyoake on the other hand was always uneasy at what he regarded as cheap and deliberately offensive attacks on Christianity. He preferred the coolly reasoned approach. Through his periodicals—the *Movement* (1843-45), which replaced the *Oracle*, and the *Reasoner* (1846-61)—he gathered around him a number of like-minded artisans, ex-Owenites and Chartists, who delighted in sharpening their intellects on the careful but colourless rationalism of his pages. Thus Secularism was born. The *Reasoner* was a far cry from the *Republican* and the *Oracle*. Some men yearned for the good old days of full-blooded attack.

When Charles Bradlaugh appeared on the scene, they thought that their secular prayers had been

answered—but they should have been forewarned. The first periodical that Bradlaugh edited was the *Investigator*, taken over in 1858 from Holyoake's *Investigator*, Robert Cooper and W. H. Johnson. This paper was more radical than Holyoake's, but it still had the same sober air about it. Attacking Christianity was a serious matter. Bradlaugh's *National Reformer*, begun in 1860, was no different in this respect. It still presumed that its readers wanted instruction, not entertainment.

"A Good Tonic"

The freethought journalism of the 1870s, when Foote entered the movement, was dominated by the *National Reformer*, edited by Bradlaugh and, after 1877, by Annie Besant. Hypatia Bradlaugh Bonner claimed that her father had a sense of humour; we must take her word for it. No one has claimed that Annie Besant had one. That was not the fashion. Foote modelled himself on Holyoake, but wrote better. He edited his own *Secularist* in 1876, and then shared the early *Secular Review* with Charles Watts for a few months. Not until after Bradlaugh's exclusion from the Commons in 1880 did he deliberately take up the weapon of ridicule and irony. The result was a refreshing change. One reader thanked him for supplying "a good tonic to a sluggish and anaemic freethought literary system". Within a few months Foote was being prosecuted for blasphemy. The judges of England had no sense of humour either. Attacking Christianity really was a serious business!

THE FREETHINKER CENTENARY APPEAL

This year we are celebrating the centenary of The Freethinker. Since it was founded 100 years ago, The Freethinker has "fought the good fight" against irrational and intolerant attitudes and championed many important social reforms.

The Freethinker survived the imprisonment for "blasphemy" of its founder and first editor, boycott by distributive agencies, two world wars and financial crises. Its survival would be described in some circles as a miracle; its continuation is vital to all who value the principles it promotes.

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Debunking the Paranormal

JOHN MADDOX

John Maddox, Editor of "Nature" and presenter of the BBC radio programme "Scientifically Speaking", delivered a lecture to the National Secular Society in London on 10 June. He spoke about the attitude of scientists to the paranormal phenomena. We publish an edited and abridged version of his address.

I am talking from the point of view of somebody who, with the help of an army of colleagues all of them exceedingly skilled in their parts of science, occupies the invidious role of what scientists sometimes call gatekeepers—those who operate machinery by which this or that contribution to the scientific literature finds its way into print. And I'd like to tell you something of how it seems to me and my colleagues that the question of the supernatural and the paranormal has to be handled. My text comes from the very last sentence of Brian Inglis's scholarly history of the paranormal (*Natural and Supernatural*, Hodder & Stoughton, 1977). Inglis suggests that the struggle by the paranormal and the supernatural "to obtain scientific recognition and acceptance" is just beginning and will in the long run triumph. That is a tangible claim, by a serious man, addressing himself to the scientific profession. Can the claim be sustained and is there really anything in it at all?

Let me begin with a definition. It is important to distinguish between the paranormal and the supernatural. Some kinds of phenomena, like water divining, are paranormal, and some kinds of experience, like sensing one is in conversation with god, are phenomena which are supernatural. The paranormal phenomena have no rational explanation. They are the occasions on which objects fly off walls, on which people sitting in one room can read the number of spots on the cards and in envelopes in another room. They are the occasions on which people can read each other's thoughts. But they entail no explanation of the world that is different from what we would call rational. Whereas the supernatural phenomena entail an explanation of a quite different kind from what we would call rational (although the words are often used interchangeably). There is another more important aspect of these phenomena: there are a lot of them about. All of us must acknowledge that many people whom we know personally believe in things like telepathy, like extra-sensory perception, things even like mediumship. I'm struck with how often it is that farmers, who it is well known are some of the most hard-headed members of our community, will hire a water diviner when they need to drill a well. We must take account of these happenings, and they

should determine the way in which people like me, who do not give a great deal of time to wondering about the supernatural and the paranormal, should behave towards those who do.

I would like to say something about the scientific process. Science is a body of knowledge and facts connected together by a web of theory. It is important to appreciate how difficult it is in ordinary orthodox science to come by a fact. Just now, for example, in higher energy physics people are wondering whether it is possible that the proton, which is the nucleus of the hydrogen atom and a constituent of all nuclear matter, is not, as we thought, stable for all time. Is it possible that it decays and turns into something else, perhaps even nothing? It is a very tangible kind of fact to expect to have. Many people around the world have set out to devise experiments to answer the simple question of the life time of a proton. The experiments may cost several million pounds, involving expensive equipment, usually deep underground. If the experiments work and provide data, they may be able to tell whether the proton has a lifetime that is shorter than 10^{32} seconds or they may be able to say nothing at all. In the first case we shall have a fact; for several million pounds we shall have what we guess to be the life time of the proton. I emphasise the difficulty of these experiments because this is the sort of thing scientists are doing all the time in order to gather a few crumbs of fact.

Scientists can be Wrong

Theories are exceedingly hard to come by. Looking back over the recent history of science in, say, biology, we recognise that about 110 years ago when Darwin wrote his *Origin of Species*, people after ten or 15 years began to say here is an idea that can really change our way of thinking—"Let's take it on board." Exactly the same sort of thing happened earlier this century with the physical sciences. These major shifts of theory are very rare, very hard to accomplish and require the collaboration of not merely all those who spend their time in science thinking about theories, but also those who spend their time trying to assemble a few facts.

We must also acknowledge that the facts and theories that make up science can be in error. The answer to the lifetime of the proton—if it is found—may be in error by a factor of 2; it could be 10^{31} or 10^{33} seconds. This is no shame, for it is inevitable that in the observation of what the natural world is like, the facts should be in error to some extent. Exactly the same is true of the theories which constitute the network within which these facts are embedded. The way in which at the end of

the nineteenth century it turned out to be necessary to do away with the Newtonian theory of mechanics and replace it with Einstein's special theory of relativity, which was in turn refined into the general theory of relativity, is part of the process of adjusting and refining theories, not merely to make them fit the facts better, but also to make them more philosophically consistent.

In thinking about the relationship between orthodox science and unorthodox belief, like belief in the paranormal, we must remember that science itself is not the monolithic, objective, scornful body of knowledge that it is sometimes made out to be. Critics of the scientific Establishment say frequently that the reason these people would not take telepathy seriously, or would not believe in water divining, is that they have their system of beliefs and conservatively hang on to them. An example of the malleability and willingness to change by the scientific profession was seen with Linus Pauling, whose theories that Vitamin C in large quantities could cure cancer had been treated with great scepticism, and he was given a grant by the National Cancer Institute in the United States to research his theories. The scientific Establishment is not in any sense repressive of ideas that many of its members think odd and heterodox.

Rules of Investigation

What then excludes the paranormal and the supernatural from the body of scientific understanding? The paranormal phenomena are observed, we don't know how they happen, but the observers say it is the duty of science to give an explanation. The advocates of paranormal phenomena as realities never themselves put forward an accompanying theory, but ask scientists to do so. It would be a tenable position philosophically if they said we have observed phenomena which we think cannot be accommodated in any rational theory relating cause to effect, we do not suggest these are part of scientific knowledge, on the other hand we say that there are phenomena outside scientific knowledge. We do not ask you to explain them, we do not think any explanation is possible. However, the argument is always: here are the phenomena, we have no theory, please think up a theory.

Another aspect of the claims of the advocates of the paranormal is that the phenomena themselves are not reproducible—in several senses of that word. The literature shows that it is always one subject, usually named by initials, who turns out to be able to tell whether it is the ace of spades in that envelope. It is never the case that reports of these phenomena are accompanied by reports of the negative results. To say that X is capable of this paranormal activity does not throw a bit of light on its importance if the report is not accompanied

by a rather detailed study in which other people do not show this kind of behaviour. In strictly scientific terms what purport to be facts in the field of the paranormal are not facts as understood in the scientific profession. It is inconceivable that someone would send to *Nature* or any other reputable scientific journal a scientific paper reporting the reactions of a single frog to an external stimulus. Reports of the paranormal, accompanied though they may be by the most elaborate statistical analysis of how greater than random is the chance that the ace of spades had been spotted in its envelope, are never accompanied with reports of how other people perform in exactly similar circumstances.

The alleged facts of the paranormal not only fail to match up to the criteria that patient scientists regard as essential, but also the alleged facts are produced in exceedingly contrived circumstances. The Stanford Research Institute devised the following experiment. They said we will take a subject, put him into a room, tell him that a person whom he meets is then going to travel to a dozen different sites in the neighbourhood by motorbike or car, and after half an hour it is the subject's duty to say which of the sites the man has reached. Half an hour is a clue—he will not travel a hundred miles. More to the point, a judge sits in the room with the subject. The judge is provided with a list of the sites, which he has visited, and if the subject says it might be a church spire the judge can ask if it is this kind or that kind. It then becomes very hard to demonstrate that the judge was not helping the subject to spot the place. Even so the results of that experiment were not all that good. This is an exceedingly contrived way to devise an experiment. If ESP were a common attribute of human behaviour, then surely it would be an interesting issue that could be demonstrated repeatedly in a significant section of the population. We would then acknowledge that it was a phenomenon as we now acknowledge that, say, magnetic forces exist and are different from electrical forces.

Theories in Abundance

The lack of theory is a less serious objection regarding paranormal phenomena. If the advocates believed they had a serious phenomenon and had spent the time and money that the physicist spends measuring the life time of the proton, they would have a right to say here is a phenomenon to which others will perhaps find an explanation. It is proper that people should produce scientific results and not immediately have an explanation of them.

What attitude should we have in general to these phenomena? Having referred to the inevitable uncertainty within regular science of our factual know-

(continued on page 172)

Opponents of harmful religious sects are elated by the news that 300 leading members of the World Unification Church (nicknamed the Moonies after their "divine" founder, a sleek, melon-faced megalomaniac named the Rev Sun Myung Moon) are withdrawing from Britain. The general public, with the exception of a few academics and others who endorse the WUC because of its extreme Right-wing politics, now recognise it as a dangerous force whose poisonous influence has broken families, disrupted careers and wrecked the lives of hundreds of victims.

A number of groups, newspapers and individuals—notably Paul Rose, the former MP—have battled with this dubious organisation and its offshoots. But the outcome of a High Court case earlier this year may well have been their undoing. Morale and finance have been sapped, following their defeat in a libel action brought by Dennis Orme, a Moonie leader in Britain, against the *Daily Mail*. The trial lasted six months and cost an estimated £750,000.

After the case, newspapers which had hitherto maintained a discreet silence directed a barrage of criticism at the Church, exposing its questionable methods of indoctrination and fund raising. Michael Marshall, their Press officer, had an unenviable task. But then life must always be rather fraught for the Cambridge undergraduate who grew up in a devout Roman Catholic family but is now an ardent follower of a divorced ex-Presbyterian from South Korea.

One of the most worrying aspects of the trial for the Moonies was that the jury added a rider to their verdict, urging that the Church's registration as a charity be investigated. The Charity Commissioners were not exactly overjoyed by the proposal, but a storm of protest in Parliament and in the country could not be ignored. The surprise departure of the One World Crusade, the Moonies' missionary elite, follows quickly on this threat to their charity status, and there is reason to suspect that it was an important factor in the decision to leave Britain.

Moonie officials have been putting on a brave face by announcing grandiose plans for expanding their work in Europe, including Communist countries. One spokesman said that they might be preaching in Red Square, Moscow, by 1984.

Certainly the Moonie leaders are not given to reticence. When Dennis Orme addressed a New Hope Crusade at London's Royal Albert Hall, in 1978, his speech was modestly listed on the programme: "Dennis Orme speaks to save the nation". But his lawyers were unable to save him—from himself, according to some accounts—in the High Court, and he may be hard pressed to save his position in the Moonie hierarchy. His itinerary during a recent trip to the United States probably included an uncomfortable explanatory chat with Mr Moonshine at his mansion in Tarrytown, New York State.

Doris Orme, his second wife, who was born in North Haledon, USA, also performed at the New Hope Crusade. According to a programme note, "Doris has a unique, dramatic mezzo-soprano voice". She was an early Moonie activist in Britain, and many believe that the North Haledon nightingale is the real ruler of the British Moonies.

The Moonie missionaries will have a chilly reception on the Continent. One German MP, who represents Frankfurt where they plan to establish their base, has called on the city authorities to prevent them from receiving tax benefit or charity status.

While this exodus of the Moonies from Britain is most gratifying, there is no justification for complacency among opponents of such sects. The WUC will continue to operate from its London headquarters, albeit on a reduced scale and often under innocent-sounding names.

There are scores of other religious groups, not as well known as the World Unification Church, Children of God or Divine Light Mission, which cause havoc in the lives of those who become involved with them. The first *Freethinker* comment on Moonie activities was in May 1975; the previous month we carried a report on the Christine and Michael Taylor tragedy, in which he tore out her eyes and tongue after becoming deranged by happenings at an obscure Christian Fellowship Group. The same year, 20-year-old Susan MacDonald's death leap from a block of flats drew this comment from the Manchester County Coroner: "It is quite clear that the Divine Light Mission . . . had taken control of this girl's mind".

The Humanist movement has a special responsibility to combat these sects. Most of the Christian opponents of the Moonies are motivated by envy and competitiveness. Their own beliefs are just as idiotic and dangerous. Religious indoctrinators, clergy and lay, undermine the critical faculties of the young, making them easy prey for the more unscrupulous brainwashers and religious screwballs. The exposure and likely downfall of the Moonies in Britain should be seen as only a skirmish in the ceaseless battle against irrational, superstitious and authoritarian elements in society.

An Iranian who had lived in Britain for 12 years was executed for his religious beliefs when he returned to visit his mother in Teheran. Habbibollah, aged 65, was a member of the Baha'i faith. His daughter still lives in Bournemouth.

AND NOTES

THE FACE OF EVIL

"It is not surprising that so many people in the world are convinced that religion has been responsible through history for more evil than good", laments Urbanus, the *Catholic Herald* columnist. How true, not only of the historical past but at the present time with religious fanaticism raging on our own doorstep and in most parts of the world.

Listeners to the BBC Radio 4 programme, *Sunday*, were recently horrified by an interview with a leading Christian evangelist in the United States. This worthy follower of the alleged Prince of Peace positively gloated over the prospect of a hundred million people being wiped out in a nuclear war. He greeted the forthcoming holocaust with smug satisfaction as fulfilment of God's plan for the human race. Needless to say, like the fundamentalist Moral Majority which played a crucial role in electing a two-bit actor President of the United States, he regards Ronald Reagan as God's agent who will make the Armageddon scenario a reality.

The following week letters came from indignant listeners denouncing their bloodthirsty brother in Christ. But a number of Britain's "Bible-believing Christians" also wrote welcoming the coming mass slaughter.

Christian fundamentalists will be pleased that a court in Karachi has taken a leaf out of their horror comic, the Bible (Deuteronomy, ch 22 v 23), and sentenced a man to death by stoning. The sentence was passed by an Islamic judge who rejected an appeal for mercy and ordered the maximum sentence.

Under Pakistani law, a decision on the maximum punishment must be confirmed by the Federal Shariat Court. General Zia, the President, has nominated three Muslim scholars to sit as full members of this court. He did so in response to pressure by orthodox Muslims who contended that Islamic law could best be interpreted by scholars.

One Urdu language newspaper supports the sentence of death by stoning and hopes that the superior courts will uphold Islamic decisions by lower courts. If the barbaric sentence is carried out there will be no shortage of religious fanatics volunteering to hurl the stones.

In Israel the Rabbinate is interfering in every sphere of life. Menachem Begin, career terrorist and power-mad politician, is giving way on all sides to orthodox zealots to safeguard his position.

Archaeologists have been assaulted near Jerusalem by Zionists and others who claim that the excava-

tions being carried out are on the site of an old Jewish cemetery. Under an agreement between Begin and the religious parties, anyone finding a tomb must now report it to the religious authorities. Such discoveries were previously reported to the Department of Antiquities, which controls archaeological research in Israel.

Even hoteliers and restaurateurs are being pestered by rabbis. The Chief Rabbi of Jerusalem ordered them to ban all festivities on their premises last Christmas and New Year. The penalty for refusing to obey such an instruction is withdrawal of the *kosher* certificate—a disaster for any catering establishment in Jerusalem.

One of the nastier pieces of racial discrimination enforced by rabbis is the banning of Arab waiters from hotels and restaurants, on the grounds that "an Arab is forbidden to touch the wine a Jew drinks". Surviving Nazis from the Hitler era must be smiling wryly.

The evil and fanaticism of Christianity, Islam and Judaism may be "the unacceptable face of religion". But it is an authentic one.

PRICEY PAPAL VISIT

Pope John Paul's visit to Britain next summer will cost an estimated £5 million, although the Church is looking to recover this huge outlay in the glut of media coverage given to the Pontiff's reactionary views on social questions. The visit will also bolster the campaign by Catholic front organisations against the 1967 Abortion Act. No doubt the Pope will take the opportunity to reaffirm the Vatican's opposition to contraception, and we can expect to see a sudden spurt in the birth rate around spring, 1983, with John and Paul figuring high on the list of names for the new male offspring.

Since the above quoted figure does not include the cost of security arrangements for the visit, the final bill is likely to be far in excess of £5 million, and the British taxpayer, not the Church, will be landed with it. The Pope's five-hour whistle stop in Manchester alone will absorb £700,000 when police wages, accommodation, special equipment and transport are totted up.

The Papal circus is off and rolling, with the British public playing the clowns.

John Wadham, a Mormon missionary, was fined £20 by magistrates at Hove, Sussex, after admitting that he punched another car driver on the nose. It was while he was driving home from a religious meeting that the assault on Mr Peter Hill took place. It was stated for the defence: "This is not the sort of thing a man of his religious belief gets involved in. Mormons are opposed to violence. This man does not even smoke or drink!"

BOOKS

THE FREETHINKER, Volume 100, 1980, Edited by Jim Herrick. G. W. Foote & Co. £7.50.

Will I review *The Freethinker* for 1980? O.K., that doesn't sound too difficult.

But I am forgetting how much there is in it. It has been a long job reading 12 *Freethinkers*, but rewarding and intriguing. Reading the issues for a year in quick succession reveals two things that are less apparent when there are four weeks between issues: the immense breadth of subject matter that is dealt with in these pages; and the high standard of several debates, largely through the medium of the letters column.

Perhaps the most important role of *The Freethinker* is as a newspaper. Until its change from an eight-page weekly to a 16-page monthly in 1973, it was, after all, "registered at the post office as a newspaper". It has survived the change with its news facility unimpaired, perhaps even improved. We now get two pages of news and comment from the Editor at the front, two pages of "News and Notes" in the centre, and almost invariably a lot more news besides.

The Editor's cover and inside page stories throughout 1980 reveal the major events of concern to freethinkers. Three front pages (February, April and December) deal with developments in the ever present and always crucial struggle against religious education; developments in the strange world of Catholicism are covered in January, March and June; in October the absurd waste of public money on chaplaincies in the armed services, prisons and hospitals is reported thoroughly, and figures, collated by the National Secular Society and unavailable elsewhere, are presented. The speeches at the NSS annual dinner (May), South Place Ethical Society's tortuous achievement of charitable status (July), the visit to London of the Indian freethinker, Lavanam (September) and the unveiling of the bust of Bertrand Russell in Red Lion Square (November) are treated clearly and fully. But the Editor is a commentator as well as a reporter, and I am struck by the sensitivity (as well as the stridency) of his comments. In August he handles the subject of euthanasia and the EXIT booklet with delicacy, very fittingly quoting More's *Utopia*.

From February onwards Barry Duke edited "News and Notes", providing a wealth of news from all parts of the world, much of it in bite-sized chunks, and adding comment where appropriate. He ranges from the revival of Islam to the evangelical Christians backing President Reagan, and keeps readers in close touch with domestic developments in the area of social reform: abortion law, homosexual equality, euthanasia. Many of Duke's items are just plain funny: like the couple in Nashville who manufacture "scriptural cookies". Others, such

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as the antics of the ubiquitous Mary Whitehouse (compared by Antony Grey, in February, to the Ayatollah Khomeini), would be funny if so many people did not take her seriously, and she did not have powerful friends. In September, Duke reports Archbishop of Canterbury Runcie (described, I must mention for those who missed it, in *Private Eye's* "Dear Bill" column at the Royal Wedding as "that prize ass Runcie mincing about in a silver reachme-down like something out of 'Doctor Who'") publicly thanking the lady for the encouragement her National Viewers' and Listeners' Association gives to good broadcasting.

Articles from contributors covered the full gamut of freethinkers' preoccupations. Philosophical pieces included: David Berman on "mortalism" (January and March); G. A. Wells on "The Myth of the Resurrection" (February), in which the difference between the Jesus of history and the Christ of religion is clearly set out; B. J. Reid's "Pinning Down Square, Circular Gods" (May) in which the importance of demonstrating the meaninglessness of the concept "God" is suggested; "On Immortality and Atheism" by Geoffrey Webster (July); David Berman's "Fascism and Religion" (September), from which I learned that fascism is not fundamentally anti-religious; G. A. Wells' "The Sermon on the Mount as a Guide to Behaviour" (October); and R. J. Condon's "The Psalms of Thoth" (December), in which the Hebrew psalms are compared with the religious literature of ancient Egypt.

Pieces concerned with history included Sam Beer's "Omar Khayyam—Proof of the Truth" (February), an amusing account of the Persian poet's anti-religious verses; Edward Royle (June) on Bradlaugh's election to parliament and Nicholas Walter (July) on Bradlaugh's struggle to enter parliament (both these are reports of speeches made at the NSS meeting to celebrate the centenary of Bradlaugh's election to parliament); and Nigel Sinnott (August), clear, concise and enthusiastic as ever, on "H. K. Rusden, Australia's Iconoclasts".

Barbara Smoker led the way with contributions of a topical, social or political nature. Her "Mother Theresa—Sacred Cow" (February) is a most refreshing approach to the sacred cow of the year, in both senses of the phrase; and "Whole Body Transplants" is a thought-provoking review of a television series dealing with reincarnation and spiritualism (here, though, with every respect to this knowledgeable lady, I would suggest that she explore homeopathy a little more before comparing it to the two crackpot notions above). Other excellent pieces in this category come from: Vera Lustig, on "Death of a

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Princess" (May), and on clitoridectomy in the third world ("A Searing Flame", June), this last both informative and harrowing; An Indian Rationalist on "The Curse of Celibacy" (August); Peter Crommelin, who is thoughtful, stimulating and humane in his "Some Thoughts of an Ex-Catholic Priest" (August); and George Mepham, who produces a most useful resumé of the Brandt Report "North and South: Wealth and Poverty" (November).

I designate a final category of contributions "satirical". Poetry rarely appears in *The Freethinker*, surely reflecting the wisdom of the Editor. However, William Miller's "Psalms for the Eighties" is a hilarious attack on Mrs Thatcher, in the form of a parody of two psalms. Francis Bennion is satirical and highly amusing on three occasions: "The New Comfort Column" (July); "Sex Morality Changed (Official)" (August) and "Demented Dogmata" (September).

William McIlroy's occasional "Jottings" appear three times, and the man is as impish, and on occasion as hard-hitting, as we all expect him to be. In April he treats us to a lengthy resumé both of the controversy surrounding *Monty Python's Life of Brian* and of the film itself. In June he takes on and demolishes an organisation of busybodies called the Community Standards Association. In December he reflects rudely and rightly on the bizarre membership of the Religious Education Council by none other than the British Humanist Association.

Freethinker Reviews usually occupy at least three pages. Some of the book reviews are among the best pieces in the volume. Chris R. Tame's review of George H. Smith's *Atheism: The Case Against God* (January) is informative, amusing and a model of how to write a glowing review. (Julian Meldrum's review of *Optimism: the Biology of Hope* (April) is the corollary, a model panning.) G. N. Deodhekar recommends an excellent book for those puzzled by Islam, "*Islam and Capitalism*" by Maxine Rodinson (April). R. J. Condon is informative about the Gnostics, that interesting sect suppressed by the early Christians, while reviewing *The Gnostic Gospels* by Elaine Pagels (August). Ken Wright gives us a good argument in his review of *The Existence of God* by R. Swinburne (October); and T. F. Evans puts across the significance of James Hemming's *The Betrayal of Youth* (October). These are just the tip of the book review iceberg; *The Freethinker's* extensive book coverage is one of its most valuable features.

Cinema is the preserve of the well-informed Vera Lustig, who, while excellent on the serious European film-makers can see the good in popular Holly-

wood films like *Kramer Vs. Kramer* (May), and in the more mushy outpourings from France, such as *Une Semaine de Vacances* (October). Vera Lustig also reviews theatre, as do Jim Herrick and James MacDonald. The latter is not afraid to pan when the Establishment is ecstatic, *Amadeus* (January); and his review of O'Neill's *The Iceman Cometh* is stimulating and original.

Perhaps my favourite feature is the letters column, which often extends to well over a page. Here people are permitted to be rude, irate and intolerant, and perhaps reveal their true selves, although the column contains much besides rudeness. Several debates have continued through the months, not least the fascinating *contretemps* between Peter Cadogan and Barbara Smoker, with others butting in occasionally, on the subject of "Money Matters at Conway Hall", to quote the title of Barbara Smoker's piece (March) which started it all. The most interesting part of this debate is over Peter Cadogan's decision to let the hall to the National Front and the concomitant loss of a grant from Camden Council. This reminds me of my own decision, as Editor of this journal in 1969, to print a piece from a frequent contributor in which he praised Enoch Powell's obnoxious views on immigration. I still have sympathy with Cadogan's approach: "The thing to do is to confront them directly, expose their debased values, their shallow thinking and their ugly deeds" (April). However, I digress.

Other interesting debates have concerned such diverse topics as: John Wesley, immortality, Shostakovich, the formation of a secular political party, women's rights (a clever letter on these from Norma Benney, August), celibacy (which provoked a letter from David Flint entitled "In Praise of Fucking" (November)—or is the title a ploy by the Editor to sell more *Freethinkers*?). This also takes me back to 1969, when the word fuck first appeared in *The Freethinker*, and the correspondents who wanted the journal kept free of such words merely, Whitehouse-like, provoked more of the same from those in favour.

William McIlroy wins my prize for the most dismissive statement, albeit made in a jocular vein. To Frank Maitland's suggestion (February) that community singing should be introduced into secularist meetings, he replied (March): "The whole exercise would be embarrassing and musically awful."

Far better to gather together and read *The Freethinker*, 1980 *Bound Volume*, Mr. Maitland.

DAVID REYNOLDS

THE FREETHINKER, 1980

Bound: £7.50 plus 50p postage

From G. W. Foote & Co, 702 Holloway Road
London N19 3NL.

One-time feminist journalist, Mary Kenny has gone back on her political radicalism at the same time as her irreligion. This is her second book since her re-conversion.

Brought up in Irish Catholicism with the inevitable convent education—apart from Polish Catholicism, the most cloying variety of faith—Miss Kenny rejected it all in her adolescent bid for personal freedom. But there is rejection and rejection—rejection based on reason, which, perceiving the sweet poison in religion, will never be tempted by it again; and rejection based merely on nausea, wherein blander religious flavours may be sought as the appetite returns.

Mary Kenny's rejection was never total. Unable to face up to the implications of reality—the human condition and the finality of death—she gradually slid back into the fold. But, having left Ireland for the world, she could slide back only so far—to the post-conciliar, ecumenical, charismatic, nebulous kind of Catholicism that is so unarguable, either for or against. However, to a glib, professional communicator like Mary, unarguability is something (unlike reality) to be accepted as a challenge.

Her previous book, *Woman Times Two*, was her Augustinian Confession—in which she did not entirely regret her errant youth, but saw it rather as the necessary preliminary to her re-conversion. Now, with *Why Christianity Works*, she presents her Apologia. The theme should last out a few more books yet, and keep her in royalties for life.

The title is a clever one—calculated to attract thousands of perpetual seekers after harmony. Some freethinkers, always ready to give the opposition another hearing, might also be attracted by it. But they need not bother: Mary Kenny has little to say that is rational or new, though she says it well enough, her prose oozing with the easy jargon of Jungian psychology.

To ensure that nothing comes over too literally, she intertwines everything with metaphor, or statements that just might be metaphor, at the same time insisting that Christianity *must* be taken literally. It is the old Protestant Broad Church trick of using the same words to convey different messages to the naive and to the sophisticated, but it is a comparatively new trick in Catholicism.

For instance, Mary Kenny's chapter on Hell, though insistent that Hell is "real", continually harks back to the universal consciousness of Jung and to examples of "hell on earth", so that it is impossible to be sure how far the author herself accepts the literality of eternal torment.

Christianity of this woolly character may "work" (as the title claims) for those to whom a spade is an undefined horticultural implement, but not for

anyone who calls it a bloody shovel. As she says herself, "No number of clever arguments can impart faith. But the arrival of such faith may be a question of people opening themselves to its possibilities." In other words, you have to suspend disbelief and let yourself be conned. This is a good prescription for enjoying a couple of hours in the theatre, but hardly a basis for living.

Miss Kenny uses her admitted skill with the English language to make communication acceptable rather than to make it clear. This fills me with an overwhelming desire to take the author by the collar and shake her.

One of the verbal tricks to which she resorts (perhaps without conscious dishonesty) is using a word in two senses at the same time. For instance, the word "materialism" has a double connotation in the sentence "The beginning of faith is, I think, most often a negative thing; not an immediate persuasion that Christianity *does* work, but a gradual realisation that atheistic materialism *doesn't* work." If "materialism" here is taken in its philosophical, scientific sense—which is indicated by the epithet "atheistic"—then it certainly does work; in the pejorative sense, it has far less to do with atheism than with the materialistic symbols of religious ritual and the pomp of the Church of Rome.

If Mary Kenny's re-conversion were confined to the blind leap to faith and a betrayal of honest reason it would be bad enough. But she has also betrayed her old radical social values. While claiming to be libertarian, she comes down on the side of puritan politics and argues (in the gentlest, most equivocal terms) against contraception, abortion and euthanasia. Religion makes her dangerous.

BARBARA SMOKER

Debunking the Paranormal

ledge, let me go further. The most popular and pervasive theory today for the origin of the universe is the theory that it all began with a big bang, say, 10,000 or 20,000 million years ago. This presents one major philosophical difficulty: everything has been cause and effect since the big bang, but of the time before then we have nothing to say. It is important to accommodate within the scientific profession those who believe in the paranormal, because those of us who take the view that there is a cause and effect explanation of most things must be tolerant of scientists who believe in the big bang and who ask no questions about what happened earlier.

The history of science shows that any scientific theory is bound to be, by definition, in doubt. It is remarkable and stirring how apparently perfect theories, like the Newtonian theory of mechanics, have been refined and improved upon. Scientific theories have been abandoned one after the other

in the past several centuries as our knowledge of what the world is like has improved.

Not so long ago, in the seventeenth century, people believed in the spontaneous generation of organs. There was a classic medieval experiment: take an oak chest, put in a blanket, sugar and oatmeal, close the chest and open it three months later—mice will be found inside. We know what the probable explanation is, but people did believe in the spontaneous generation of animals at repeated intervals in chests. Another earlier theory was that of vitalism. People thought there was a difference between living tissue and non-living matter. We now know that there is no difference at all and not even the most devoted disciple of extra-sensory perception or water divining will now say a kind word for vitalism. Again, in biology there was in the early nineteenth century the notion that acquired characteristics could be inherited. The point about Lamarck at the turn of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries was that he said, in effect, that the wish is father of reality. If I want to be taller I must stand up straight and not merely will I seem taller but my children will also be taller. It is now widely accepted that Lamarckian inheritance, if it happens at all, is a rare phenomenon and we can see how Lamarckian inheritance, if there were not too much of it, can be accommodated into Darwinian inheritance by natural selection.

As the decades and centuries have gone by a great deal of lumber has been discarded. We have evidence that what used to be thought plausible is no longer so, that the irrational has failed to make its way and that the doctrine of to each effect some cause, has won out. If we now acknowledge that there are some people who believe in paranormal and supernatural phenomena then, knowing that they have no explanation, rational or otherwise, knowing that their plight is very much like that of the people who were battling for Lamarck at the end of the nineteenth century, the people who were battling for vitalism in the early nineteenth century, the people who were battling for spontaneous generation in the seventeenth century, they too, from this historical perspective, could be on a sticky wicket.

The campaign to open London theatres on Sunday has received a set-back with the Federation of Theatre Unions and the Society of West End Theatres, representing management failing to agree on salary arrangements. It is expected that the parties will meet again, and Peter Plouviez, General Secretary of Equity, the actors' union, commented: "We hope there will be further talks so that there can be a reasonable basis for agreement". Vincent Burke, SWET's development officer, said that Sunday opening would help to revitalise the commercial theatre.

Lord's Day at Lord's

JAMES MacDONALD

England's record-breaking retention of the Ashes in the Test series this summer is sure to find a permanent place in the social history of the 20th century for a significance far beyond the world of *Wisden*. For the first time in this country, Test cricket was played on a Sunday in three of six England-Australia matches. The popularity of the experiment has been so decisive that it is likely to be a fixture at all Test grounds from next season onwards.

First class cricket has been a feature of the English summer Sunday for roughly a decade now, with the advent of the John Player League one-day, limited overs contests. It may be remembered that arcane statutes against the profit-making element of this Sunday entertainment were circumvented by attaching the price of admission to the programmes and scorecards. Now that that bastion of British convention has been scaled, the way seems clear for Sunday cricket to gain official approval from not only the Test and County Cricket Board but—a real fillip—from Marylebone Cricket Club as well.

It is reasonable to assume that the success of Sunday cricket was due more to the particular winning circumstances of the matches at Edgbaston and Old Trafford. For this reason, Peter Lush, of the TCCB, sought to compare this year's attendance figures not with last year's, but with those of 1977, the last time Australia played a Test series in England, again successful for the home team. The figures reveal a nine thousand increase in tickets for fourth-day attendance and over a million pound increase in receipts.

So far the single obstacle blocking the Sunday scheme is, ironically, a profit-making one. Traditionally Test matches begin on a Thursday and continue till the following Monday, with Sunday as the rest day. Sunday play, while engaging greater interest than is customary on a fourth day, does interfere with commercial interests. Provincial businessmen, it seems, favour the first two days of a Test match to soften up their clients, and are not likely to welcome the sacrifice of one of these opportunities for the sake of "family" outings, as the Test matches would become.

The Lord's Day Observance Society may take some heart from the decision to postpone the beginning of these Sunday matches until midday, time enough, the officials assure us, for parishioners to attend morning worship. However, it was noted at Birmingham, where a golf course adjoins the cricket grounds, that punters used the extra half hour to improve their putting and driving, inspired, no doubt, more by the stroke-makers across the way than by the soul-savers in the pulpit.

LETTERS

PRESERVATION OF LIFE

Barbara Smoker was, I think, quite wrong in the letter she wrote to the "Guardian", 11 August, on the subject of the Appeal Court decision on the case of the mongol baby girl whose parents had refused permission for an operation to keep her alive.

The two main points of the letter were that a newborn baby has no right to life and that to oppose this view is to suffer from religious superstition. Surely as people who reject all religion as bunkum we should be the ones to defend life. It is, of course, quite right to insist that people who want to end their own lives should be allowed to do so with dignity, but that implies the ability and knowledge to make that choice. A baby is not in that position and it is quite wrong to use available medical skills less for one person than another.

I submit that the logical extension of Barbara Smoker's argument is that human life will be judged according to its economic or social worth to the State and that "nuisances" like mongol babies, the elderly, disabled people and even the unemployed should be denied basic care. While we are not there yet there have been societies, e.g. based on slavery, where this has happened.

I hope that I have misunderstood the original letter but I have read it several times and still find the arguments quite horrifying. Perhaps the NSS President could spare a little time to explain her rationale as I doubt if I was the only member to be concerned.

JOHN BENNETT

Barbara Smoker writes: My main argument is opposition to the contention that human life is absolutely sacred—an argument generally based on religious grounds and used mainly by the religious lobby. They do not care how much suffering and distress they cause by their opposition to abortion, voluntary euthanasia, and infant euthanasia, as long as the divine plan they believe in is not thwarted. (Though how mere humans could thwart an almighty plan is a bit unclear!)

You suggest that the "logical extension" of my argument would allow human life to be judged according to its economic or social worth. But the whole logic of my argument is to replace absolutes (of which "logical extension" is an example) by the consideration of every case individually and weighing up the probabilities of each possible course of action. After all, deciding that a seriously defective newborn baby shall be kept alive is no less a decision than deciding that it shall be allowed to die, or even that it should be given a merciful lethal injection. People talk about condemning to death, but what about condemning to life?

If a decision is made not to carry out either passive or active euthanasia, then of course every care possible must be lavished on the living being—and if only voluntary euthanasia were legalised, then those incurably ill people who did not choose it would be more likely to get the labour-intensive care and the amount of pain-suppressing drugs that they need than they do at present, since adequate treatment in hospices for the terminally ill is available only for about two or three in every hundred of those who need it.

In the case of babies, euthanasia obviously cannot be voluntary, but to wait until adulthood is not avoiding a decision—it is deciding to condemn a seriously defective baby to years of pain and distress.

A mongol baby is, admittedly, a border-line case, as it is possible for mongols to lead reasonably happy lives. In the present case, however, there were apparently a number of physical handicaps as well as the Down's syndrome and the blocked bowel, and the fact that the parents and their medical advisers decided that it would be inhumane to condemn her to major surgery followed by a far from normal life persuaded me to publicise an important human, legal, and social issue that is usually swept under the carpet.

I have often written similar letters to the Press but they have never been published unless there is a particular case in the news that makes them topical. One of the appalling cases of spina-bifida babies kept alive, to have one major operation after another, with no possibility of ever being anything but doubly incontinent, immobile, and in continual pain and distress, would have provided a better peg on which to hang my letter, but such cases rarely become newsworthy through an Appeal Court hearing.

When I was young, most seriously defective babies were not allowed by the doctor or midwife to take their first breath, and the parents were simply told "Your baby was stillborn, but even had it lived it would have been seriously incapacitated; and there is no reason why you should not have a perfectly normal baby next time". Even when the baby was allowed to live, nature generally took a hand and the baby died within a week or two. But now that surgical developments enable so many more such babies to live for years, and so many nurses are recruited as spies by LIFE and SPUC (which are Christian in sponsorship and membership), it is all the more important to get the law changed so as to decriminalise both active infant euthanasia by the medical profession and passive infant euthanasia (as chosen by the parents in the case in question).

As mentioned in my "Guardian" letter, infanticide for mere social convenience would not be justifiable in a country like ours, though I would not rule it out in countries where adoption of a handicapped baby would be impossible and the likelihood is death by starvation.

In my opinion, James MacDonald's article, "God's Blotted Copy" (September), makes the salient point in the whole controversy about the handicapped; the decision has nothing to do with the State, but must be taken by parents, with the necessary counselling as to future prospects. But to suggest that no one has the right to argue the case from the point of view of the infant (even though the arguments must come from the parents), is contradictory.

Mr MacDonald is one of those who has had the intelligence and the opportunity to surmount his disabilities, but he represents only a very small proportion of the disabled. I would also point out that he is young and no one stays that way.

For many of the disabled who must suffer physically all their lives there are also the agonies of mental and emotional frustration. We are all born with the natural instincts of our species, yet we promote life which can only be thwarted of expression of such instincts from birth to death. Some adults, both young and old, ask with justifiable bitterness why they were made to survive. Others, unable and without opportunity to speak, vent their unexpressed but deeply felt deprivation in violence and spiteful and unco-operative behaviour. Who can blame them?

My personal conviction is that the only true and lasting value in human life is that of continuity—the evolutionary process. Most of us have some temporary satisfaction in working to contribute to society;

but this is finite, unless connected with social reform.

I think if Mr MacDonald were to insist upon going "behind the scenes" in some of our institutions, where visitors are rarely welcomed, he would be appalled. I do not think he would really believe that many of these unfortunate human vegetables have what he calls a love of life.

Another unhappy result is that sometimes parents who, in the initial drives of emotion, nurtured very seriously handicapped children, in later years come to regret and resent their situation, both for the child and themselves. Recently I was told of a woman of 88, still caring for her spastic but intelligent daughter of 66—and both confessed that they regarded the whole of their lives absolutely pointless. Neither had had the opportunity or capability of doing anything but simply surviving within a very limited regime.

No matter how caring our society, it cannot possibly solve all life's problems. I believe it is presumptuous and often very cruel to try.

(Mrs) PEGGY LEJEUNE

ROYAL RUMPUS

On the front page of the July "Freethinker", recently received here in Fiji, you ask: "Do we need the Monarchy?" The answer is indubitably "Yes"; the alternative for Britain would be communism, and I see already a drift in that direction.

If in this tiny country, Fiji, a colony up to ten years ago, you even asked the question, your head would be bashed in and you would be in the cooking pot—or at least you would have been a hundred years ago. You have simply no idea of the veneration, the love, which most of the people of the world have for our Royal Family; how out of touch you are. It is foolish to grouse about the cost of the recent Royal Wedding; the money has boosted trade, besides giving pleasure to millions. Why do you think that the radio and television coverage was so vast? In Fiji the complete proceedings were broadcast live on the Wednesday evening, for nearly four hours.

We may disagree with the connection between religion and the throne. But we have an heir to the throne: would you have him marry in a Registry Office?

I am getting fed up with the several secular publications to which I subscribe, as they all assume that someone who holds no religious beliefs must be a labourite, a communist, or a trade unionist. Many secularists, humanists, agnostics, atheists, call us what you will, are old enough to still believe in tradition, and realise the damnable state of affairs which extreme labour policies and trade unionism have inflicted on many countries, the UK being a prime example.

E. A. W. MORRIS

THE RULE OF LAW

I am grateful to Benedict Birnberg for his thoughtful and sympathetic review of my book, "Statute Law", in your September issue. What he says about the content of the book calls for no comment from me. I would, however, like to respond briefly to his remarks on wider issues.

It is certainly true that a different book could be written about the social and political environment of legislation. (Indeed I have for some time had hopes of writing just such a book.) My entire career, spanning some 30 years, has revolved around the belief that law is basic to human living. It is the key to self-determination. Without it we are at the mercy of those who would use force to get their own way. But it needs to be the right sort of law.

Birnberg asks why it should be the preserve of politicians alone to make our laws. As he knows, they are not alone in fact. Nor do they originate much law. What in my view is vital is that they should be true representatives. (That is why I have supported abolition of the House of Lords.) As representatives, in close touch with the opinions of their constituents, they can take sound decisions on what new laws should be made.

I believe that our system of representative government is a powerful contribution to human welfare. It needs improvement, as all things human do. But perhaps more than that it needs cherishing and protecting. It needs to be valued, as the only fair system by which a society can govern itself in freedom.

FRANCIS BENNION

DIVIDE AND RULE

In reply to John Broom's letter (September): it would have been ludicrous to suggest that after the recent elections in Zimbabwe, a section of the country be sectioned off for the white minority. But that is what has happened to Ireland. The Protestants want to remain part of Britain because of the privileges they receive in jobs, housing, etc. The reason they have been given these privileges is an economic one.

In order to keep control of their interests in Ireland, Britain sectioned off the most industrialised part, the north. Then to counter the growing militancy of the workers and the Republican movement, they played on the Protestant workers' fears of Catholic competition, and artificially aligned them with high Tory interests in Orange Lodges.

Britain cannot afford to undermine the Unionist regime, so discrimination against Catholics will continue, and the violence will go on.

The old tactic of "divide and rule" lives on.

ROGER LEWIS

Centenary Appeal

It is with much gratitude we announce that contributions to *The Freethinker* during its Centenary year have passed the £3,000 mark. This is a very practical way in which to celebrate the paper's 100th anniversary.

Donations received between 8 August and 4 September are listed below. Anon, £15; Anon, £20; Anon, \$1; I. Barr, £2; R. Bennett, £5; Sir H. Bondi, £5; P. W. Brook, £28.90; K. Byrom, 50p; E. P. Channon, £2.25; R. J. Condon, £10; P. B. Cooper, £3; J. R. Crellin, £4; R. J. Dale, £1; Mr Davies, £12; W. S. File, £3.60; In Memory of Bert Follett, £5; M. B. Fuller, \$7; D. Fyfe, £1; E. C. Gibson, £1; D. Goldstock, £25; W. R. Gray, £2; M. Hawkins, £2; E. Henderson, £10; C. P. Honeywell, £5; C. G. Houston, £2; C. M. Lejeune, £3; G. Love, \$2; H. Madoc-Jones, £2.90; D. Marietta, \$2; K. Martin, \$3.50; I. A. Mason, 50p; J. A. Milburn, £2; B. Morgan, 50p; A. E. Morris, £1; J. Morris, \$2; R. Pyne, £20; J. Riding, £10; S. Rogers, £3; R. R. Shergold, £6; W. Shuttleworth, £2; V. Stone, £2; J. Sutcliffe, £1; M. Wood, \$2; R. G. Wood, £1; D. Wright, £4. Total for the period: £224.15 and \$19.50. Total for the year: £3,112.85 and \$78.

EVENTS

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

Berkshire Humanists. Friends Meeting House, Church Street, Reading, Friday, 9 October, 8 pm. Trevor Brown: "Free Speech".

Brighton and Hove Humanist Group. Queen's Head, Queens Road (entrance in Junction Road, opposite Brighton Station). Sunday, 1 November, 5.30 pm. John Ennals: "Immigrants in a Cold Climate".

Gay Humanist Group. Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London. Meeting on the second Friday of the month, 7.30 pm.

Harrow Humanist Society. Gayton Road Library, Harrow, Wednesday, 14 October, 8 pm. Claire Rayner: "Being a Meddler—the Dilemma of the Professional Communicator".

Humanist Holidays. Brixham, Devon, 24-28 December. Andalusia, Spain (Mediterranean coast), 20-27 December. Details from Mrs B. Beer, 58 Weir Road, London SW12, telephone 01-673 6234.

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

Merseyside Humanist Group. 46 Hamilton Square, Birkenhead, Monday, 19 October, 7.45 pm. Raymond Freeman: "Miracles: are They Really Possible?"

Sutton Humanist Group. Friends House, Cedar Road, Sutton, Wednesday, 14 October, 8 pm. Prof. Jack Boag: "The Prospects for World Disarmament".

West Glamorgan Humanist Group. 117 Pennard Drive, Southgate, Friday, 9 October, 7.30 pm. Forum discussion: "Should the BHA be in the Religious Education Council?"

Worthing Humanist Group. Trades Club, 15 Broadwater Road, Sunday, 25 October, 5.30 pm. Harry Stopes-Roe: "The Social Dynamism of Humanism".

Dr Paul Buckland would like to hear from "Freethinker" readers who are interested in forming a secular humanist group in the mid-Glamorgan area. His address is 2 Forest Avenue, Cefn Hengoed, CF8 7HZ, telephone Hengoed 813420.

PUBLIC MEETINGS AT CONWAY HALL, Red Lion Square, London (Holborn Underground)

Monday, 26 October, 7 pm
Professor Bernard Williams
Legislation on Pornography

Monday, 2 November, 7 pm
Antony Grey
How Moral is the Backlash?

Monday, 9 November, 7 pm
Madeleine Simms
Reflections on "Irresponsible Societies"

Organisers: National Secular Society,
British Humanist Association,
South Place Ethical Society
and Rationalist Press Association

OBITUARY

Mr S. Clowes

We regret to announce the death of Sidney Clowes, of Wirral, two days before his 92nd birthday.

He was probably the oldest continuous reader of *The Freethinker*. His father bought it every week and, as a boy of 12, Sidney was introduced to the paper. He took it to school and one of his teachers regularly borrowed the Clowes family copy.

Sidney Clowes came from a working-class family, and by sheer hard work and determination won a place at university. He became an engineer, and later held a high position in a firm not noted for its sympathy with employees who joined a trade union. He became actively involved in union affairs and was a committed Socialist all his life.

He was an early advocate of equal rights for men and women, and supported the pioneering family planning movement when open discussion of birth control was taboo.

Sidney Clowes was an active and highly respected member of Merseyside Humanist Group, and was largely responsible for the Group's affiliation to the National Secular Society. He met his wife Marion in the movement, and she cared for him with great devotion.

Paul Ebsworth conducted a secular committal ceremony at Birkenhead Crematorium.

THE FREETHINKER

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