

The Freethinker

secular humanist monthly

founded 1881

Vol. 101, No. 11

NOVEMBER 1981

25p

CRISIS WARNING: WORLD POPULATION WILL OUTPACE RESOURCES

The London-based organisation, Population Concern, has published a report entitled "Proposals for a National Policy on Population" as part of its programme to create awareness of the nature, size and complexity of problems caused by excessive breeding. There is little optimism in the document. Written by Eric McGraw, the organisation's Director, it examines the stark reality of the dangers resulting from uncontrolled population growth both in Britain and in the world at large. All governments, particularly those which have hitherto ignored the problem or have succumbed to religious pressure not to encourage or finance birth control programmes, should study this report and take firm action on its proposals.

The opening chapter, "The World Perspective", is far from reassuring. The essential facts are widely known, but they lose none of their force by reiteration. During the last decade the population of the world has increased by more than 800 million. And because children under 15 now constitute 36 per cent of the world's population (in some of the poorest countries 50 per cent), the situation is likely to get worse before there is any hope of some deceleration.

World population now exceeds 4,000 million, and is already fast approaching 5,000 million. If the replacement fertility level, two children per woman, is not attained for another two-and-a-half generations, it could reach 15,000 million.

The demographic revolution which began about 1780 has completely changed the physical face of the earth and "entailed the exhaustion of resources that would support a hundred thousand Roman Empires". Surveying the nature and limits of these resources, the author concludes that the richer nations of the world have a clear obligation to reduce their levels of consumption. But whatever

is done towards moderating excessively high living standards, "if the number of people in the world continues to increase by 70 million every year . . . the human race will outpace land, food, water and mineral resources, to say nothing of homes, jobs and all opportunity of education".

The only note of hope in this world survey is that in the last ten years some governments have recognised the crisis that is upon us and population policies are being worked out. Mr McGraw does not say whether he considers this to be a case of "too little, too late"; he implies "better late than never", and proceeds to deal with the more specific problems of the United Kingdom.

Despite a century of mass emigration, Europe is now the most overcrowded continent in the world with Britain and the Netherlands the most densely populated countries in Europe. Perhaps the most telling statistic in this section is that while it has been estimated that the "optimum" (i.e. economically and socially ideal) population of Britain would be approximately 30 million, her population today is 54 million. It has increased by about five million in the last 20 years.

In addition to gross physical overcrowding, Britain is dependent on imports for 50 per cent if its food. The inevitably rising costs of these importations, and even more seriously the insecurity of availability in the increasingly fierce competition of a growing, food-demanding world, are tersely set out. And in addition there is the economic madness of nearly 50,000 acres of land being lost every year to urban development and industry by British agriculture.

Here again there is a hopeful sign; there has been a drop in the birth-rate in Britain as in most of Western Europe. It is now the responsibility of legislators to welcome this "instinctive social choice"

1881

CENTENARY YEAR

1981

as a moral mandate towards formulating a national policy on population.

In spite of this recent fall in the birth-rate, our population would stop growing only if we maintained replacement fertility level for about 60 years. Among the factors militating against the achievement of a stable population are restrictions on the availability of family planning facilities, indifference on the part of the education authorities to the need for preparation for parenthood and personal relations ("something more important to human happiness than all the academic subjects put together"), and the lack of interest in population matters by the mass media.

There is also the vocal and influential religious lobby whose concern for "morality"—their morality—can be maintained only by steadfastly ignoring social realities. There is a radical callousness beneath their veneer of solicitude for "the sanctity of life".

Do the breeding enthusiasts know—or care—that worldwide for every three live births, one pregnancy is deliberately terminated? In many countries of Christian Latin America there are twice as many abortions as live births. The "morality" which religiously motivated breeders uphold is partly responsible for the appalling abortion figures, as it prevents access to family planning facilities. It also results in the great danger and pain that women and girls endure rather than face an unwanted or dreaded birth. As long as there is more life on earth, opponents of contraception do not care if it is unwanted—or starving—life.

Time for Action

The second part of the document contains proposals for action in nine major areas. The first four of these concern the assumption of essential responsibilities by Parliament, with the creation of a Population Research Unit within the Office of Population Censuses and Surveys and parliamentary funding of research by OPCS for research in areas essential to the formation of policy. It urges legislation for the introduction into schools of population studies, education for parenthood and sex education.

The need to strengthen the country's grossly under-financed family planning services is forcefully and rightly stressed. It is asserted that "when local authorities are obliged to make cuts in social services, family planning is generally seen as the most expendable. Taking all but the shortest views, in purely financial terms, it is the least expendable. By assisting in the prevention of births of extra, unwanted children, they would in fact be taking the single most helpful step possible to reduce their social expenses in the future."

It is legitimate and reasonable for a country to control the number of people coming into it to settle, although not on grounds of race or colour.

But an immigration policy that is not based on demographic considerations, and is not integrated into a national population programme, would inevitably be racial in character.

In a final section concerning the conservation of resources and the protection of the environment, attention is directed to four different areas: the scarcely credible wastage of reclaimable and recyclable mineral materials; the depredations on our agricultural base; destruction of the countryside; and the increasing ravages of insufficiently controlled noise. It is recommended that "Parliament . . . acknowledges the principle that a national policy on population should contain effective measures to control the use of scarce resources, protect the environment and drastically reduce waste".

The contents of this important document—hard if unpleasant facts, clear reasoning and realisable proposals—cannot be faulted. It has been sent to specialist organisations and the Press as well as to Members of Parliament. Our only regret is that it is not yet widely available to the public. For at the end of the day, it is pressure by an informed public that will force the politicians to act.

• The Royal College of General Practitioners and the Family Planning Association have called for an increase in family planning services, with more training for GPs and sex education in schools. They urge that family planning clinics be maintained by local authorities and there should be a national campaign advertising contraceptive information and facilities. A domiciliary service should be provided for those who need it. More than 35,000 babies are born annually to mothers of two or more children. Almost half of third pregnancies are unwanted and every year 130,000 women seek an abortion; 90,000 teenagers become pregnant; 55,000 are unmarried and 30,000 have abortions. A representative of the British Pregnancy Advisory Service said: "Although BPAS terminates some 25,000 pregnancies each year, and is best known for this service, we believe abortion to be the least desirable method by which people control their fertility".

ARTICLES, REVIEWS, NEWS REPORTS,
LETTERS AND ANNOUNCEMENTS
SHOULD BE SENT TO THE EDITOR AT
32 OVER STREET, BRIGHTON, SUSSEX
(Telephone: Brighton 696425)

POSTAL SUBSCRIPTIONS, BOOK ORDERS
AND DONATIONS TO THE
FREETHINKER FUND
SHOULD BE SENT TO

G. W. FOOTE & CO,
702 HOLLOWAY ROAD, LONDON N19
(Telephone: 01-272 1266)

Not the Church Times, or Pamela Stephenson Where Are You?

DAVID REYNOLDS

It looks like *The Church Times*, it feels like *The Church Times*, it even smells like *The Church Times*, but more than a cursory glance reveals that it is emphatically *Not The Church Times*. Congratulations are due to the three Anglican clerics who have written and put together a convincing and well-produced spoof of the time-honoured and generally tedious weekly organ of the Church of England. They have managed to fill eight pages with continuous lampoonery: articles, editorials, letters, advertisements — display and classified — young readers' corner, even obituaries; but none of them are what they seem.

The authors do not, of course, reach anywhere near the high standards of the *Not the Nine O'Clock News* team, who set the trend and gave them their title. There is a schoolboy quality to much of the humour—"Queen's Chaplain in Mercy Dash to Corgi"; and there are rather too many "in" homosexual jokes—"Mr Alvin Smith, 32, churchwarden of the parish of St Jonathan with St David, SE1, came out on Friday. Neither his vicar nor the Bishop of Southwark had any comment to make."—and not enough jokes (indeed nun, whoops, that I could find) about the holy sisters.

But, to their credit, the authors succeed in being funny almost all the way from the front page lead, "Dancing in the Streets as the Bishop of London is Enthroned" where a picture of Heinrich Himmler appears above the caption "London's new Bishop", to the spoof display advertisement on page six: "1982 is the Year of Decision ! ! ! for Britain's Capital City ! ! ! 'This will be the Biggest Crusade Ever ! ! !' says Stephen Runcible. Events will include: Rivers of Blood Flowing down the Edgware Road from the Site of Tyburn ! ! ! as prominent evangelicals are disembowelled . . . The Nicene Creed recited backwards by the Humanist Association in the Albert Hall . . ." At the bottom of this display in small italic letters: "Sponsored by the National Secular Society in association with the Greater London Council." Well, whatever its members feel about Ken Livingstone and his crew, the NSS should feel in a small way honoured.

I, for one, hope that *Not The Church Times* flourishes, that it will bite harder and that it will, unwittingly of course, hasten the disintegration of the Church from within. But what they really need is an evangelical equivalent of the wonderful Pamela Stephenson of *Not the Nine O'Clock News*. Surely, in some out of the way convent there must be a stunningly beautiful, acidly witty, potentially rebellious nun just longing, if she would admit it to herself, to

be released by three lusty young clergymen. And, if they really search their hearts, they must know the good she can do them. Or am I just a dreamer?

OBITUARIES

Mr W. Craigie

William Craigie, a New Zealand reader of *The Freethinker* for many years, has died.

Mr D. A. Fellingham

Derek Albert Fellingham, of Hove, Sussex, died last month at the age of 60. He had been in poor health for some time. A teacher by profession, Mr Fellingham taught for some years at Worthing and latterly at the Downs Special School, Portslade. He had a wide range of interests and was well known in cricketing and ornithological circles.

There was a large gathering of relatives and colleagues at the secular committal ceremony which took place at Woodvale Crematorium, Brighton.

Mr E. Greaves

Eric Greaves, of Sheffield, a keen secularist and *Freethinker* reader for many years, has died after a long illness. He was aged 67.

Mrs B. J. Maciejewski, his daughter, writes: "I should like to express my gratitude to your publication for the obvious pleasure it gave my father over the years, and trust that it will go from strength to strength in its attempt to diminish the ineptitude with which religion strangles society".

A family friend conducted the secular committal ceremony at Hutcliffe Wood Crematorium, Sheffield.

Mr E. Kingston

Edgar Kingston, of Ramsgate, Kent, has died. He was a member of the Thomas Paine Society and a *Freethinker* reader for many years.

Mr M. Shapira

Maurice Shapira, aged 52, the victim of a brutal murder, was Lecturer in English Literature at the University of Kent. There was a large gathering of relatives, friends, colleagues and students, when the President of the National Secular Society conducted a secular committal ceremony at Golders Green Crematorium, London.

It is ironic that religious services are held all over the country during November to commemorate the dead of the 1914-18 and 1939-45 wars. For it was the horror of war and the futility of prayers for peace that caused thousands to reject religious myths. Albert Beale, one of the editors of the pacifist fortnightly, "Peace News", has been active in the peace movement for over ten years. He says he realised he was "an atheist" before he realised he was "a pacifist", probably because "Christian influence was having a more noticeable adverse effect on my life during my schooldays than was militarism". In this article he looks at some of the links between atheism and pacifism.

"I'm an atheist for the same reason as I'm a pacifist". That is my brusque response to the many comments I get if I'm wearing my "I'm a Born-again Atheist" badge in pacifist circles. I suppose I should no longer be surprised that some people are surprised—but it all seems so obvious to me. Maybe the links will be better understood by my fellow-readers of *The Freethinker* than they are by many of my companions in the peace movement.

Perhaps I should explain that I am a pacifist for two main reasons. They are, in a very abbreviated form, as follows: first, I have found that people tend to behave towards you in a way that reflects how you behave towards them. Secondly, considering the wider aspects of pacifism it is logical that the means must surely be compatible with the end. Therefore you cannot "fight for peace".

The essence of pacifism, I suppose, is the placing of great value on the well-being of other individuals, rather than on dogmas or philosophies. It reflects a certain modesty and willingness to consider alternative viewpoints to one's own. In other words it hardly seems right to kill somebody in pursuit of a particular viewpoint if you accept that your view might later change. And that of course is a way in which a pacifist world view comes up against a religious one: the "certainty" of a religious view of the world is inherently totalitarian. There is a fundamental difference between a forceful espousal of a cause and an unwillingness to concede the possibility of a different "truth".

I have always seen atheism and pacifism as both embodying this same set of values, the well-being of the individual having priority over any allegiance to the State or to some "supreme being"; the following of one's own conscience in preference to an external "authority". (And if this sounds a bit like anarchism creeping in too—well, I happen to think that anarchism, is like atheism, indistinguishable from pacifism).

Part of a declaration of principles published many years ago by the Peace Pledge Union, the main British pacifist organisation, reads: "Pacifism involves the belief in the innate dignity of every human being . . .". That not only means rejecting the use of violence, but it also ties in with a rejection of ideas of a god, since the notion that we're subservient to some sort of "supreme being" is about as demeaning to ideas of an individual's dignity as you can get.

Furthermore, not only is a religious mentality at root incompatible with pacifism, but even where people take up a pacifist position despite being theists, their pacifism must ultimately be unreliable. After all, most theists say they follow the instructions of their god (though they may not use quite that language—sometimes it's to do with "revelations" etc, but the effect is the same). So what if their god changes its mind? What if their god turns around, in effect, and says that there's a new "truth" to obey? If their god suddenly turns nasty, and they believe what they say about who's in charge, then their pacifism is hardly going to last very long.

If any of my Christian friends are reading this, I can hear them saying at this point: "Ah you know you mustn't take all this stuff about obedience, supreme authorities, and so on, too literally—the modern view isn't quite like that." And indeed these modern Christians don't use that kind of language in discussion with those people outside their circle. (Though if you pursue the basis of their beliefs, they generally fall back on traditionally theistic concepts: magic and mysticism lumped together as "spirituality".) But go and listen to them in their churches! When they're alongside the less critical faithful you won't hear them standing up all the time and denying the things they deny to us! I think I sometimes have more honest arguments with good old-fashioned fundamentalist Christians, who are at least consistent.

God and Nation

Another thing that atheists and radical pacifists have got in common is the problem of debunking ideas which, though ridiculous, are well ingrained in the culture of many generations. Take the similarity in this sense between the idea of a god, and the idea that there is anything sensible or reasonable in a mode of organisation based on the nation state.

Imagine we'd grown up in a world which had developed on more rational lines. (Perhaps take some of the lines of a song that John Lennon wrote ten years ago, as a guide: *Imagine there's*

no heaven, it's easy if you try. . . . Imagine there's no countries, it isn't hard to do. Nothing to kill or die for, and no religion too. . . .) Then along comes somebody one day, puts forward the idea of "god", or the suggestion that the planet should organise itself in nation states. If you can try hard to think yourself into a world where they don't already exist, can you imagine two more absurd ideas? Can you imagine the incredulity and laughter? (It reminds me of a famous radio sketch many years ago with some American comedian or other. He's at the court of Queen Elizabeth I, when Sir Walter Raleigh arrives back from America with this new discovery. The Queen speaks: "Tell us about this wonderful crop again, Walt. You say you grow all these plants, then cut them down? Then what Walt? You just leave them until they've gone dry? Then you set fire to them? Then you what? . . . You breathe in the smoke? ? ?")

What both pacifists and atheists have to do is the very frustrating job of communicating perfectly sensible—and not particularly new—ideas to people who're trapped by commonly held assumptions. It's not that we're trying to get people to grasp something new; rather we have to encourage people to take a leap of the imagination to free themselves from existing ideas which are chaining them down.

It's true that there are quite a few theists in the pacifist and other sections of the peace and disarmament movement. Sometimes they're amongst the most militant activists. I often find myself working alongside them, and I'm glad to say that if they make much of a point about their combination of attitudes it's usually more to do with taking peace movement ideas to their co-religionists rather than bringing their religion to people in the peace movement.

Nevertheless, if some sort of "atheists for peace" group existed I'd certainly see a role for it to actively counterbalance some of the irrationalism in the peace movement, as well as trying to involve fellow-secularists in peace activity. It would be nice to think that the atheist-humanist movement was big enough to have a specific group within it concerned with these issues, just as there are "peace" factions within many religious denominations.

Religion and Militarism

Besides religion being difficult to reconcile with pacifism, the other side of the coin is the way in which it ties in with militarism. This is particularly obvious in the month of November during which Remembrance Weekend falls. We are accustomed to seeing religious and military leaders taking part in ceremonies which are supposed to honour the dead, but which in fact have more to do with glorifying militarism and perpetuating the attitudes which lead to all those deaths. And they are leading

us to far greater horrors at the present time.

Fortunately there is now an increasing awareness of the hypocrisy of such displays. In London, for the second successive year, supporters of the London Peace Action are conducting "alternative" Remembrance events. These will take place outside the Royal Albert Hall on Saturday, 14 November, and at the Cenotaph the following day. On each occasion there will be a genuine—and a dignified and secular—remembrance of the dead, coupled with a commitment to oppose the horror of future wars.

Can we expect secularists to mobilise—as secularists—over the issue of militarism? There are plenty of explicit theists active in the peace movement and it must be said that they are sometimes involved in courageous and inspired forms of non-violent direct action (such as the "Plowshares 8" in America recently). But that is all the more reason why we should be doing so too. We might ensure that the kind of attitudes which are encouraged in the peace movement are not those likely to cause it to fail on account of inherent contradictions.

After all, as I often think when meeting a Christian pacifist, is it really such a good basis for people to behave lovingly towards one another if they are doing it because of an instruction from a supposed supreme being?

London Peace Action, an anti-militarist group consisting mainly of pacifists, c/o 6 Endsleigh Street, London WC1.

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.

Please respond generously to this special Centenary Appeal.

SPONSORS

H. J. Blackham, Edward Blishen, Fenner Brockway, Brigid Brophy, Maureen Duffy, Jim Herrick, Margaret Knight, Lord Raglan, Edward Royle, Dora Russell, Earl John Russell, Renée Short, MP, Barbara Smoker, David Tribe, Nicolas Walter, Lord Willis, Barbara Wootton.

Please send donations to The Freethinker Centenary Appeal, 702 Holloway Road, London, N19 3NL.

(Cheques, etc, should be made payable to G. W. Foote & Co.)

Classroom Christianity: A Personal View

JULIA ATKINSON

It has been said that secularists should encourage rather than oppose Religious Education, as the subject is so unpopular and badly taught it results in contempt for rather than commitment to Christianity. At least it frequently provides a comic interlude in the school day.

The Centenary issue of *The Freethinker* contained an extract from a 12-year-old schoolgirl's letter to the President of the National Secular Society. In it she said: "RE is my favourite subject because I find it hilarious, I love disagreeing with my teacher." I'm sure these words must have brought back happy memories to many who read them, especially to those who were fortunate enough to receive their "Religious Education" from eccentric or grossly incompetent teachers. I was particularly lucky in this respect—all four of my RE teachers (at two grammar schools) fitted into one or other of these categories. Everyone is familiar with the rather unfair saying: "Those who can, do; those who can't, teach." I would be strongly inclined to add: "Those who can't teach, teach Religious Education."

My first RE teacher at secondary school level was an elderly lady, long past retiring age, whose teaching methods consisted of asking her flock of 11-year-olds to trace maps of ancient Palestine, memorise snippets of the New Testament and write an occasional essay. As she usually forgot to collect our homework, we soon stopped doing any, and thus emboldened, there was no holding us. I spent most of my time during RE lessons reading horror stories (no, not the biblical ones!), doing crosswords or catching up on yesterday's History homework. Almost everyone else in the class was similarly occupied.

If the teacher objected to our behaviour she never showed it—as long as a few children in the front row were paying attention she seemed to be quite content. On one occasion she managed to generate a flicker of interest by telling us about her recent visit to Egypt (at this point she produced a snapshot of herself sitting on a camel). Fascinating, but nothing to do with Religious Education.

Bible Stories

My next RE teacher had worked out an entirely different strategy. She would begin each lesson by writing a Bible reference on the blackboard and telling her pupils to write a short essay "describing the lessons which can be learned" from the fable in question. Few of us could resist this challenge, and the teacher would be bombarded with essays pointing out that any wall which could be demolished by the

sound of trumpets must have been jerrybuilt to begin with; that it was silly to sell your brother into slavery merely because you were jealous of him; that the average whale much preferred shrimps to humans at mealtimes, etc. The teacher, much to our disappointment, refused to be drawn into debate on any of these points.

During my third year at grammar school a new RE teacher joined the staff. This man, a lay preacher for some obscure Protestant sect, specialised in predicting the course of world affairs (his information came from the Bible, or rather from a few biblical phrases taken out of context). Amongst other eccentricities he named his house "Jesus Lives"—well, it makes a pleasant change from "Dun-roamin". He also took a distinct pleasure in physical violence, a characteristic which no doubt sprang from a desire to live according to the Bible's example. On one occasion he hit a boy in the face with a heavy textbook, narrowly missing his eye. (The boy's "crime" had been to laugh at one of the teacher's ludicrous prophecies.)

Exactly how such a fanatic managed to obtain a teaching post I cannot imagine. After this rather frightening incident his pupils refrained from even the most polite criticism, turning instead to that old favourite, the anonymous note/verse/cartoon. Most of these literary efforts ended up as shreds of paper in the litter-bin (which was a pity, as some of the verses, particularly those dealing with the lurid private lives of various religious leaders, were quite good).

Conception Confusion

My last RE teacher was the answer to any young agnostic's dream. His ignorance of his own subject was so great that his pupils, now between 15 and 16 years of age, were frequently obliged to correct his mistakes. I took great pleasure in informing him that the Immaculate Conception referred to the conception of the Virgin Mary, not of that of Christ, as he seemed to think. His reaction was predictable. "Are you a Catholic?" he asked. "No, Sir"; end of conversation. He didn't even ask where I had come by this scrap of invaluable information. Of course, before judging the teacher too harshly one must bear in mind the fact that many Catholics are rather confused on this point, and who can blame them?

I do not claim that my experience of Religious Education is typical of the subject as it is taught in all English schools, but in the five years since I left school I have not met a single person who could honestly claim to have benefitted in any way from

this compulsory lesson. Most children seem to realise that RE is somehow "different" from other subjects such as English or Maths. RE has little or nothing to do with everyday life; the absurdities and contradictions of the Bible are an obvious target for ridicule, as are any teachers who give the impression that they take it at all seriously.

Since RE will probably be of no use to anyone after leaving school, there is no point in paying attention to the lessons anyway. Some pupils rapidly come to the conclusion that the whole lesson is a complete waste of time and don't even bother turning up for it. I can remember lessons where only about five pupils were present—most of the allotted 40 minutes were wasted while the teacher rounded up the malcontents.

A Holy Mess

Any subject which can be so abused by teachers and held in such low regard by students has no place in the modern educational system. The old-fashioned "Religious Instruction" at least had a recognisable aim, that of instilling Christian teachings; it is extremely difficult to work out precisely what present-day RE, with its uneasy mixture of Christianity, other major religions and sociology, is attempting to do. Not to inculcate religious beliefs, surely; any one of the four "educators" described in this article would have been more likely to crush any incipient spiritual aspirations.

Those in favour of keeping RE as part of the curriculum often argue that the subject as it is now taught (i.e., now that it is no longer confined entirely to Christianity) can only be "a good thing", as it seeks to provide children with a basic knowledge of the ways in which humans have explained their place in the universe and come to terms with the problems of life and the mysteries of death. This claim would hold water only if the enormously influential religions of antiquity were to be included in the RE syllabus on an equal footing with Christianity; but of course, this would suggest that the Holy Trinity, Allah, Buddha and company will eventually follow in the footsteps of Jupiter, Osiris, Woden and the rest of mankind's discarded deities. In other words, if the largely undeserved "special status" of any surviving religion is laid aside for teaching purposes, all that remains is mythology with no more claim to validity than that of ancient Rome.

Of course the majority of RE supporters would be as strongly opposed to the treatment of the subject described above as they would be to the complete removal of Religious Education from our schools. But is RE's removal from the curriculum any more "anti-religious" than its present sorry state, a subject so utterly meaningless for many children that it is widely regarded as a source of unintentional humour?

The Attack on Science

BEVERLY HALSTEAD

This year the British Association for Advancement of Science celebrated its 150th anniversary in the city of York. His Royal Highness The Duke of Kent delivered his Presidential Address, "Science and Everyman", in York Minster, after having the degree of Doctor conferred on him *honoris causa*. It was a ceremonial occasion at which the audience could have been expected to listen to a catalogue of self-congratulatory platitudes delivered by a Royal personage to the assembled audience of civic and scientific dignitaries. Nothing could have been further from the truth. The British Association was treated to a forthright, hard-hitting and vigorous defence of science that it has not been privileged to hear for many a year.

The Duke of Kent referred to the hostility which greeted the British Association in its early days when *The Times* thundered against it. But "the virulent hatred becoming evident today was very different", he said. "The kind of antagonism that has been growing in recent years has taken a different and more sinister form. Now we are seeing a positively anti-science movement, which seems to take as its starting point the belief that by pursuing science without restraint, or as its opponents suggest, for its own sake, scientists themselves determine the uses to which science is put, and thereby put us all at risk".

He added that such counter-scientists pointed to specific instances where discovery had led to dangerous or, in their view, undesirable developments. The favourite examples must be nuclear weapons, toxic insecticides, and dangerous drugs such as thalidomide.

The Duke continued: "They go on to suggest that since science is capable of showing such an ugly face it is clear that scientists cannot be trusted". So they argued that scientists should refrain from research which could lead to unforeseen consequences, believing that if necessary research workers should be forcibly prevented from pursuing potentially hazardous work. He suggested that it was only a short step from that argument to a position where scientists were told what they might or might not do.

This same issue came to the fore in the address given by Professor Arthur Cain, of Liverpool University, when he noted that in the last 20 years there had been remarkable recrudescence of fundamentalist antipathy to evolution, while from a different religion, Marxism, had come intense efforts to prove that natural selection had little

(continued on page 191)

After reading Jessica Mitford's devastating and witty account of funerals in the United States (*The American Way of Death*, re-issued by Quartet Books at £2.95), it is difficult to realise that Americans once buried their dead with simple dignity and economy. The black-coated gentlemen, using an astonishing variety of blandishments, euphemisms, sales jargon and outright lies, have bamboozled the public so successfully that the last send-off is now usually a vulgar and expensive show.

In addition to the usual requirements of their calling, American undertakers have created a wide range of ancillary goods and services. No effort is spared to persuade relatives that the more expensive and ostentatious the funeral, the more loved and honoured the departed will be. Ideally, from the undertaker's viewpoint, they will agree to a procedure resulting in a prettified embalmed body, heavily made up, wearing expensive clothes and shoes, surrounded by heaps of flowers, displayed to the mourners reposing in an ornate "casket" (coffin) at the "funeral home" (undertaker's premises), transported in a pastel-coloured "funeral carriage" (hearse) to a "memorial park" (cemetery) and deposited in a "vault" (mass-produced concrete box) over which a bronze marker will be placed.

The undertaking trade is overcrowded, so competition for custom is fierce. There is a considerable outlay on advertising, standards of which are a hit-or-miss affair. For instance one of the W. W. Chambers Mortuary calendars bore the inscription: "Beautiful Bodies by Chambers". And in case a potential customer missed the point, there was an illustration of a young, completely naked girl. The same firm used a radio commercial, words of which were sung to the tune of *Rock of Ages*:

Chambers' caskets are just fine,
Made of sandalwood and pine,
If your loved ones have to go
Call Columbus 690,
If your loved ones pass away,
Have them pass the Chambers way.
Chambers' customers all sing,
"Death, oh death, where is thy sting?"

It probably came with the funeral account.

"Pre-need" selling of graves, crypts, vaults, mausoleums and memorials is a highly profitable side of the American funeral industry. The "professional memorial consultant" (salesman) attends a training course and is equipped with sales aids which will enable him to extract every possible dollar from the client. In one recording he is advised: "Each Sunday . . . visit your best prospects in their homes. . . Join the family circle . . . turn the pages of the family Bible and make their best-loved stories live. Then, attention assured, tell your own story." Best-loved stories from "the good book" can obviously be all things to all salesmen.

NEWS

When *The American Way of Death* was first published in 1963 its author was accused of trying to undermine the American way of life. One Congressman said the book was Communist-inspired, an accusation likely to make most Americans jettison their meagre sales resistance to professional memorial consultants.

Until the 1960s it was easy enough for the undertaking fraternity to ward off criticism by journalists and others who were aware that the American public was being taken for a ride—and not just in a hearse. At the first sign of trouble the funeral interests, normally rivals, would close ranks. A threatened withdrawal of advertising revenue usually silenced the Press. The "bier barons", as their critics described them, had made it virtually impossible for a person or surviving relatives to arrange a simple funeral. (They even thwarted the wishes of a President of the United States.) *The American Way of Death* blew the gaff; life (and death) has never been quite the same for the mythologists of the mortuary.

Jessica Mitford's crisp, biting narrative is suitably complemented by Hjordis Dreschel's mock-lugubrious cover illustration. Everyone who enjoys a good giggle, or marvels at the ingenuity of those out to make a fast buck, will shout the praises of Quartet Books for making *The American Way of Death* available to a new generation of readers.

"Joy and Light", the Lord's Day Observance Society's quarterly journal, carries uplifting news for the champions of "our Lord and his day". The glad tidings include reports that an application for a seven-day licence which would allow Sunday opening of an amusement arcade has been rejected; a local council has decreed that its new golf course cannot be used on Sunday; another council passed a resolution to close its Leisure Centre on Sunday; the owners of a town's only cinema must not open it on Sunday following protests by local church leaders; power-boat enthusiasts have been refused permission to organise Sunday racing; a recreation committee's recommendation that roller disco sessions on Sunday should be allowed has been turned down by the local authority. It is scarcely necessary to inform "Freethinker" readers where these ludicrous decisions were made. And mainland Sabbatarians will rejoice at the determination of their murderous fellow-Christians in Northern Ireland to "Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy".

AND NOTES

SEGREGATIONISTS

Muslim educationists have been advised by Mr Tim Ottevanger, assistant education officer for the London Borough of Ealing, that this is not the time for opening new schools. Speaking at a conference at the London Mosque, he said that if Muslims were determined to have their own schools, then they "need the sort of educational bureaucracy the Catholics, Anglicans and Jews have. They know the ropes".

Mr Ottevanger warned the Muslims that what they proposed "is being equated by some with racial segregation". His warning went unheeded. Dr Muhammad Iqbal, senior lecturer at Huddersfield Polytechnic, urged wealthy Muslims to help set up Muslim public schools. Such establishments "would cater for good Islamic education".

Dr Sultana Saeed, senior lecturer in law at London University, said single sex school were preferable on educational grounds. Girls in mixed schools tended to drop out of competing with boys.

Mrs Hyderia Hussain, a teacher from Tower Hamlets, London, proposed that the first single sex Muslim school should be for girls with their mothers accompanying them.

Stanley Charlsworth, aged 62, a docks board fitter who made and presented two large candlesticks to a church, stole the materials with which he made them. He was one of 25 people who appeared before Swansea Magistrates Court to answer charges of stealing from the British Transport Docks Board. After pleading guilty he was fined £25 on each of two charges.

A MATTER OF CHOICE

The decision not to have children is still a difficult one to take, as pressures on couples to have children are very difficult to resist. Those who remain child-free are often labelled "selfish", yet it is more selfish to conceive a child who is not really wanted.

Couples trying to decide whether or not to have children are bombarded by advice and pressure from those advocating parenthood, but it is less easy for them to hear the views of the childfree. Since it was formed three years ago, the British Organisation of Non-Parents has handled an overwhelming number of enquiries from individuals and from professionals working with prospective parents. It is clear from the correspondence that the childfree option is still not a "respectable" one. BON members, who include

married and single people, parents and non-parents, come from a variety of ethnic and age groups. They are not anti-children, but are working towards a society where having children is not a foregone conclusion, rather a matter of individual choice.

A new leaflet, *Is This You?*, has been issued by the organisation and is obtainable from BON, BM Box 5866, London WC1N 3XX.

Mrs Mary Whitehouse has written to leading members of the Social Democratic Party raising a number of issues that obsess her National Viewers' and Listeners' Association. William Rodgers sent a non-committal reply and Mrs Shirley Williams did not respond. Dr David Owen said: "I do not want to repeal the 1944 Education Act's provisions for religious instruction. Nor do I see a high priority to replace the present blasphemy laws". Dr Owen added that he believed the age of consent for homosexuals should be reduced to 18. "On the whole", commented Mrs Whitehouse, "we did not get much comfort from the replies".

CROSS QUESTION

When Mr Frank Lord died recently at the age of 67, he left no next-of-kin and little money, so a "contract" funeral was arranged by Lewisham Borough Council. Since Mr Lord was a member of the National Secular Society and had, indeed, been a member of the Bolton branch while still in his teens, Barbara Smoker, the NSS President, phoned the undertakers to say that no clergyman would be required, that the cross should be removed from the crematorium chapel, and that she would be willing to officiate herself without a fee. But she was told rather rudely: "We can't take any instructions from you."

She therefore rang the council official concerned, but he refused to allow any deviation from the usual arrangements—only the denomination of clergyman could be varied. After some discussion, he finally agreed to allow her to speak instead of a clergyman, but was adamant that the cross must not be removed from the altar. "Supposing it were a Jewish person who had died," she asked, "would you still insist on a cross on the altar?" "Well, I suppose we would get the rabbi to make the arrangements." "Well, I'm an atheist rabbi", retorted the irrepressible Miss Smoker. "We cannot have special arrangements for a contract funeral." "Do you mean to say that someone who dies without any money is forced by the council to be religious?" Still he refused to budge.

When it came to the day, however, Barbara Smoker simply arrived at the crematorium a little early and asked the chapel superintendent to remove the cross and to provide secular music instead of the usual religious music. He did so without demur.

BOOKS

MIND OUT OF TIME? REINCARNATION CLAIMS INVESTIGATED by Ian Wilson. Victor Gollancz, £6.95

Religions are sharply divided on reincarnation. For some, notably Buddhism and Hinduism, it is an indispensable tenet. For others, such as Christianity, it is anathema. That alone might make one seriously question the reality of the claim that people alive today harbour within them memories and experiences derived from past existences, but the evidence is apparently so overwhelmingly favourable that few have bothered to question it at all. Ian Wilson's remarkably good book changes all that; he has done his homework most thoroughly, and the result of his scholarship is a work that exposes the vast majority of reincarnation claims as mistaken.

It is as well to be careful here and, like Wilson, stress that deliberate fraud is seldom an issue. Most people who experienced "past lives" are entirely sincere and honestly believe that they harbour knowledge that could only have come from a previous life. Indeed, it is because they believe in themselves so thoroughly that such claims are so convincing. Hypnotic regressions in particular, where a skilful hypnotist will take a person back not simply to early childhood but beyond to a prior existence, have the power to produce performances of terrifying reality. But in the end, as Wilson clearly documents, they are just that; performances.

Wilson's method is simple. He takes claims of reincarnation at face value and examines them in detail, returning to original sources wherever possible. In many cases this is sufficient. The details of the past life are found to be completely at variance with historical sources and that is all there is to it; the claims must be false. One of the most impressive of these pieces of detective work concerns the case of a young woman called Jan who became, under hypnosis, Joan Waterhouse, tried for witchcraft at Chelmsford in the 16th century. Jan evidenced an astonishingly detailed knowledge of her life as Joan, denied that she had ever made even a casual study of the period, and suffered horribly during the regression. In fact, so traumatic was it that she wanted nothing more to do with regressions or hypnosis afterwards.

The key to understanding her case came with the date she gave for her trial—1556—and her unshakeable belief that Elizabeth was queen. Elizabeth became queen in 1558; at the time Jan gave for her trial, Mary was still on the throne. But history records that the Waterhouse trial did actually take place well within Elizabeth's reign, in 1566, not 1556. Where had the error come from? Wilson traced it to a reprint of a pamphlet held by Lambeth

FREETHINKER

Palace and detailing the Chelmsford witch trials. The British Philobiblon Society produced a facsimile edition around 1880, and a typographer's slip substituted 1556 for 1566. The error was never detected and, used as a source by several subsequent writers, the mistaken date on the Philobiblon edition passed into many popular works on witchcraft. Unfortunately Jan's trauma means that we may never know exactly from which of these she learned about Joan Waterhouse and the Chelmsford witches.

Similar scrutiny (often requiring far less effort) demonstrates the falseness of even the best reincarnation claims. But instead of leaving things there, Wilson continues his investigation and comes up with an alternative explanation that is at once satisfying and, in all likelihood, correct.

To repeat his case here in detail would be unfair. Suffice it to say that the method that offers the most superficially convincing evidence for reincarnation—hypnosis—also provides insights into the mental mechanisms that allow people to produce this evidence. I for one am persuaded by his argument and feel that the ball is now firmly in the reincarnationists' court. The wonder of it is that they have been so lax in proving their claims to date, and I was astonished that Wilson was able to make his points so tellingly. Surely if the reincarnationists wanted to convince people that there is renewed life after death they would have made sure that their cases were watertight? Apparently not.

It will no longer do simply to claim that the only way a subject could have come by certain information was to have lived through it once upon a time, for Wilson has exposed human consciousness for the powerful and yet misleading faculty it is. I unhesitatingly recommend his thoughtful and eminently readable book to anyone who wants to know all there is to know about reincarnation today.

JEREMY CHERFAS

BLOODY MARY, by Carolly Erickson, J. M. Dent £4.50

This is the story of a tragic, likeable and interesting woman. It is ironic that tradition should have nicknamed her "bloody", since, despite the horrible burnings that took place in her reign, by the standards of her time she was more remarkable for her clemency than for bloodiness. Compared with her monstrous father, Henry VIII, who took a gruesome delight in the nastier details of executions, and

REVIEWS

had Protestants burned for heresy almost as gleefully as he had Catholics hanged, drawn and quartered for treason, Mary was an angel of mercy.

History is written by the victors, and Mary was a loser. By the end of Elizabeth's reign the Protestant ascendancy, and the corresponding mythology, were so firmly established that Mary has had to wait a long time for justice. She receives it from Carolly Erickson.

Mary's primary misfortune was to be born female. This could be said of almost every woman for thousands of years, but in Mary's case it involved not only a lifetime of personal suffering, but also incalculable consequences for English and European history. Had Henry VIII had a surviving son by Katherine of Aragon, whatever the charms of Anne Boleyn he would hardly have contemplated repudiating his son's mother to marry her. His break with the Pope—who dared not oblige Henry by annulling the marriage because of the military power of Katherine's relatives—would probably never have occurred, much as he might have itched to lay his hands on monastic lands.

Mary was 11 when Henry began his attempts to get rid of her mother. Katherine's dogged insistence on the validity of her marriage led to increasing cruelty on the part of the King to both mother and daughter. This culminated in years of virtual imprisonment. They were never allowed to meet, even when Mary was dangerously ill and Katherine was dying. Anne Boleyn urged that both women be executed or poisoned. Mary was 20 when Anne was beheaded; Jane Seymour and Katherine Parr were kind stepmothers to her.

The Seymour uncles and other great nobles who governed for the boy-king Edward VI combined Protestant extremism with financial corruption and general misgovernment. Not surprisingly, when Edward's health failed, Mary, his successor under Henry's will, saw herself as divinely appointed to restore Catholicism in England. Undoubtedly this is what the majority of people desired at that time. The attempt to place Lady Jane Grey on the throne collapsed ignominiously, and Mary became Queen amidst enormous popular rejoicing.

Just over five years later Elizabeth was to be welcomed equally enthusiastically. Two colossal blunders had cost Mary and the Catholic religion their popularity. The first was the burning of Protestants, which, though practised in England for a century and a half, had never until now been

widely applied. Certainly more heretics might perish in a single day in Spain than the few hundred who were burned in Mary's England. And Calvin in Geneva, the Protestant Mecca, burned those he defined as heretics as keenly as anyone. Still, horror at the ghastly scenes, their accelerating numbers as the reign wore on and the heroic demeanour of many of the victims, turned to the advantage of the Protestants the popular sympathy that had previously been directed towards the Catholic victims of Henry's brutality.

Mary's second mistake, politically and personally disastrous, was her marriage to Philip of Spain. The tradition in which Mary had been reared demanded that a wife obey her husband, but to Philip's intense annoyance she refused to have him crowned king of England. The marriage was extremely unpopular, and led to England being dragged into an expensive and pointless war with France. England lost Calais (the last relic of her gains in the Hundred Years' War), valueless in itself, but in its loss a great blow to Mary's prestige.

From the personal point of view, Mary, then aged 38, was at first delighted with her husband, a handsome young man of 27 and related to her beloved mother. He, she thought, would give her the child who would make the Catholic succession safe. Twice she suffered the bitter disappointment of a false pregnancy. She was neglected by her unfeeling husband, who, instead of coming to England to be with his dying wife, busied himself in a sordid negotiation for marriage to her heir, his sister-in-law Elizabeth.

In my Protestant childhood I accepted the official picture of Mary's cruelty, Catholic wickedness and Protestant virtue. I now see that the moral balance is far more even than I imagined. True, Catholic rulers, both clerical and lay, had already a long career of atrocity and oppression behind them before modern Protestantism came on the scene. The Spanish Inquisition was in a class on its own; but Calvinism remained the nastiest form of Christianity, presenting Hell as the likely destination even of most of its own adherents.

England was probably a happier country before Henry VIII, for his own selfish motives, forcibly upset comfortable old religious certainties, redistributed land to the advantage of grasping time-servers and executed, usually with every refinement of cruelty, those who had the courage to oppose him.

Carolly Erickson does not go into all these questions, but she has written a solid and fascinating book which will be greatly enjoyed by anyone interested in the period. Mary emerges as an intelligent, able and conscientious woman, deserving admiration as well as sympathy. Elizabeth did not have to prove that a woman could be a capable ruler—her sister had already done so.

MARGARET McILROY

PAMPHLET

FAMILY PLANNING FOR YOUNG PEOPLE UNDER SIXTEEN, by John Bradford, Church of England Children's Society, 75p

Anyone who thinks that the Rev John Bradford's discussion paper is just another sermon preaching that the word "No" is the best contraceptive is in for a very pleasant surprise. He has produced what is probably the most thorough and enlightening summary of the situation as it is at the moment. In his own words: "This paper is an attempt to draw together various statements and insights from inter alia, leaders and senior officers of the Church of England which, it is felt, deserves rather wider circulation".

Mr Bradford commences by quoting the text of the 1974 Family Planning Service Memorandum of Guidance. Section G—the Young, and reviews the revised text of February 1981 pointing out "the assumption that it would be most unusual to provide advice about contraception without parental consent is made perfectly explicit". Having stated the statutory position, he then considers the teenagers under discussion under the formidable heading: "Client Group Date". Quoting DHSS pregnancy figures for under-16s, and Christine Farrell's findings that 12 per cent of girls in her sample had had sex before the age of 16, he reproduces a statement by Dr Frank Wells, Under-Secretary of the British Medical Association: "Despite all the love, care and protection which families and society can give . . . (some younger girls) . . . will seek the experience of intercourse". To refuse to provide contraception will not cut down on the amount of sex they have.

The author then perceptively includes a lengthy extract from a newspaper article quoting psychoanalyst Dr Josephine Lomax-Simpson about the effect very young parenthood may have on future generations. Mothers who are unable to see their babies as little more than animated dolls can often unwittingly neglect them, producing very disturbed children. Inadequate health education is mentioned. Dr Mia Kellmer Pringle is quoted on the need for such education, as is the DES paper, *The School Curriculum*.

Mr Bradford challenges the view that the 1974 FPS Memorandum "destroys family responsibility" and "undermines all sense of moral responsibility". He points out that the revised text, and Dr Vaughan's statement in Parliament on the Memorandum, places greater emphasis on the desirability of parental involvement, and links this concern with the new curriculum guidance by the DES which made it a requirement that parents should have access to "the ways and contexts in which sex education is provided". But he reminds readers that for the con-

sultation and co-operation to work, "a new openness and mode of thinking on the part of parents may need to be encouraged".

Mr Bradford points out that informed Anglican opinion is in favour of confidentiality being respected. It "is not against contraceptive advice and facilities being afforded to minors under 16". On responsibility he quotes a statement made in 1974 by Giles Eccleston, Secretary to the General Synod's Board for Social Responsibility:

What should be avoided is the suggestion that, especially in a plural society, the only choice facing individuals and the health services is that between total irresponsibility and the acceptance of the full Christian position regarding chastity. In the judgement of the Board, the object of public policy should be to encourage people to accept a greater measure of responsibility for their actions, and to remove some of the unnecessary difficulties in their way. The Church's interests in seeing society accept a more mature understanding of sexuality is not served by the suggestion that we are in favour of people being left in ignorance of contraception.

Having laid out the facts, the needs and the views of various bodies and members of the Anglican Church, Mr Bradford then ventures his own observations. He commends Dr Vaughen's emphasis on the importance of seeking to persuade the under 16-year-old girl seeking contraception to involve her parents, and urges that the Church "should be concerned to see that the quality of adult support is as good, respectful and understanding as possible". He points out that teenagers are far less sexually knowledgeable and active than is popularly supposed, and recommends Christine Farrell's *My Mother Said* (Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1978) for further reading.

Mr Bradford winds up his discussion paper by recommending that health education for young people should reflect the implications of the revised DHSS Memorandum, and "that the DHSS should support as a priority the need for specialist counselling to be always available to young persons (especially those under 16) when contraceptives are prescribed". Church and Community Health Councils should give attention to the need for support both by and for parents in educating their teenage children.

Family Planning for Young People Under Sixteen is highly recommended to everyone who is interested in the subject of teenage sexuality. Whatever your standpoint, Mr Bradford clearly delineates the areas of concern and the present situation. His common sense approach has already sparked off a lively debate. The document has been bitterly attacked in the religious Press and denounced by Raymond Johnston, Director of the Nationwide Festival of Light, in a letter to the Archbishop of Canterbury. It is obtainable at 75p from the Church of England Children's Society, Old Town Hall, Kennington Road, London SE11.

SUZIE HAYMAN

A Dormitory of Bishops

FANNY COCKERELL

Fanny Cockerell, who has been editing the Progressive League's monthly journal, "Plan", for the last 25 years, looks at the problems and pitfalls that await the Editor of a "small" magazine.

There is a story of a Bishop giving a little homily on moral courage during prizegiving at a boys' public school. "Imagine", he said, "a dormitory full of boys. And before they jump into bed, one of them—just one—kneels down and says his prayers. That is what I call moral courage".

Later, the boys were asked to write essays giving other examples. One of them wrote: "Imagine a dormitory full of bishops. And one of them—just one—jumps into bed *without* saying his prayers. That is what I call moral courage".

History abounds with examples of courage and self-sacrifice; of heroes lauded or unsung, and patriots awarded and acclaimed. When occasion demands, men and women can often rise to great heights and produce examples of supreme physical courage and endurance. But the examples of moral courage are much rarer. To stand out for your own beliefs against those of your fellows, whether the humblest of schoolboys or the most prestigious of clerics—that is infinitely harder. And to know that in so doing you gain no medals and reap no rewards, but earn abuse and contumely—often from your friends and colleagues—this requires the greatest courage of all.

It is this courage that was shown by the founders of the secularist movement and by *The Freethinker* for the last 100 years. It has helped to make our society so much more honest and less hypocritical than it was a century ago. It is this courage to which, in *The Freethinker's* Centenary celebrations, we address ourselves today.

Battles Won

A hundred years of *The Freethinker*—what a splendid achievement! What a noble concept! For is not all thought free—in all circumstances? Our thoughts are our own; no one can chain or subdue them—no Inquisitor, no dictator, no ruler, no Pope, no Ayatollah. What we think in our innermost being is for each of us alone to determine. But to give expression to those thoughts when they differ from those of the established order, to question established faiths, rebut established superstition, expose accepted hypocrisy, refute accepted dogma, or, above all, challenge established morality, requires moral courage of the highest order.

All this *The Freethinker* has consistently achieved since its inception. The history of the National Secu-

lar Society and the first 100 years of *The Freethinker* has been the story of an endless fight against the forces of reaction and intolerance—religious, social and moral.

Ever since the dark days when Charles Bradlaugh and Annie Besant faced imprisonment for making a pamphlet about contraception available to the poor, the fight for the dissemination of truth has continued. Almost 100 years ago *The Freethinker's* first Editor served a year's imprisonment for daring to speak his mind; nearly 100 years later the Editor of *Gay News* was tried at the Old Bailey for daring to publish a poem which certain people—who normally never read the paper—might find offensive. This prosecution was brought under an out-moded blasphemy law resurrected for the purpose.

Many of the battles which *The Freethinker* has fought have been won. There is a far greater acceptance today of religious and sexual tolerance. We live in a far more humane and tolerant atmosphere. The fight waged by the NSS, the Progressive League, the humanist movement and its offshoots, the Divorce Law Reform Association and the Abortion Law Reform Association, has borne fruit. Our hypocritical and cruel divorce laws have been amended; abortion law has been changed; the spread of contraceptive information instead of being a criminal offence is now a requirement under the National Health Service. If Oscar Wilde were living today he would not be sent to rot in prison. For all these things *The Freethinker* can claim its share of the credit.

The Fight Goes On

Does this mean that the fight is now over and that our new Editor can sit back on the laurels of his predecessors, or perhaps give up altogether? By no means. In many ways the real fight for greater tolerance, understanding and humanity among and towards all people is only just beginning.

Mixing, as many of us do, with others of like mind, it is easy to forget that we are still a very small minority when it comes to open expression of our beliefs. The concept of God still permeates our national life, our literature and our everyday language. Religious instruction is still the one compulsory subject in our school curriculum and children cannot be opted out of it without feeling conspicuous. Local and national papers carry their columns of "Clerical Reflections" as a matter of course. Prayers, hymns and religious broadcasts are a daily part of all our lives.

The Royal Family all go to church as does the Prime Minister (of whichever party), and the Pope still holds sway over millions of lives, particularly

in an area in which, by definition, he has no personal experience. Blasphemy laws are still in operation, while the Lord's Day Observance Society, SPUC and Mary Whitehouse are still active. Religious organisations are still exempt from tax, provided they claim faith in some deity, however far-fetched. Yes, there is still plenty of scope for *The Freethinker* today.

Being its Editor is not an easy task. Having myself edited a "little magazine" for 25 years (by no means a record compared with that of the first Editor of *The Freethinker*), I know well the many pitfalls involved and the many paths to steer. On the one hand it can be fatally easy to expend one's energy and invective fighting battles already won, preaching to the converted, indulging in passionate diatribes which enemies ignore and readers are long bored with. On the other, if a paper is to be kept lively and readable, it must be controversial and risk giving offence to friends as well as foes.

This may well be the greater challenge, but a risk that must be taken. For controversy is the life-blood of every journal, great or small, and however united freethinkers may be in their opposition to the absurdities of much organised religion, the search for truth and honesty has many paths which need to be explored. Throughout the ages, religion has been there for those too weak to stand alone. How many human beings can exist without it? And when we destroy it, what do we put in its place?

The need for some form of instinctive faith—something to admire, love, believe in—is strong in nearly all of us, however logical and rational we may be. The eternal arguments between the atheist and agnostic cannot be dismissed, and they must be allowed to find expression without prejudice or bitterness. As any Editor of *The Freethinker* knows, this is not always easy, and may require a great deal of moral courage. But moral courage is surely what *The Freethinker* is all about—which is where we came in.

THE FREETHINKER, 1980

Bound volume now obtainable from
G. W. Foote & Co,
702 Holloway Road, London N19 3NL
Price £7.50 plus 50p postage

We should like to thank John L. Broom for his work in compiling the Index to "The Freethinker", 1980. Copies of the Index are obtainable free of charge from 702 Holloway Road, London N19. Please send a s.a.e., foolscap size.

LETTERS

UNSCIENTIFIC

The article by Beverly Halstead in your September issue does little but confirm the statement by Dr Colin Patterson that "Darwinism is treated like a religion. If you express any doubt people react like churchmen sniffing out heresy".

It is hardly scientific to criticise people for making a certain observation on the grounds that it might give "the other side" ammunition. Nor is the author's method of argument very scientific, logical or helpful. For instance, two apparently quite reasonable statements are described as "arrant nonsense" without any indication as to why this should be so; and words like "ludicrous" and "garbage"—purely emotive terms without any objective value—are used to describe alternative views. Later we are told someone "dealt firmly" with a particular statement without being told how or why. It is of course possible to deal firmly with something without making any sense at all. Terms without any objective views.

Perhaps all this is permissible while preaching to the converted, but it is surely out of step with the title of your publication. I know plenty of churchmen who have greater respect for the truth than to indulge in such semantic hooliganism, even while sniffing out heresy.

T. D. LENTON

Beverley Halstead replies: I felt that most readers would have recognised the "Popperian" statements of Dr Roger Miles and Dr Colin Patterson as "arrant nonsense" as they were so firmly rejected by Sir Karl Popper himself. My reference to Professor Ruse's articles, "Darwin's Theory: an Exercise in Science", should have indicated by its title alone that it was concerned with this issue. With regard to Barry Cox "dealing firmly" with the anti-evolution film loop, I gave the reference to where and when he accomplished this so that any reader could check for himself.

The purpose of my article was to bring to the attention of readers the current anti-evolution bandwagon and the campaign being orchestrated from certain quarters. Nobody objects to the expression of doubts over Darwinism, but one must protest vehemently at the distortion of science merely to promote a favoured phillisophy.

The fossil man exhibit at the Natural History Museum is a case in point where key evidence being deliberately omitted against the advice of the Museum's own anthropologists. In consequence, entirely misleading "information" is given to the public.

There is a fundamental difference between "sniffing out heresy" and demanding a minimum standard of integrity in the way scientific matters are presented.

TOUGH LUCK ON LAZARUS

I doubt if I'm quite as "confused" about the story of the raising of Lazarus in John II as Ruth Ross supposes (Letters, September). Perhaps she overlooked the significant point that I don't believe a word of the story.

But suppose I did. Suppose I accepted the whole of the Christian mythos; and then suppose that I

interpreted the story from Lazarus's point of view, as one might expect an imaginative reader to do.

There is Lazarus, well into his third day in the Heavenly mansion. All is going well, he thinks, until the poor sap is suddenly hoicked out of it by the son of God, no less, to find himself back in the stinking grave-clothes his rotting body has already fouled. "Come forth!" cries the son of God, snuffling into his hankie because he knows very well how brassed off Lazarus is going to be when he gets out. "Come forth, Lazarus!"

"Jesus wept!" thinks Lazarus, who is already coming forth as fast as he can. "I suppose the silly bastard thinks I'm dying to see him. Again. And, come to think of it, that's a fair enough description. . . ."

It's a dotty scenario, I know, but it's the only one that makes sense, given the facts as they appear in John's ill-written fabrication. And, as I say, I don't believe a word of it. If I did, I'd condemn Jesus for his cruelty to Lazarus in causing the poor sod to suffer another death. And I don't see how the Christians can logically avoid condemning Jesus for this. Still, they have faith and don't need logic.

Ruth Ross asks if I would "not try artificial respiration on a dead child." Of course I would! Any reasonable human being would—unless, perhaps, he was "confused" by a groundless faith in an ideal afterlife.

Miss Ross commends to me the study of Raymond Moody's Corgi paperback, "Life after Life", in the hope that it might convince me that I may "look forward to a happy future after death". I assure her I look forward to no such thing. I don't know any rationalist who does.

ALAN BOOTH

PARENTS' DILEMMA

I did not understand James MacDonald's article, "God's Blotted Copy", in response to my "Little K" of June 1981. My article was unmanageably long, but it was well abridged. Yet it must have been unbridgeable if Mr MacDonald thinks I advocated "empowering the State" and "ignorant officials" to decide whether a hopelessly handicapped child should live or die. I did not do so.

The last sentence of my article, which he quoted incomplete and finds offensive, is: "Our love might decide that our little K's life, a frosted bud that could never open and bear fruit, should be allowed to drop." Mr MacDonald, who is grateful that his parents did not allow him to die, has, though congenitally disabled, "lived a full life with minimal dependence on others". Little K is 16, almost blind and cannot talk. She will never write letters to "The Freethinker". There is no analogy between his case and hers.

Perhaps we must not hope to change the law so much as to defy it and face the consequences, as Mme Candeput did in the case of her Thalidomide baby. She had the support of her relations and friends. The law was kind to her, as it is in most humane countries to those who act not from selfishness but from love.

Mr MacDonald put the case for the parent much more strongly than I do. He wrote: "I would certainly not convict any parent who found the care of such a (severely disabled) child too much of a handicap and opted to terminate life rather than continue it at perpetual disadvantage and detriment to the family as a whole".

I think I would have to know the family before I would assent to this. But what is he quarrelling with me about?

HENRY MARSHALL

The Attack on Science

importance. Professor Cain was particularly scathing about Dr Richard Lewontin, an eminent American scientist and a supporter of non-adaptive evolution. He said that Dr Lewontin had tried to sneer away as a British middle-class activity, the work of field investigators in this country who had produced results contradicting his beliefs. The only question was whether the results stood up as science.

As he was speaking, Professor Sir Edmund Leach, of Cambridge University, was providing an illustration of the very attitudes against which both Professor Cain and the Duke of Kent were raising the alarm. Sir Edmund's address, entitled "Men, Bishops and Apes", went over the ground of the famous evolution debate at the Oxford meeting in 1860 between Bishop Wilberforce and T. H. Huxley. Sir Edmund Leach came to the remarkable conclusion that:

while the bishop lost the debate heavily, and Huxley's success was hailed as a victory for enlightened rationalism, many of Wilberforce's criticisms of Darwin's work would be accepted today by the best scientists . . . who believe in some form of 'catastrophism', accepting that sudden step-like changes must have occurred in evolution, who appear to be the enlightened rationalists. For evidence in the fossil record of long-term stability in species, followed by sudden changes, and the missing links in the fossil record, pointed to that theory being more likely. If Darwin were alive today and knew what is known about genetic mutation and the recurrent pattern in the fossil record, he would have preferred 'catastrophism' to the views of the conventional neo-Darwinians.

Sir Edmund based his "understanding" of recurrent patterns in the fossil record on the interpretations being advanced by the Harvard biologist, Professor Stephen Jay Gould. Non-adaptive evolution and catastrophism are concepts being pushed for all they are worth by two of the most energetic and prolific Marxist biologists, Lewontin and Gould respectively. Gould claims that "when Darwin cleaved so strongly to gradualism he translated Victorian society into biology where it need not reside". Gould sees "the replacing of gradualism with the flip-like style of change which has been appreciated within Marxist philosophy for a long time".

Marxists and Creationists

It should occasion no surprise that the same Lewontin-Gould attack on Darwin has been taken up enthusiastically by the Creationists. Both the extreme Right and extreme Left are vehemently opposed to the concept of gradual change through time. Both have their own special axes to grind.

Professor Sir Andrew Huxley, the President of the Royal Society, in a previous Presidential Address to the British Association declared: "It is suggested that on sensitive topics we should base our beliefs not on what is actually found to be the case, but

on the supposed consequences of holding particular beliefs—in effect that we ought to replace science by wishful thinking. I regard any such attempt to deflect scientific conclusions for political or social motives, however well-meaning, as a betrayal of science”.

The Duke of Kent's spirited call this year to defend science comes at a most opportune moment.

EVENTS

Belfast Humanist Group. York Hotel, Botanic Avenue, Belfast. Meeting on the second Tuesday of the month, 8 pm.

Berkshire Humanists. Friends Meeting House, Church Street, Reading. Friday, 13 November, 8 pm. Speaker from the National Council for Civil Liberties.

Brighton and Hove Humanist Group. Queen's Head, Queen's Road (entrance in Junction Road, opposite Brighton Station). Sunday, 6 December, 5.30 pm. T. F. Evans: "Bernard Shaw".

BHA, NSS, RPA, SPES. Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London WC1. Monday, 9 November, 7 pm. Madeleine Simms: "Reflections on Irresponsible Societies".

Gay Humanist Group. Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London WC1. Meeting on the second Friday of the month, 7.30 pm.

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

Lewisham Humanist Group. Unitarian Meeting House, 41 Bromley Road, Catford, London, SE6. Thursday, 26 November, 7.45 pm. S. E. Parker: "Nietzsche-Anti-Christ?"

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.)

National Secular Society. Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London WC1. Saturday, 7 November, 2.15 p.m. Annual General Meeting. Admission by current membership card

Sutton Humanist Group. Friends House, Cedar Road, Sutton. Wednesday, 11 November 8 p.m. Dr Michael Festing: "Animal Welfare and Survival—does it Matter?"

West Glamorgan Humanist Group. Friends Meeting House Annexe, Swansea. Friday, 27 November, 7.30 p.m. George Greening: "Glimpses of China".

Worthing Humanist Group. Trades Club, 15 Broadwater Road, Worthing. Sunday 29 November, 5.30 p.m. Wm McIlroy: "One Hundred Years of 'The Freethinker', 1881-1981".

Centenary Appeal

We acknowledge with thanks the following donations received during the period 5 September until 1 October 1981. C. F. Ablethorpe, £2; G. A. Airey, £2; M. Ansell, £12; A. Avery, £2; A. Bayne, £2; S. W. Beer, £7; S. Berry, £2; P. W. Brook, £57; J. L. Broom, £2; K. Byrom, £2; V. S. Caverner, \$8; A. F. Dawn, £5; F. Docherty, £3; R. Douglas, £1; S. Exley, £7; P. Flynn, £2; W. R. Grant, £2; Y. Gugel £1; N. Haemmerle, £2; P. Harding, £1; J. C. Hillhouse, £5; Human Etisk Forbund, £8; J. R. Hutton, £1; C. F. Jacot, £2; C. Kensit, £10; P. L. Lancaster, £7; J. Lauritsen, £7; W. Lazarus, £5; C. F. Monrad, \$2; Prof H. Newman, \$17; M. Pinsker, £2; S. Quoistiaux, £2; W. N. Ramage, £2; J. B. Reader, £2; J. F. Robins, £1; W. Shinton, £20; N. H. Sinnott, £3; P. R. Smith, £2; L. H. Sparkes, £2; J. A. Spence, £2; G. Spiers, £1; W. G. Stirling, £2; R. J. M. Tolhurst, £5; P. D. Ward, £2; P. L. Willig, £10; A. E. Woodford, £2; D. Wright, £4.

Total for the period: £223 and \$27; total for the year: £3335.85 and \$105.

The Church of Scientology has embarked on a purge of its key officials after 11 of them were found guilty in the United States of conspiracy and theft. Those for the chop include the wife of L. Ron Hubbard, the movement's founder. So is Jane Kember, who failed in the English courts to avoid extradition. She is now appealing against a conspiracy conviction. Documents seized by the FBI in a raid on Scientology offices revealed an intelligence operation which included a wide range of "dirty tricks"—telephone tapping, sexual seduction and character assassination—to discredit critics. There was a "dirty tricks" department at the East Grinstead, Sussex, headquarters of the Church. A Scientology spokesman declared: "They got off course and were not adhering to the source of our policies, the teachings of Mr Hubbard". Put another way—they were found out.

THE FREETHINKER

Editor: WILLIAM McILROY

32 OVER STREET

BRIGHTON, SUSSEX

TELEPHONE: 0273-696425

UK ISSN 0016-0687

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

"The Freethinker" was founded in 1881 by G. W. Foote and is published mid-monthly. Material submitted (including Letters and Announcements) must reach the Editor by the 10th of the preceding month.

SPECIAL POSTAL SUBSCRIPTION RATES

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

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

Please make cheques, etc, payable to G. W. Foote & Company, 702 Holloway Road, London N19 3NL. Tel: 01-272 1266.