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"PUT THE DEITY ON THE DOLE!"

Barbara Smoker was re-elected President of the National Secular Society by members who attended the annual general meeting at Conway Hall, London, on 7 November. In the course of her presidential address, Miss Smoker referred to the serious economic problems facing the British people. She recalled the consequences of G. J. Holyoake's suggestion when a similar situation prevailed in 1842.

Miss Smoker said: "When the economic situation in this country was bad and unemployment figures were high, G. J. Holyoake, the social reformer and secularist pioneer, was sentenced to six months for 'blasphemy'. Answering questions, after giving a lecture on socialism, he was ensnared by a Christian zealot who complained that the lecturer had told the audience a great deal about their duty to man. What about their duty to God?"

"Holyoake replied: 'I appeal to your heads and your pockets if we are not too poor to have a God? If poor men cost the State so much, they would be put like officers on half-pay. I think that while our distress lasts it would be wise to do the same thing with the Deity'.

"Holyoake's sensible suggestion landed him in Gloucester gaol for six months, served under extremely harsh conditions".

Barbara Smoker went on to say that since Holyoake's day increased scientific knowledge about the cosmos and evolution has made the gods redundant. So even half pay for the Christian God in our present recession would be too generous.

"Give the Creator his cards. Put the Deity on the dole", she declared.

"And if God is redundant, his agents too must be redundant. Pension off the ageing priests and preachers, the prelates and the pontiff, while their younger colleagues seek redeployment. Give the bishops in the house of Lords their marching orders.

"And why should church buildings and religious

bodies continue to be exempted from their fair share of rates and taxes when they no longer fill a public need? Their function has long been bankrupt.

"Why should they, any more than tens of thousands of small businesses at the present time, be propped up by public subsidy? Let them go under the official receiver's hammer. And good riddance".

Christmas and New Year Greetings to our Readers



Mary and Child

1881

CENTENARY YEAR

1981

SUDDEN DEATH OF INDIAN SECULARIST LEADER

Professor A. B. Shah, founder and President of the Indian Secular Society, died recently at his home after a heart attack. He was aged 61, and is survived by his wife, son and daughter.

A. B. Shah's premature death is a serious loss to the secularist movement in India. He was a noted educationist who, after a brilliant academic career, became first principal of the South Indian Education Society's college in Bombay. He was Asian Director of the Congress for Cultural Freedom and Director of the Institute for the Study of Indian Traditions.

It was in the role of journalist that A. B. Shah made his greatest impact. His criticism of the writings and speeches of religious leaders made him a target of attack.

He was Editor of *Quest* during the emergency in 1976. His trenchant criticism of press censorship led to the journal being closed down by the authorities. Later he became Editor of *New Quest* and of *The Secularist*.

Critic of the Caste System

A. B. Shah concluded one of his last *New Quest* editorials with a characteristic denunciation of religious superstition and the caste system. He wrote in August:

... the real enemy with whom battle will have to be joined is not the government, which in India has always been a bunch of cowards in matters of social change. This has been so because regardless of its ideological complexion, every political party relies on the vote contractors among the Muslims, the Church among the Christians, and the middle castes among the Hindus in rural areas. It is because of these groups that untouchability, the oppression of women (especially Muslim women) and the various kinds of social and religious tension continue as blots on Indian society more than three decades after Independence.

But this is only one side of the picture. The victims of exploitation in most cases share the worldview of their exploiters. The ordinary Indian woman, for example, believes that she is inferior to man—does not the *Manusmriti* (or the Bible or the Quran) clearly say so? Home and school confirm this belief.

The Scheduled Castes are in no better position. They are as caste-conscious among themselves as the so-called upper-caste Hindus, and cannot unite for a common cause. To them inter-caste and even intra-caste rivalries are more important than the degradation to which all of them are subjected.

Political or economic democracy cannot survive in such a society. What the country therefore needs is a new leadership that would create the social and cultural preconditions for a society based on freedom, equality and the dignity of the individual. Political parties, which can only thrive on banning cow-slaughter, perpetuating the Muslim personal law and promising the missionaries freedom to carry on conversions in border areas even by recourse to "force, fraud or inducement"—the vice-president of the Bharatiya Janata Party has even proposed a bill

to this effect in the Lok Sabha—cannot provide the kind of leadership that is needed for saving India. It will have to come from people, mostly young, who are impatient with the present situation but who realise that Rome was not built in a day.

Man of Action

Mr Abe Solomon, Vice-President of the Indian Secular Society, described Professor Shah as "a man of both thought and action, a clear and courageous thinker and writer. He was always meticulously impartial and just when discussing and analysing the views and arguments of those who differed from him, or who opposed or attacked his ideas.

"He was one of the few non-Muslims in India, or perhaps the only one, who made a serious critical study of Islam, and was considered an authority on it by some scholars and followers of that religion . . . Professor Shah impressed all those who knew him by the volume and quality of his intellectual output, and he endeared himself to his friends by his simplicity and modesty".

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

Monday 4 January, 7 pm

SPEAKER: MR LAVENHAM
(from the ATHEIST CENTRE IN INDIA)

SUBJECT: THE POST-RELIGIOUS SOCIETY

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

The Pope's visit to Britain from 28 May until 2 June next year will definitely take place. It was rumoured that the trip would be cancelled following an assassination attempt in which the head of the Roman Catholic Church was seriously injured. But not all of his fellow-Christians will welcome him. Enoch Powell, MP, gave his support to critics of the visit when he told an audience of Conservatives at Grays, Essex, that it undermined Britain's independence. The Rev Ian Paisley is planning to hold a series of anti-Pope rallies. The Orange Order and the British Council of Protestant Churches are aiming to create a climate of opinion that will result in the visit being called off. Barbara Smoker, President of the National Secular Society, referred to the Pope's coming trip when she spoke at the annual dinner of Brighton and Hove Humanist Group last month. She said that while humanists should oppose the Pope's policies on social questions, they should "neither be lulled by the low-key plans for the visit nor sucked into extremist Protestant opposition to it".

The centenary of the opening of Leicester's Secular Hall was celebrated earlier this year when the veteran Labour politician and Leader of the Opposition in the House of Commons was guest speaker. This article is based on the address he delivered on that occasion.

During the past 100 years, and in earlier years, the right to speak freely has been protected by secularists. But for Bradlaugh, Besant, Kropotkin and others who have spoken in this same Secular Hall in Leicester, the advancement towards free speech would have been much slower. At critical moments in this history there has been a union between freethinkers and socialists who both sought to speak out freely.

It has been said that at some periods British socialism has owed more to Methodism than to Marx. This does not indicate properly quite the wide and various background to English socialism, but there is some truth in it. Yet, to a great extent, the two strands of socialism and secularism have also been interwoven. E. P. Thompson in *The Making of the English Working Class* shows how at an early stage socialist ideas were interwoven with secularism. The book indicates the secularist-socialist sources comprised in the term "radical"—in its original sense "the roots of politics".

Two such writers who had the greatest of influence on English radical thought were John Bunyan and Thomas Paine. Paine's *Rights of Man* is the greatest democratic manifesto in English literature and *Pilgrim's Progress* is also a class document breathing fire against riches, vanity and the aristocracy. Both Paine and Bunyan suffered in prison for their ideas. The language of both entwined and became part of our radical tradition. That is why radicals and rationalists can still be concerned about the revision of the authorised version of the Bible. The language of the authorised version derived not only from the original Hebrew, but from Tyndale and Wycliffe—good, legitimate, radical sources. Hence, the language of the Bible entered the later language of radicalism and socialism.

Robert Blatchford wrote about what he derived from the writings of the Bible:

I hold a high esteem of the literary quality of some parts of the Old Testament; but I seriously think that the loss of the first fourteen books would be a distinct gain to the world. For the rest, there is considerable literary and some ethical value in Job (which is not Jewish), in Ecclesiastes (which is Pagan), in the Song of Solomon (which is an erotic love song), and in parts of Isaiah, Proverbs, Jeremiah, Ezekiel and Amos. But I don't think any of these books equal to Henry George's *Progress and Poverty*, or William Morris' *News from Nowhere*.

(*God and my Neighbour*, by Robert Blatchford, published 1903).

Recent developments have thrown up those who challenge evolution and so do not wish to see Adam and Eve as allegories. According to announcements, during the Presidential campaign, President Reagan re-asserted his confidence in creation theories once regarded as allegories. Such developments may be of great consequence for the education of children, and a trial is taking place in California at this very moment about the right to teach evolution.

Some of the most powerful voices in demanding the right of everyone to argue their own themes have been freethinkers. Thomas Paine, because of the directness and simplicity of his language, was one of the greatest. He was responsible for the creation of innumerable socialists—even if he was not himself entirely a socialist, he was one who gave birth to the socialist impetus. *Rights of Man* was a key book for nineteenth century radicals and men, such as Richard Carlile, went to prison for printing it.

A New Perspective

One fascination of the history of freethought development is that rationalist writers have known the importance of speaking in a language which all can understand. Winwood Reade was another who spoke clearly and opened up fresh vistas. He also may have made socialists without being one himself. At the age of 30 he went to Africa, then dark and unknown to people of the rest of the world. He returned and rewrote history, at a period when England was conscious of a dominant position in the world, Reade told us a new truth about our history. He wrote in a broader and entirely new perspective:

Asia taught Europe its alphabet; Asia taught Europe to cipher and to draw; Asia taught Europe the language of the skies—how to calculate eclipses, how to follow the course of the stars, how to measure time by means of an instrument which recorded with its shadow the station of the sun; how to solve mathematical problems; how to philosophise with abstract ideas. Let us not forget the school in which we learnt to spell, and those venerable halls in which we acquired the rudiments of science and art. (*The Martyrdom of Man*, by Winwood Reade).

At this period freethought sects quarrelled, as radical groups always do, perhaps too furiously. But the arguments over birth control at the time of the Knowlton trial were to change the way people taught and thought about sexual choices in their lives. 100 years ago in the Leicester Secular Hall people would have celebrated the victories of Besant and Bradlaugh. Secularism and the National Secular Society

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A controversy over the National History Museum's policies has been going on in scientific circles for some time. In this article, Beverly Halstead, Reader in Geology and Zoology at the University of Reading, argues that because members of the staff are restricted by the Official Secrets Act they cannot publicly criticise what the majority of them regard as a distortion of scientific evidence at the Museum.

The astronomers do not have to argue the case and present the evidence again and again that the Earth orbits the Sun, yet for biologists such an exercise has to be dealt with in every generation. The evidence that evolution has occurred is so overwhelming that any normal scientist who has not been caught up in the semantics of professional philosophers simply accepts the historical fact of evolution.

However, arguments have raged regarding the processes by which evolution took place. Was it gradual, as Darwin insisted, or a series of jumps as the catastrophists and now the new-breed Marxists such as Professor Stephen Jay Gould claim?

The evidence for gradualism is there in abundance. But such is the religious fervour with which certain theories are held that critical scientific evidence is being deliberately suppressed in an attempt to promote Marxist/Creationist "truths". From the scientific standpoint, what has been going on in the public galleries of the Natural History Museum, London, must rank as one of the greatest, if not the greatest, scandal in its entire history. Here is a major scientific institution in the natural sciences to which the ordinary member of the public looks for information on the current state of the natural sciences. They do not suspect—why should they—that the displays are factually incorrect, nor would they suspect that what is on display is disavowed by the Museum's own specialists in those very same areas. They cannot be expected to know that certain key displays are crude distortions of the available evidence, and that critical material, such as the Petralona skull in the fossil history of man, has been deliberately omitted against the pleas of the Museum's own scientists.

The man in the street may wonder why the scientific staff do not speak out against this scandal. There is a constraint: every member of the scientific Civil Service has to sign the Official Secrets Act. The Public Services Department of the Natural History Museum appears to have at its summit a number of ideologically committed people, to judge from their actions. They are responsible for the public presentation of science in the Museum; they hence represent the official policy. Such is the structure of all Government institutions that once a policy is formulated no public debate by public servants can be

permitted. This state of affairs makes such institutions extremely vulnerable to takeovers by extremists, especially as it is guaranteed by the rules that the majority of the staff will be gagged.

There is a genuine reluctance to believe that such a situation could ever arise in the Natural History Museum. Perhaps this explains the stupefying inertia of the Museum authorities. The very idea of "Marxist dinosaurs" is seen as a joke. When it comes to fossil man, the crude distortion of the evidence at least suggests that perhaps all is not well. But the notion that there is some ideological axe-grinding behind it is dismissed as exaggeration. As a result of public protest, some aspects of the present policies are being modified: the anti-evolution film loop was withdrawn, some of the labels in the fossil man exhibit have been changed and there are reputedly changes under way with regard to the dinosaur exhibit. Only time will tell if the changes are merely cosmetic. It would do no harm if the Trustees of the Museum and the Government Minister concerned, Sir Keith Joseph, were to take a closer and more active interest in what is actually happening.

Gagged by Official Secrets Act

Arguments over the Natural History Museum's policies have raged in the scientific magazine *Nature* for the past year, and the Editor brought the recent discussion to a conclusion on this very issue:

Like many other invaluable institutions, the Natural History Museum is staffed by scientists who are public servants. This circumstance is not usually restrictive. Members of the Museum's staff ordinarily function as scholars without impediment. On the question of the public policy of the institution for which they work, however, civil service employees are less than free. In the past several months, many among the Museum's staff have sympathised with many of the complaints made against their institution, but have been gagged. The problem is not novel. Scientists working in defence establishments may, for example, differ from official policy on defence procurement, but may be unable to say so publicly. In such circumstances, however, it is understandable (if reprehensible) that laboratories should require their employee-scientists to keep their silence. The case for insisting on such a policy at an institution such as a natural history museum, whose public reputation stems from the supposed academic independence and integrity of its members, is by comparison non-existent. It is to be hoped that the Museum's trustees will now give this problem the attention it deserves, and urgently.

It is surely time that the Natural History Museum's staff were given the freedom to speak their mind on these issues without the fear of contravening the Official Secrets Act hanging over them. An open discussion on dinosaurs and fossil man is unlikely to threaten the security of the nation.

Charges, counter-charges, resignations and legal action have exposed the power struggles and questionable financial operations that have been going on behind the scenes of a network of Christian "relief" organisations. Under the direction of an American, the Rev Joe Bass, colossal sums of money have been raised in various countries allegedly to combat hunger, disease and illiteracy. But the organisations concerned appear to be a front for Underground Evangelism, an outfit specialising in promoting Christian propaganda in Communist countries.

Over 10,000 Ethiopian refugees share the makeshift tents of Camp Horseed in the border area North West of the Somali capital of Mogadishu. Two doctors and four nurses fight a hopeless battle against hunger, dysentery, pneumonia and tuberculosis.

In the immediate vicinity of the camp, a mobile clinic rots in the desert sands because the laboratory and air conditioning unit was not supplied. This expensive vehicle serves as a store room. What is now a heap of junk was paid for by Europeans and Americans who donated money to the California-based fund-raising organisation, Evangelism Center International (ECI). Their charity, International Christian Aid (ICA), with the backing of the United Nations Association and the Somali Government, claims responsibility for running the camp.

German contributions have been vast. The American missionaries maintain a branch in Bad Nauheim called Deutsches Mission Zentrum (German Mission Centre) in association with the International Relief Fund. According to Heinrich Floreck, an ex-Director, the IRF donated eight million Deutschmarks to the Somali project alone. Despite this largesse, Helga Meyer, a nursing sister, had to scrounge for dried milk in neighbouring camps; International Christian Aid moved into a spacious mansion in the capital.

"Total Chaos"

In the autumn of 1980 medical supplies were piling up in Mogadishu, as nursing sister Iris Amman observed. A consignment of the anti-biotic Erythromycin perished in the sun. Meanwhile, the refugees were being treated with out-of-date drugs. Sister Amman commented: "We received drugs that had expired in 1967. It was total chaos".

At about that time—with Christmas approaching, when, as every fund-raiser knows, people are more generous—Relief Fund managers announced that donations from Christian communities would be used to spread joy and happiness among the Muslims of

Somalia. They sent Christmas parcels. The appeal slogan was: "You can Save Human Life and Give a Christmas Present to Thousands of Children!"

The "gift of heaven" was flown to Mogadishu by charter plane and transported by lorries to Camp Horseed. But the refugees did not seem to enter into the true spirit of Christmas. Instead of badly needed supplies of food, blankets and medicine, the parcels contained biscuits, T-shirts bearing the ICA imprint, crayons and chewing gum. Sister Kerstin had to flee the wrath of the enraged refugees and barricade herself inside a hut.

The West German collectors promise that "all donations are scrupulously administered and distributed amongst the distressed". Distribution of funds was not arranged by them but by the parent organisation in the United States. Its overlord, the Rev Joe Bass, directs operations in 11 countries from Los Angeles. Last year the ECI and its affiliated organisations collected 26 million dollars.

When, in 1960, Evangelism Center International started to smuggle Bibles and religious tracts into Communist countries, it operated on a modest budget. The financial breakthrough came when the "underground evangelists" discovered that there was hunger in the world. The money poured in; so did accusations of mismanagement, manipulation of funds, publishing falsified reports and of being in league with the CIA. Former disciples in Switzerland, Austria and the German Federal Republic spoke out against their American brethren.

For God and Uncle Sam

This domestic quarrel highlighted the original purpose of the ECI—the Christian subversion of the East. The operational centre of the Bible smugglers in Munich is disguised by the name of Vision Verlag GmbH (Vision Publishing Ltd.) There, United States citizen Virgil Dale Smith, under the pseudonym Don Stillwell, acts as co-ordinator for parcel dispatch, religious broadcasts and smuggling trips to Eastern countries. During 1980, the ECI expended eight million dollars on this work.

According to Smith, the ECI moved 878,161 items of Christian literature and nearly 100,000 tapes behind the Iron Curtain in one year. He boasted that they have between 700 and 800 employees. Vehicles are specially prepared in Swiss and Austrian workshops. Most of them start off from a closely guarded villa in Modling, near Vienna. They have American, Swiss, German or Austrian number plates.

In order to equip his crusaders for their hazardous work, Smith orders them to attend regular train-

(Continued on back page)

The Virgin Mary—Paragon and Paradox

JULIA ATKINSON

The Virgin Mary is a prominent figure in the Christmas tableau. The cult of Mary attempts to correct the vicious patriarchal element common to Christianity, Judaism and Islam. Christianity scores by making a working-class girl "Queen of Heaven", but falls down badly by suggesting that the ideal mother is a virgin.

Miriam, the Jewish girl known to us as Mary the mother of Jesus Christ, is a very minor figure in the *Dramatis Personae* of the New Testament. Her appearances are few and far between; she is sometimes seen in a rather unflattering light; even her most famous speech, the *Magnificat*, bears an unmistakable resemblance to the thanksgiving prayer of Hannah, mother of Samuel, the Old Testament hero. Mary's family history, her age, her appearance and the manner of her death are not mentioned in any of the four gospels. Only St John's gospel, the last to be written, states that Mary actually witnessed her son's crucifixion; her presence at the Ascension and the descent of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost is merely implied from a few ambiguously-phrased passages in the Acts of the Apostles. Yet from these seemingly unpromising beginnings sprang one of the most influential and enduring religious phenomena—the cult of the Virgin Mary.

Over a period of 15 centuries, beginning in 431 when the Council of Ephesus proclaimed her "Mother of God", Mary has undoubtedly been a source of comfort and inspiration to many people, by no means all of them poor and illiterate. Her devotees have included some of the leading intellectuals of their respective eras. Much of the greatest art, poetry, architecture and music of the Middle Ages drew its inspiration from various aspects of the Virgin's cult. However, it is impossible to review the long history of Mariolatry without coming to the conclusion that the Virgin's beautiful face is in fact a mask concealing an ugly and distorted reality. For it is in her role as an image of perfect womanhood, not as a divine patroness of the arts, that Mary has wielded greatest influence.

Christianity is a patriarchal religion, the most recent in a long line of patriarchal religions, yet in the Roman Catholic countries church-going is generally regarded as "women's business"; the convent is the only refuge for an unmarried woman who does not wish to be looked upon as an object of ridicule. Much of the blame for this can be laid fairly and squarely on the Virgin's cult; as Christianity's only female figure of major importance and its nearest equivalent to a Goddess, Mary has always been a powerful weapon in the Church's campaign to win female adherents.

Many women must have been greatly attracted towards Mary not only because of her exalted status, but simply because she was a mother. Needless to say it is this most human aspect of the Virgin, rather than her manifestation as the Queen of Heaven, which has held greater appeal for women of humble background. We will return later to the subject of Mary's influence on the lives of women. But first, in order to understand how this ill-defined biblical character achieved her prestigious position in the Christian hierarchy, we must take into consideration Mary's place in legend.

Popular interest in the Virgin Mary began long before it received official recognition at Ephesus. The lack of scriptural information about her naturally encouraged the growth of legends, and the most ancient stories concerning Mary's life—or, more precisely, her birth, childhood and death—probably originated in Egypt as long ago as the second century (which would make them roughly contemporary with the first pictures of the Virgin, painted on the walls of the catacombs in Rome). The Marian legends vary considerably in detail, but most of them identify the Virgin's parents as Anna—obviously a variant of Hannah, whose link with Mary we have already noted—and Joachim.

After years of marriage the couple are still childless. One day, as Anna is walking in the garden, an angel appears and promises her a child who will be famous throughout the world. In her gratitude Anna vows to dedicate her unborn child to the service of God. In due course Mary is born, and when she reaches the age of three years her parents take her to the temple. There, accompanied by several other young girls, she is cared for by the priest Zadok and his wife Sham'i.

An Arranged Marriage

During her years in the temple Mary is fed and clothed by angels. When she reaches marriageable age, the high priest is instructed by God to bring together all the widowers in Israel, telling each man to carry a staff. The Lord indicates his choice of Mary's future husband by working a miracle—Joseph's staff bursts into flower. Because of his advanced age and the existence of several children by his previous marriage, Joseph—sometimes described as Mary's cousin—is at first unwilling to marry such a young girl, but eventually he accepts his part in the divine plan.

By making Joseph a widower and providing him with a ready-made family, the myth-makers were obviously trying to bypass a major problem which confronts believers in Mary's perpetual virginity—

the New Testament references to Christ's brothers and sisters. Of course, this awkward discrepancy only became a problem when the Church began to emphasize the connection between virginity and virtue. The gospel writers would have been familiar with the pagan notion of virgin birth (parthenogenesis), a common attribute of gods, legendary heroes and even historical figures—Alexander the Great and Plato were both thought to have been the offspring of mortal women and spirits. The virgin birth of Christ was probably introduced into the gospels to stress his divinity, and there is no reason to think that these aforementioned siblings were anything other than the younger children of Mary and Joseph. The Church, however, chose to overlook such objections, and belief in Mary's perpetual virginity soon became an article of faith.

Two other Marian dogmas, the Immaculate Conception (proclaimed in 1854) and the Assumption (proclaimed as late as 1950) are also largely based on the ramshackle foundations of medieval legend. The fact that generations of theologians have gradually refined the crudity of the myths, sometimes falling into heresy in the process, does not conceal the total lack of scriptural evidence for both dogmas. The Immaculate Conception refers to the conception of Mary herself, not that of Christ as is commonly supposed; while stopping short of declaring her the product of a virgin birth, it claims that she was conceived "without sin". The doctrine goes on to state that Mary was the most perfect being ever created by God (with the obvious exception of Christ himself).

The Lady Vanishes

Inevitably, this extravagant praise for Mary gave rise to the question: surely God would not allow this paragon of virtue, the only human being untainted by original sin, to suffer the common fate of death and dissolution? Members of the early Christian Church were greatly puzzled by the complete lack of information concerning the Virgin's death. There was no contemporary record of her decease and no tradition of martyrdom; no Marian relics, such as her bones or blood, had been preserved. Even the site of her grave was unknown. It must have seemed to them that Mary's body had quite literally disappeared from the face of the earth, and this belief is reflected in the widespread myth of her assumption, body and soul, into heaven.

There are several versions of the legend—in some of them Mary dies but is almost immediately reanimated by Christ, in others she does not die at all. However, all the versions agree that no trace of Mary's body was left on earth; an explanation which neatly accounts for the lack of physical remains, and also disposes of the abhorrent thought that the Virgin's body may have become food for worms.

For centuries the physical and spiritual Assumption of the Virgin Mary was accepted and believed in by many Christians. But it did not become an article of faith until 1 November, 1950—truly a red-letter day in the annals of superstition.

Although Mary's cult has always been greatly dependent on legend, it must not be forgotten that other influences have been at work. Visionaries, poets and artists have all played an important part in the development of Mariolatry. The Virgin's image underwent many changes over the years in order to accommodate changing attitudes (however slight) towards women in general. Whenever one of Mary's various aspects became outdated it was simply laid aside and replaced by another—the medieval "Queen of Heaven", an image which could only have originated in the age of feudalism, gave way in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries to the more sophisticated "Immaculate Conception".

This process is by no means at an end; in 1974 Pope Paul VI, obviously realising that the cow-like docility usually ascribed to the Virgin is unlikely to find favour with the modern woman, attempted to show Mary in a more positive light. In his *Cultus Marialis* he wrote that the Virgin should not be seen "as a mother exclusively concerned with her divine Son, but rather as a woman whose action helped to strengthen the apostolic community's faith in Christ". In this extraordinary statement, which needless to say has no scriptural basis, it is surely possible to detect a note of desperation. For if this most recent view of Mary—woman of action and foundress of the early Christian Church—were to be accepted, it would necessitate a totally new attitude towards the role of women in society. And the Roman Catholic Church, for all its ingenuity, cannot ignore its 15 centuries of misogynous teachings.

It is a curious fact that a number of non-Catholic writers have found much to admire in the cult of the Virgin Mary. For instance, it has often been claimed that Mary represents a feminising influence in the almost entirely masculine world of Christianity; she is in every respect an ideal woman, the personification of humility, gentleness and forgiveness. However, even if we overlook the way in which these so-called "feminine" characteristics are confined to the female sex (a practice which is largely responsible for the phenomenon of *machismo*, the aggressive masculinity so prevalent in the Catholic countries) it should be obvious that Mary's influence is more likely to harm women than to help them.

Predestined to be the mother of Christ, free from original sin, a virgin mother miraculously preserved from the terrors of death, Mary is an impossible model to emulate; yet this is what the Catholic Church demands from its female followers. The more devout the woman, the more keenly she is conscious of her shortcomings—a vicious circle which is practically impossible to break.

Three years ago, Charles Oxley, a devoted servant of the Lord, issued a leaflet accusing journalist Denis Lemon of having, with others, re-published the poem, "The Love that Dares to Speak its Name". This was quite untrue, and as Mr Lemon had already stood trial at the Old Bailey for having published the poem in *Gay News*, of which he is Editor, he instructed his solicitors to secure a retraction and apology. After a long period of squirming and wriggling, Oxley admitted that "such allegation is entirely without foundation".

He has popped up again with another grubby little tract entitled *Michael Foot's Anti-Religious Objectives*. The purpose of Oxley's latest epistle (which carries the legend, "Blessed is the nation whose joy is in the Lord") is to warn Britain that the Leader of the Opposition and a possible future Prime Minister "has recently confirmed his support for a secularist organisation which has some very far-reaching, anti-religious objectives". The National Secular Society is the organisation in question.

It is true that Mr Foot has appeared on the Society's platform. His name is on the Distinguished Members Panel although, like most NSS members, he probably does not agree with every dot and comma of the Society's programme.

Prime Ministers have, over the last century, included a Methodist (Lloyd George), a Unitarian (Chamberlain) and a Rationalist (Churchill), as well as members of the Established Church (some committed, some nominal). None of them has foisted his own religious or non-religious views on the nation, and there is no reason to suppose that Michael Foot would attempt to do so either if he became Premier.

Other authoritarian zealots will share Oxley's horror at the 13 "far-reaching, anti-religious objectives" on his list. But by no means all believers oppose Church disestablishment, voluntary euthanasia, abortion on request and repeal of laws relating to blasphemy, Sunday observance and school religion. Certainly not all Christians share his hostility to "the abolition of corporal punishment in schools" and to the treatment of prisoners that is "based not on punishment but on re-habilitation".

Although the NSS is opposed to capital punishment, it does not appear on the list of "anti-religious objectives". This is a curious omission for, like so many of the anti-abortion, anti-euthanasia, "sanctity of life" lobby, Oxley is a tireless advocate of the death penalty. (Whether he believes that it should be imposed on policemen and prison warders who kill people in their charge is not clear.) As Chairman of the Campaign for Law and Order, whatever that may be, he informed readers of the *British Weekly and Christian Record* (31 July 1979) that he holds to the principle of "an eye for an eye". And in the *Daily Mail* (2 June 1981) he declared: "Parlia-

ment failed us when it voted against the restoration of capital punishment".

Charles Oxley's leaflet is the nasty product of a nasty mind. No doubt it would go down rather well with the Annual Assembly of Women Conservatives. But it is unlikely to cut much ice in religious circles.

MORAL HOOLIGANS

Two meetings organised by the national humanist organisations took place at Conway Hall, London, last month.

Antony Grey, Secretary of the Sexual Law Reform Society, who spoke on 2 November, said that Mary Whitehouse and her allies in the Nationwide Festival of Light and the Responsible Society were moral hooligans who do not scruple to smear and denigrate those who oppose them. He added: "Far from being upholders of lofty ideals and moral absolutes, they are Christian Stalinists who believe that the end justifies the means. They are the Church Militant Tendency of present-day religion, and as virulently anti-fair play as the political extremists who currently bedevil British politics".

Giving several detailed examples of the way in which the various interlinked groups he was criticising carried on their campaigns, and in particular of their assiduous efforts to brand all those who worked for a balanced approach to sexuality as tools or dupes of the Communists, Mr Grey blamed the mainstream churches for staying silent.

"The leaders of the Anglican and Nonconformist churches, and public figures such as Lord Shawcross, who is a Patron of the Responsible Society, are culpable for their failure to rebuke the rampant bigotry and intolerance, almost amounting to fanaticism, which is nowadays masquerading as 'Christian truth'.

"Formerly the churches were much more aware of the inherent threat posed to traditional British decency and tolerance by the excesses of such groups. We have only to look at the horrendous example of Iran to see what happens when primitive fundamentalists gain a foothold of respectability in the government of Church and State".

Madeleine Simms, the speaker on 9 November, said that humanists should be encouraged by two recent events. In the Croydon North-West by-election the previous month, Miss Gillies-Carr, the anti-abortion "Pro-Life" candidate, secured less than one per cent of the total vote. She contrived to garner even fewer votes than the National Front candidate.

AND NOTES

"After giving her campaign front-page coverage in previous weeks, the *Catholic Herald* was so mortified by the result that it omitted to print it at all. The election might never have taken place. The technique is of course familiar in the Soviet Union where those who are no longer *persona grata* with the authorities become non-persons.

"With only 340 votes to her credit, Miss Gillies-Carr seems to have been transmogrified into a non-candidate".

Madeleine Simms then referred to the acquittal of Dr Leonard Arthur, the distinguished Derby paediatrician who had been accused of attempting to murder a seriously handicapped baby.

"On 15 January, Professor John Scarisbrick, Chairman of LIFE, confessed in the London *New Standard*: 'We told the police'. He said he naturally could not reveal the name of the LIFE spy in Derby City Hospital, and added: 'If it is a nurse we are relying on, for example, they would be putting their career on the line'.

"Professor Scarisbrick is wise to be cautious. I guess 'they' would be doing a great deal more than just putting their career on the line. 'They' might well be in danger of being lynched by Dr Arthur's grateful patients who signed petitions on his behalf in their thousands, and crowded into the courtroom to give him support".

The LIFE informer at the hospital grossly abused her position of trust, and the Royal College of Nursing has condemned this unethical behaviour. "But the moral is clear", said Madeleine Simms.

"Doctors must in future question nurses much more closely before offering them responsible posts in paediatric wards. Membership of fanatical religious pressure groups is clearly incompatible with such responsibilities.

"Equally, there is a responsibility on parents to seek treatment for themselves and their families from doctors whose ethical judgements they can trust. There are inhumane dogmatists in every profession, and the alert patient must try to ensure that he or she does not fall into the wrong hands. They should ask questions beforehand of family doctors, obstetricians and paediatric specialists.

"It is no good waiting until an emergency arises. By then it is too late".

The speaker drew attention to the campaign to promote the Protection of Disabled Children Bill which is now being trundled around the lobbies of the House of Commons.

"James Dunn, MP, and some of his Roman Catholic colleagues in Parliament are pledged to

introduce this bill if they succeed in drawing a high place in the Private Members' Ballot on 12 November. The purpose of the bill is to make it an offence 'to withhold any treatment from a newly-born child suffering from any abnormality, without which it is known he or she cannot survive'.

"This is an attempt to undo the good arising out of the Arthur case. This bill would ensure that humane Dr Arthurs of the future will be led away into the cells for taking the quality of life into account as well as longevity.

"The 'Pro-Life' faction claim they have 150 MPs who will support such a measure. My guess is that the number is nearer 40.

"But there are a few very determined religious fanatics who will have a go if they can, because they know this is their last chance. By this time next year, the General Election will be too near and no MP of any political party will be encouraged by his party managers to take up such a controversial issue.

"So this year is quite crucial. If the Protection of Disabled Children bill does get taken up this winter, please write to your own MP immediately asking him or her to vote against it on Second reading".

Centenary Appeal

The loyal and generous support of readers, crucial throughout *The Freethinker's* history, has been particularly evident during 1981. Well over £3000 has been donated to the Fund and we are certain that many more contributions will be received during the last weeks of this Centenary year. We plan to advertise *The Freethinker* more widely in 1982 and to publish a history of the paper which Jim Herrick, a former Editor, is writing. All this will be costly, but we are confident that readers will respond with customary generosity.

Thanks are expressed for the following donations. Anonymous, £25; P. W. Brook, £29; E. Brown, £2; D. M. Carter, £1; J. Coward, £5; P. A. Danning, £2; D. Harper, £4.50; H. Hilton, £1; F. C. Jennings, £2; A. Joiner, £1; E. J. Le Fevre, £2; J. Lippitt, £3; K. G. Mack, £2; W. G. Matters, £2; C. G. Newton, £2; A. Oldham, £10; D. J. Oliver, £2; N. O'Muraile, £1.50; E. P. Roberts, £7; J. V. Ruffell, £1; B. M. Shepherd, £1; H. V. Stopes-Roe, £2; J. M. Thomas, £2; B. Wycher, £1; D. Wright, £4.

Total for the period 1 October until 6 November: £115; total for the year: £3450 and \$105.

Our Seasonal greeting (front page) was drawn by Tony Dallas. He has designed a series of cards for Parry-Duke Enterprises, 45 Telford Avenue, London SW2, telephone 01-674 7438. Details will be sent on request.

ABORTION POLITICS by David Marsh and Joanna Chambers. Junction Books Ltd., £12.50 and £4.95

A sense of excited anticipation is, I suppose, inevitable in starting to read a book which describes events in which one has participated. At the same time, detailed knowledge of a subject leads to a niggling awareness of errors and an impatience with interpretations that differ from one's own.

So it was with mixed feelings that I sat down with *Abortion Politics*. The book deals in a unique way with the John Corrie Abortion (Amendment) Bill which dominated Private Members' time during the 1979-1980 parliamentary session. The authors attempt to use the passage—and final downfall—of this anti-abortion measure as a basis for examining how, in the publisher's words, "our elected representatives choose to vote when freed from the constraints of the party whip".

Unfortunately, on that level, the book was doomed to failure from the start. Indeed, the writers themselves admit "issues like abortion are very different from the normal run of Private Members' issues". I would suggest that this is an understatement, for if there is one thing on which anti-abortion and pro-choice activists are likely to agree it is that abortion is different from every *other* issue. Nevertheless, despite not providing a reliable predictor of how MPs would vote on less partisan and less emotive topics, the analysis of why MPs voted as they did on this particular Bill makes fascinating reading.

For me, part of this interest lies in having gut reactions confirmed by the authors' reports of interviews with some of the main protagonists. For instance, during those long cliff-hanging hours sitting in the House of Commons I became more and more sure that squabbles between the various anti-abortion groups supporting John Corrie were contributing to his indecisiveness and lack of planned campaign. The authors make clear, following interviews with the General Secretary and the Director of SPUC, with the Chairman of LIFE and with John Corrie himself, that this was so. Thus, the lessons for those of us who want to keep abortion legal are clear: co-operation between the various pro-choice groups is essential and a common policy must be thrashed out in order to present a united front to whoever is supporting our cause in Parliament.

Regretfully, for the ordinary reader the book falls between two stools. On one hand it provides a good narrative read with detailed, well researched facts and insights about parliamentary behaviour: on the other hand, complex—and to my non-mathematical mind—pretentious statistical analyses are dotted throughout.

The introduction indicates what to expect. In

describing the methodology we are told, for example, "lamda B is used as our measure of the strength of the association between the independent and dependent variables. In effect, lamda B indicates how good a predictor of the dependent variable in each cross tabulation the independent variable is considered to be. In a limited number of circumstances, however, lambda symmetrical is employed as the measure of the strength of the association . . ." This may be necessary for students of politics, but the results would seem to be deducible by common sense and everyday knowledge of human behaviour. Certainly over the years, SPUC, in concentrating its lobbying and pressure for anti-abortion measures in marginal constituencies, has come to the same conclusion as this study—namely that MPs in marginal seats are likely to be most responsive to constituency pressure.

Quantitative analysis apart, some inexcusable errors have crept into other parts of the book. For instance, in outlining the legal background, the authors state that the Infant Life (Preservation) Act of 1929 lays down conditions under which *abortion* would not be an offence. In fact, the Infant Life (Preservation) Act created the offence of wilful destruction of a *child capable of being born alive* (of which evidence that the mother has been pregnant for 28 weeks or more is *prima facie* proof etc). Thus, the 1929 Act had nothing to do with abortion, although subsequently it has been of great importance in defining the limits for abortion by analogy. This is not a minor nor an unimportant error and could be very confusing for a reader who was hoping to learn from the book.

Additionally, I found one important sin of omission rather than commission. In answering their own question, "Why was Steel successful?" (in liberalising the law in 1967) the authors list six main factors. Surprisingly missing from the list is the fact that in 1966 there was a Spring election leading to an extended session of Parliament. It is generally accepted that this was an essential ingredient for the passing of the 1967 Abortion Act. Without the extra months—and the breathing space of the long summer recess which came between Second Reading and Committee Stage—those factors correctly listed by the authors (a liberal atmosphere in Parliament, a high place in the ballot for David Steel, the peaking of activity of pressure groups, favourable attitude of the Government etc), would probably not have culminated in legislation.

In this context, an excellent opportunity for comparative analysis of the 1979-80 session was missed, for in 1979 too there was a Spring election. Indeed,

REVIEWS

it was for this reason more than any other that knowledgeable supporters of liberal abortion laws feared John Corrie's Bill so much. A conventional (October to July) session of Parliament gives opportunities for talking-out a Bill—an extended session makes this nearly impossible.

For humanists and others who do not wish to see minority religious sects dictate the laws by which we all must live, chapter three is probably the most interesting. It provides a detailed account of the involvement of the Roman Catholic Church with anti-abortion pressure groups at constituency level. It spells out the political dilemma for those of us who are pro-choice for women but nevertheless cannot, in all conscience, place our cross on the ballot paper solely on the basis of a candidate's stance on one issue. It provides reinforcement of the fact that for anti-abortionists their belief that abortion is murder often supercedes all other considerations, whilst for the rest of us it is only one of a number of important political considerations. This chapter should be compulsory reading for all those who do not bother to write to their MPs when the Abortion Act is under threat because they do not believe a letter is worthwhile.

Having read the book, nobody can help realising how nearly John Corrie succeeded in returning the law on abortion to the bad old days. Knowledge and acceptance of the fact that the liberal atmosphere of the 1960s is no longer with us is essential if the next anti-abortion, anti-humanitarian, anti-humanist, anti-women bill is to be defeated. *Abortion Politics*, with its analyses, facts and figures, provides a chilling reminder that the clock of progress can be turned back—unless some of us jam the mechanism. For this, if for no other reason, I would recommend the book to all freethinkers.

DIANE MUNDAY

THE PAGAN CAROLS RESTORED by Norman Iles. Vol 1, £3 and Vol 2 (text only) £1.25

Christianity could not totally destroy the lively and life-loving customs of paganism. They were incorporated into Christian ceremonies or survived in an alternative folk culture. In the case of the numerous churches built before 1350, which contained a stone phallus hidden in the altar, the pagan pleasure-loving principle was preserved and concealed. This and other curious facts are put together by Norman Iles in the introduction to his restorations of pagan carols—which have been available, but not widely known, for some time.

It is, of course, well known that the origins of Christmas lie in the Roman Saturnalia and a winter

festival for the rebirth of the sun. Less well known is the entirely pagan origin of carols. Indeed, in the Middle Ages a Christian carol was a contradiction in terms, according to Norman Iles. He quotes a monk who wrote in 1497: "And ever his house was void of Carols and dissolute songs." As the carols were written down they were Christianised, bowdlerised, and muddled. As Norman Iles puts it: "A fertility religion has met a sterility religion".

Some of his restoration is inevitably highly speculative, but the results are enjoyable. It does not take much to be convinced by a conversion from a May Carol into a more authentic May Day Carol. "The Holly and the Ivy" is transmuted into a fertility song with the plants representing male and female. How excellent if school choirs were to take up some of these versions!

I have long speculated that a pagan folk-tradition, perhaps now impossible to truly recover, contains evidence of a strong counter-culture that persisted through even the most oppressively Christian periods. However, it is wrong to assume that all that was non-Christian was good and to set up an alternative pagan Garden of Eden. Iles comes close to this in writing, "The Carols did, in one sense, come from a 'golden age', or an age without sexual repression." Although Christianity has been outstandingly repressive of human sexuality, the roots of puritanism lie in human psychology. Puritanism is not an exclusively Christian characteristic.

Norman Iles, who has also examined the origin of Nursery Rhymes in another book, has produced restorations of Carols that are vigorous and gutsy. When a picture is restored by skilful hands, the colours and lines can spring to life with new energy—the same happens with some of the carols restored here.

JIM HERRICK

The Pagan Carols Restored obtainable from the author at 381, Marine Road, Morecambe, Lancs.

Socialism and Freethought

sustain the arguments today—not to impose views, but to ensure that they are heard.

The world is now faced with a danger greater than anything before—the danger of extinction, for that is the meaning of nuclear stock-piling. President Reagan and Mrs Thatcher talk as though piling higher nuclear armouries can add to our safety. Nothing is further from the truth, they have to be dismantled if the world is going to be saved. A new human voice must be heard across the world. The driving force to save mankind must come from the freethinking tradition, from a tradition that preached internationalism at a time of nationalism. The next century of freethought must be the greatest of all, for the determination to speak freely alone can save us.

Voices Crying in the Christian Wilderness

MERLE TOLFREE

The English education system will never be worthy of a civilised society until the children of all classes in the nation attend the same schools.—R. H. Tawney: "Education".

Christians Against Racism and Fascism, described as "a campaigning movement committed to racial justice and combating racism and Fascism", recently published a short pamphlet on the vexed question of Church schools at a time when a variety of religions are voicing their demands.

There is so much vicious racialism in the world today that the existence of such a group should be welcomed by all decent, humane people. But this is not the case. CARAF has attracted the wrath of many Christians who have denounced it in the religious Press. *Church Schools in a Multi-faith Society*, a modest, four-page tract, provoked a furious *Daily Telegraph* editorial which claimed: "To most sane people it would seem obvious and beyond contradiction that Church schools can only remain Church schools so long as they hold to Christian principles and resist allegiance to other religions and to atheism". The ultra-conservative *Telegraph* fumed: "The truth is that CARAF is anti-Christian".

The CARAF pamphlet shows a more liberal attitude on the part of some Christian people to those of other faiths. It has to be admitted nowadays that truth is not the exclusive property of one group. They recognise a certain injustice in the situation that accords a privileged position to Christian schools and the Christian religion while denying other communities similar rights. There is some sympathy with the desire of Muslims, Hindus and Sikhs to establish their own schools. It is suggested that Christian schools should include some consideration of other faiths in their curriculum.

It must be said, however, that CARAF has made a very poor analysis of the situation. For instance, how far does the very existence of Church schools foment the racialism which CARAF claims to deplore? Such schools certainly create divisiveness and add to the bitterness of torn and frustrated communities.

Inherent in nearly all religions is the idea of superiority, of unique revelation, of truth denied to all others. To set up more schools with a variety of unique revelations would only intensify the problems and, however politely disguised, mutual antagonism. For as CARAF admits, devout adherents to religious faiths, including some Christians, "want religious instruction rather than education" in the nation's classrooms.

There is no reference in the pamphlet to the large

number of people who are outside all religious communities. It can no longer be assumed that humanists and other non-religious people are merely the quixotic fringe in a largely conformist society. It might even be the reverse before long.

CARAF and other democratic Christians must come to terms with the fact that Church schools are an anachronism. The only way to ensure justice for all in a country with a wide variety of religious faiths—and none—is to make education completely secular and to free the schools from any allegiance to religious dogma or institution.

Children should be educated together, not separately because of religion, race or sex.

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1881 CENTENARY

When fundamentalist creeds and the cults of unreason gain new adherents every day—much to the surprise of rationalists and freethinkers—it is vital that there flourish forums, such as "The Freethinker", committed to critical inquiry and dedicated to freedom of thought and conscience. Regretfully, the battles of the past waged against obscurant, intolerant and dogmatic religions that many of our colleagues thought had been won, will have to be waged again today and no doubt tomorrow.

Paul Kurtz, Editor, "Free Inquiry", Buffalo, New York, USA.

The Swiss Freethought Association congratulates "The Freethinker" on its 100th birthday, and wishes it for the next century much success in the fight against superstition and the debasement of mankind. Voices like yours are in these days more necessary than ever, for the dark forces of religion, particularly those from the Far East, are now trying to conquer the youth of the European nations and of America.

Max Morf, Secretary, The Swiss Freethought Association, Berne, Switzerland.

"Vapaa Ajatteliija" sends fraternal and warm greetings to "The Freethinker" which has been a pioneer in carrying the torch of freethought. We note with satisfaction that the most famous editors of "The Freethinker", George William Foote and Chapman Cohen, are known figures here in the far north in Finland. Let it be our common purpose to strengthen the freethought movement and the World Union of Free-

A Death in the Family

JEAN STRAKER

Jean Straker, the only son of freethinking parents, was a frequent contributor to "The Freethinker" before his retirement to East Grinstead 11 years ago. When his mother died recently at the age of 93 he had to use "the system". The response of all concerned is a tribute to the much maligned National Health Service.

I was shaken by the rudest awakening of all from my mid-summer musing when my mother died. She had eaten salmon-trout for lunch, accompanied by a glass of cider and *Pilgrimage* on TV. Later she had sponge cake for tea. At 93 life seemed good, with the main discontent the non-publication of *Radio Times*.

A little after nine in the evening she rang her bell. I was working nearby and immediately went to her. She said "I'm ill". I put her on her bed. She was icy cold. I rubbed her legs and massaged her feet. I filled a hot-water bottle. Her breathing became difficult and she began to groan.

I telephone the doctor and described the symptoms. He said "I'll come." Within 15 minutes he was at her side. An examination told him she had had a heart attack, that I could no longer cope and that she would have to go into hospital for oxygen.

GREETINGS 1981

thinkers by the humanistic means of knowledge and enlightenment.

Kimmo Sundstrom, Chief Editor, "Vapaa Ajatteliija", Lohja, Finland.

"The American Rationalist" is pleased to congratulate "The Freethinker" upon reaching the venerable age of 100 years. As a publication which has had to overcome many problems to reach our 25th birthday (recently celebrated), we are keenly aware of the difficulties which face a freethought magazine in just trying to survive. "The Freethinker" has many reasons to be proud of its success. From the inauspicious jailing of Editor G. W. Foote for blasphemy, to the destruction of the publication office by fire from a bombing during World War II, "The Freethinker" has always managed to recover. The rationalists wish you continued success as a bulwark of freethought publishing.

Gordon Stein, Editor, "The American Rationalist", St Louis, Missouri, USA.

On behalf of the members of the Thomas Paine Society I would like to congratulate "The Freethinker" on attaining its centenary. Against very great odds the paper has kept its flag at full mast and presented to its readers a refreshing viewpoint that has turned the spotlight of reason upon some of the dark corners of cant and superstition that still so sadly seem to flourish in society. It is to be sincerely hoped that the paper will be able to survive to continue its important work. Robert Morrall, Secretary, The Thomas Paine Society, Nottingham.

He used the telephone. Within another 20 minutes a West Sussex ambulance had arrived. My mother was gently carried down and I rode with her to Queen Victoria Hospital. She was speedily made comfortable in a window-side bed in Dewar ward. I left her asleep.

The following morning she awoke, made a few rambling remarks and was clearly in pain. She was given drugs and passed into a coma. She died the following evening without recovering consciousness.

I tell you all this not to seek sympathy—she had had a good run of life and I was well conditioned by time to accept the inevitable—nor as a particularly interesting item of news, although all deaths make news, perhaps too dramatically and too often prematurely. It is the personal news none of us can avoid.

Yet it is necessary to say that in my mother's case she had it easy and I am sure that most of us would wish life to end so speedily in some such way without lingering creeping paralysis. It was made easy for her and for me because the system worked, without a hitch and with speed and compassion.

We are all quick to grumble and criticise when things go wrong, as they so often do. It is right that we should do so; but it is also right that we should acknowledge publicly and with gladness when the system works perfectly, as it did for my mother and me—and as it does for most people for most of the time when things are urgent.

What happened to us happens in a population of about 50 million a million times a year—about three thousand times a day. It is a sobering thought and puts one in one's little place.

As a family, we have not used the system very often. It was the first time the doctor had visited my mother in the 11 years she had lived in East Grinstead; but when we needed it the system worked perfectly even on a Sunday evening. This is news, and news which we should acknowledge.

Lilian Ethel Straker's body was accepted by a medical school in London for teaching and research purposes. HM Inspector of Anatomy wrote to her son as follows: "The medical profession as a whole and medical schools in particular are most conscious of the great honour and service done to them by public spirited and generous people like your mother who donate their bodies for the purpose of medical education and research. Without such generosity it would not be possible to maintain the very high standard of medicine as it is in our country at present".

LETTERS

SECULARISM AND MONARCHY

E. A. W. Morris, from Fiji, betrays his complete ignorance of the principles on which atheism, freethought and secularism are historically founded (Letters, October). With complete lack of logic sees no alternative between monarchy and Communism. Does he then suggest that the United States and all the many other republics are Communist?

I am not aware that secular publications "... all assume that someone who holds no religious beliefs must be a labourite, a communist, or a trade unionist." May I give him a few facts? The continued role of a worship of monarchy is the ultimate relic of primitive superstitions affecting society. The sole purpose of the ritual mumbo-jumbo of the coronation of the present Queen, and of all previous monarchs, with its magic ceremonies, anointing with oil, waving of wands, orbs, sceptres, et al, was to transform her into a deity with the aid of magical incantations. The whole concept of monarchy is still based on ignorant, primitive ideas that the ruler is a god in human form. Such savage concept should have no place in society today, let alone among supposed, enlightened secularists.

As to his sneer that all secularists seem to be "Communists", whatever that means, there nearly as many varieties of "Communist" as there are Christian. Let me give him a little history. In the last century there was a powerful republican and anti-monarchy feeling in Britain. These views were held not only by every leading secularist, but also by a large section of the Liberal Party and some Conservatives. The radical wing of the Liberals with their many radical clubs (in many cases virtually indistinguishable from branches of the National Secular Society) were enthusiastically republican to a man. (See my as yet unpublished manuscript in the International Institute of Social History, Amsterdam.)

Charles Bradlaugh, avowed enemy of all forms of Socialism as much of his writing shows, as well as the famous debate with H. M. Hyndman (see the columns of "The Freethinker" during 1884 and following years), was an outspoken anti-royalist. Indeed, he was widely tipped as the first President of a British republic. It is worth remembering that the most publicised present-day anti-royalist, Willie Hamilton, MP is on many more important issues somewhat to the Right of the Labour Party, and is understood to have supported Denis Healey in the recent vote for the deputy leadership. No, secularism implies rejection of all superstitious beliefs, including monarchy.

While it is interesting to read how the recent Royal Wedding ceremony was broadcast in Fiji, it would be of even more interest to know how many of the Indigenous population of that island possess a television set. Not many, according to a recent United Nations report.

J. M. ALEXANDER

I cannot say I am sorry that E. A. W. Morris was displeased by the article attacking monarchy. I found it a refreshing change from the stream of pro-monarchist hogwash and bunkum spewed forth by the media, and quite in keeping with the excellent secularist tradition of intransigent opposition to all forms of reaction and mystification.

As Mr Morris must know, this tradition, which dates from the days when Richard Carlile and Thomas Paine were persecuted for criticising priestcraft and kingcraft, was exemplified by Charles Bradlaugh who was not only President of the National Secular Society but

leader of the republican movement in the 1870s. His "The Impeachment of the House of Brunswick" still ranks among the best critiques of that feudal anachronism which is the monarchy.

The damnable state of affairs in Britain which Mr Morris laments is not the fault of the Labour movement, but that of an outmoded and decadent capitalist system, integral parts of which are an overpaid gang of scroungers and the Established Church which, like the Windsor family, is one of the country's biggest landowners.

Of course freethinkers do not have to be Socialists. But those of us who should combat the ideas of Mr Morris so that we can end all the manifestations, monarchy and state religion included, of capitalist oppression and exploitation.

TERRY LIDDLE

Acting Secretary, Socialist Secular Association

While I admire the remarkable insight of E. A. W. Morris, who claims to see a drift towards Communism in Mrs Thatcher's Britain, I find his arguments in favour of the Royal Family utterly ridiculous. Many people, for reasons best known to themselves, love and admire the Windsors. But what of it? It is often forgotten that thousands of Germans genuinely loved and admired Hitler. The fact that there is no widespread opposition to monarchy does not mean that the institution is automatically "a good thing". It should be remembered that there was never mass opposition to slavery or public executions.

I consider the monarchy to be an outmoded, useless and, worst of all, immoral institution. The Queen is probably the world's wealthiest woman, yet the upkeep of her family, numerous homes and private transport is paid for by her loyal (and often reluctant) subjects. This surely makes her the ultimate scrounger.

Why is this middle-aged lady in such a privileged position? Merely because her ancestors happened to be more ruthless, cunning and vicious than their contemporaries. Elizabeth II owes her throne to a completely undemocratic process, foreign usurpation, civil war, murder, deceit and sheer luck. I do not pretend to understand how Mr Morris can claim the abnormally sheltered Royal Family can possibly be guardians of British democracy.

JULIA ATKINSON

As a reader who has no firm views on the virtues of either monarchy or republicanism, may I comment on E. A. W. Morris's contention that the alternative to monarchy is Communism?

Mr Morris implies that monarchy is a bulwark against dictatorship. But it is now quite clear that at least one member of the Royal Family, the Duke of Windsor, was so pro-German that he was kept under surveillance during the last war. If he had not abdicated, and had been reigning as Edward VIII in 1940, Hitler may well have decided to invade Britain rather than turning his guns on Russia.

Fortunately, Edward VIII preferred Mrs Simpson rather than the Crown. For with a pro-German monarch on the throne, and the backing of supporters in Right-wing circles, including Parliament, Hitler would have had little difficulty in establishing the New Order in Britain.

O. S. PELHAM

E. A. W. Morris asks if secularists would have preferred Prince Charles and Lady Diana Spencer marry in a register office. As secularists we should encourage any move towards the secularisation of our country and cannot support public endorsement of religious ceremony. The answer to Mr Morris's question is therefore



“yes”. Those who wish to marry in church should do so before or after the register office ceremony.

COLIN MILLS

E. A. W. Morris claims that those who would abolish the monarchy “have simply no idea of the veneration, the love, which most of the people of the world have for our monarchy”. I am well aware of the esteem in which it is held, much the same as the Church. The point is that in both cases people are being conned. These institutions are both part of our heritage, reinforced by the Establishment, the media, our legal and educational systems.

The tourism argument for the Royal Wedding is a red herring. Indeed it is worth mentioning that according to figures issued by the Department of Trade in September, 17 per cent fewer overseas visitors came to Britain in July than in the same month last year, whereas 14 per cent more Britons went abroad.

ALAN D. GORE

How refreshing it was to read E. A. W. Morris's defence of monarchy. How dare anyone criticise Her Majesty and the Royal Family! Without the Royal Wedding we would have been denied the pleasure of seeing thousands of shoppers in central London carrying plastic bags emblazoned with the Prince of Wales and Lady Diana.

Indeed I have come to the conclusion that to relieve Britain of her present gloom we should have a Royal Wedding every month. Unfortunately these events are rather expensive. But they could be financed by withdrawing all unemployment benefit and supplementary allowances, thus causing, by a process of natural selection, surplus workers to die out. A few would have to be preserved, complete with cloth cap, boots and braces, to be kept in the Natural History Museum alongside other extinct creatures.

I quite agree that it would be absurd for royalty to marry in a mere register office. Vast cathedrals should be constructed in every large town so that no one is denied the privilege of seeing a Royal Wedding in all its splendour.

KEN WRIGHT

THE OLD, OLD STORY

The article “Blue Moonies” is a well-written, factual report without the sensationalist overtones often found in articles about cults (“News and Notes”, October). But why had it to be spoiled by the subjective, highly exaggerated and almost threatening last paragraph?

Applying terms like “idiotic” to belief systems only shows up the writer's ignorance. Researchers would back me up in claiming that even the weirdest cult is not as irrational in its belief as might appear from the outside. Closer study reveals a logic which can only be understood from the inside. It is not the ideologies but their abuse that we should fight. By declaring war on all religions you are creating a much greater danger; you are trying to deny people's right to spirituality.

Do you not realise that our increasingly secular society is one of the root causes of the “cult explosion”? There is deep longing for spiritual fulfilment in many young people, a search for answers to fundamental questions, the wish to opt out of materialism and the “rat race”.

What is urgently needed is not the destruction of Christianity but some de-ritualising and de-dogmatising of a message which is as new and meaningful now as when it was first proclaimed by Christ. That it has become unpalatable in some of the outward appearance may well be the reason why young people turn to cult leaders who offer Utopia, followed by exploitation.

It is easy to pick on cases which are an embarrassment to Christianity. There always have been and always will be troublesome people in all walks of life, and the Christian Church is no exception. But hold against them all those who have contributed positively to the progress and well-being of mankind, and the misfits will pale into insignificance. Personalities like St Francis, Albert Schweitzer, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Mother Theresa—to name but a few—have made their mark, together with the great army of nameless Christians who devoted their lives to the service of mankind. Education, hospitals, art and architecture—take the Christian influence out of these spheres, and where would we be?

Hitler tried to stamp out religion, starting with the Jews and having a go at persecuting Christians. Nobody can seriously wish to follow in his footsteps. Denying people spirituality is likely to create mal-adjusted personalities. As we all consist of body, mind and spirit, we ought not to neglect any of these parts of our own selves.

Fighting destructive movements will not achieve anything if you also fight those who might hold the key to cures and alternatives.

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Hon Secretary, Family Information Rescue and Rescue
(FAIR)

POETRY IN THE SERVICE OF FREETHOUGHT

David Reynolds, in his review of “The Freethinker, Vol 100”, states that “Poetry rarely appears in The Freethinker (October), surely reflecting the wisdom of the Editor”.

I suppose this is not meant seriously. I take it to be a facetious remark aimed at those who have never looked at a poem since their schooldays and who imagine that all verse is boring, or incomprehensible, or both. On the other hand, it may simply mean that the Editor rightly rejects whatever is good atheism but bad verse.

There have been many long and prosy definitions of poetry, but it has also been defined in two words; memorable speech. Now poetry which lives up to this definition can be and has been used to promote many causes, including our own. I am in fact now compiling a volume to be called “The Godless Poets: an Anthology of Atheist and Agnostic Verse”.

I have so far drawn on the works of Rupert Brooke, Samuel Butler, Arthur Hugh Clough, Edward Fitzgerald, Warren Gilbert, Thomas Hardy, Mairi MacInnes, F. O. Mann, Adrian Mitchell, Percy Bysshe Shelley, A. J. M. Smith, Stevie Smith, Barbara Smoker, Algernon Charles Swinburne, James Thomson, Verhaeren, Vigny and Voltaire. I should be most grateful to readers for suggesting further sources.

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The Editor replies: David Reynolds is a former Editor of “The Freethinker”, therefore it is likely that his remark was quite serious. Past incumbents of the editorial chair who succumbed to the pleadings and cajolery of versifiers have usually lived to curse their weakness. Publication of a poem would result in inundation by reams of doggerel—often memorable—rejection of which was regarded in the same light as strangulation of a favourite child. Much of the poetry published in “The Freethinker” illustrates that while the contributors may regard themselves as another A. C. Swinburne or Maureen Duffy, most of them are left at the starting-post by William McGonagall.

ing courses. They do not just pray on such occasions. One ex-member described the sessions as being "secret service training, more or less".

Heinrich Floreck, Director of the International Relief Fund, became worried about the way in which funds were being used. He consulted his solicitor who advised him to resign. He did so and accused the organisations of having spent only an insignificant proportion of donations received on relief work; transferring large sums from the Frankfurt account to pay the administrative expenses of other missions; issuing fictitious invoices to themselves; deciding to accumulate a "bolster" of between 50 and 100 million dollars instead of using the money for immediate relief work. Floreck said of his former colleagues: "They have deceived me and have exploited my Christian credulity".

ECI associates in Austria and Switzerland have also broken off relations with the American organisation. The Rev Hansjurg Stuckelberger, President of "Christliche Ostmission" (Christian Eastern Mission) in Zurich, said: "We have noticed that incorrect information is passed on. We have actually lied to our Swiss donors". Cornelius van Olst, chief of the Austrian Europa Mission, having worked with the Americans for eight years, came to this conclusion: "When I try to recount what has happened to the monies, I have to admit that several millions are missing".

Neither Floreck, Stuckelberger nor Van Olst know where the money has disappeared to. They could not oversee the complicated financial network through which the ECI shunts its wealth. Its affiliated organisations in West Germany, Sweden, Holland, France, Britain and South Africa deposit their funds in Pool Account 0917856 at the Deutsch Bank in Frankfurt. Those in Australia, New Zealand, Canada and the United States pay into a pool account in Los Angeles. Virgil Dale Smith says: "It is all very complicated; we are a very large organisation".

Some matters are not just complicated. In 1979 the International Relief Fund presented a British

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, 11 December, 8 pm. Martin Ryley: "Coping With Disablement Without Religion".

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". Sunday, 3 January 1982, 5.30 pm. Lord Oram: "Should the Third World Industrialise?"

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, London SW12, telephone 01-673 6234.

Lewisham Humanist Group. Unitarian Meeting House, 41 Bromley Road, Catford, London SE6. Thursday, 17 December, 7.45 pm. Saturnalian Party.

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

partner organisation with a demand for £20,000 in respect of "services rendered" in Thailand and Portugal. The accountant who signed the demand knew it to be a "fictitious invoice". Ex-Director Floreck now believes it was a trick to by-pass foreign exchange controls and illegally transfer sterling abroad.

Even the most gullible European supporters of the Evangelism Center International are coming to realise that although they do the collecting, it is the Americans who cream off the funds and say how money is to be spent.

THE FREETHINKER

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