

# The Freethinker

secular humanist monthly

founded 1881

Vol. 102, No. 10

OCTOBER 1982

25p

## ATHEISTS SHOW INDIAN WOMEN THE WAY FORWARD

"Basically our society is still a male-dominated one; the role of women is confined to family and home", Ch Vidya, a Member of Parliament in India, told an audience at Conway Hall, London, on 7 September. She added that although women are frequently engaged as auxiliary wage earners, that does not change their position in social relations. "As long as there are two separate sets of values for men and women, integrated development of human society is not possible. In fact the emancipation of women is social emancipation of all humans from the dual value system".

As well as being an active politician Mrs Vidya is involved with the work of the Atheist Centre at Vijayawada. She said that all over the world religion has been responsible for the suppression of women.

"In India, according to Hindu teachings, women were barred from reading Vedas and other scriptures. They were forbidden to learn Sanskrit. Some women defied such prohibitions and expressed themselves as great scholars. If they were successful, they were accepted by society not as a rule, but as an exception. Although individual women were respected, womanhood in general was condemned.

"Even today in Indian society a woman is considered to be dependent on her father in childhood, on her husband in youth and on her sons in old age. From birth to death a woman's life is mortgaged to male members of the family. Only sons are considered fit to perform last rites when the parents die. Without sons parents cannot get salvation. So the son is important here and now as a wage earner and physical protector, and important as spiritual saviour for salvation after death.

"Thus in the religious way of life, the role assigned to woman is only to bear children, raise the family and look after the household. It is still a big problem for parents in India to marry off a daughter".

Mrs Vidya said that Mahatma Gandhi endeavoured "to liberate women from the four walls of the kitchen and bring them into the fresh air of freedom, initiative, effort and achievement. Under his leadership women played an active and equal role in the freedom movement of India. He believed that they were the most powerful moral force at the disposal of the nation".

Independent India followed the path laid by the freedom movement. The constitution forbids any discrimination on grounds of sex. No role is prohibited to women in the political, social, economic and cultural life of the country. There is equal pay for the same job. It is a statutory obligation that every elected body or Government committee should have at least one woman on it.

### Men and Women Together

"But traditions die hard", Mrs Vidya declared. "Although Indian women have the opportunities, millions of them do not have the capacity to reach those opportunities. They are still subjected to male dominated social systems. Family planning has given a new incentive and dimension to the progress of women.

"Law and Government are in favour of women's liberation, and women have to take advantage of them. But in a tradition-bound society, continuity is firmer and change is slower.

"Here we see the important role of atheism and of atheist leaders like Periyar and Gora. They exhorted men and women to defy everything that degrades women. Gora openly championed the cause of unmarried mothers and said that any stigma attached to any aspect of woman's life degrades the quality

(continued on back page)

# The Freethinker

Editor: WILLIAM McLROY  
UK ISSN 0016-0687

The Freethinker was founded in 1881 by George William Foote and is published mid-monthly. The views expressed by contributors are not necessarily those of the Publishers or of the Editor.

Articles, Reviews, News Reports, Obituaries, Letters and announcements should be sent by the 10th of the preceding month to the Editor at 32 Over Street, Brighton, Sussex (telephone Brighton 696425). Unsolicited reviews should not be submitted.

Vol 102 No 10 CONTENTS October 1982

ATHEISTS SHOW INDIAN WOMEN THE WAY FORWARD ... ..	145
NEWS AND NOTES ... ..	146
The Mask is off; Clown Prince; Religious Mania, 1982	
HALLOWEEN AND ALL THAT ... ..	148
John L. Broom	
THE FIRST CENTURY ... ..	149
T. F. Evans	
JEREMY BENTHAM'S ANALYSIS OF RELIGION ... ..	152
David Berman	
FREETHINKER REVIEW ... ..	154
BOOK: That's the Way it Was: a Working-class Autobiography 1890-1950, by Walter Southgate (New Clarion Press) Reviewer: Barbara Wootton	
PAINE, CARLILE AND THE VICE SOCIETY	156
J. R. Spencer	
LETTERS ... ..	157
A. A. H. Douglas, Jim Herrick, Charles Wilshaw, G. J. Melmoth, Philip Harding, Nigel Sinnott, Walter Ford, Peter Danning	
HUMANISTS OPPOSE COURTROOM PRAYERS ... ..	160

Postal subscriptions, books orders and donations to the Freethinker Fund should be sent to:

G. W. FOOTE & COMPANY,  
702 HOLLOWAY ROAD, LONDON N19 3NL,  
(Telephone: 01-272 1266)

## 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.

Printed by David Neil & Co., South Street, Dorking, Surrey.

# NEWS

## THE MASK IS OFF

The international campaign to "sell" Pope John Paul II as a modern, progressive pontiff has taken a knock. Although he has never disguised his goodwill for the authoritarian and secretive Opus Dei, the Pope's granting of a personal prelature to "the Church within the Church" has caused consternation among Christians, including many Roman Catholics.

No doubt British Catholics have been recalling the damaging exposé of the organisation which appeared in *The Times* newspaper nearly two years ago. Revelations about the practices and activities that went on were uncomfortable reading for the faithful. One former member, Dr John Roche, of Linacre College, Oxford, recommended that the organisation be investigated by the Church.

Instead, Opus Dei has strengthened its position, with more than a little help from John Paul II. Its new status, giving it almost complete autonomy and the appearance of an international diocese, will lead to much greater influence and independence. One of its officials declared that the Pope's decision "proves fullest papal confidence in us".

Opus Dei was founded in 1928 by a Spanish priest, Josemaria Escriva de Balaguer. John Paul II is known to be a warm admirer of the founder, and one of his first duties as Pope was to pray at Escriva's tomb.

The organisation was notorious from the start for its ultra-conservative theology and politics. It enjoyed considerable power in Franco Spain where several government Ministers were members. Opus Dei established itself in post-war Britain and became a registered charity in 1964.

Although there has been widespread condemnation of Opus Dei both inside the Church and in the world Press, it is unlikely that commentators will point out the lesson to be learnt from John Paul II's advancement of such an organisation. The lesson is that the "liberal" image of the Pope which has been so assiduously promoted is a false one. John Paul II himself is a conservative and an authoritarian who favours such elements within his Church. This fact has been ignored, not least by spineless opportunists in some Protestant churches—particularly the Anglican—who wish to see him become the acknowledged leader of world Christianity.

The elevation of a Pole to the papacy was bad news for humanity. Polish Catholics are among the world's most fanatical and aggressive. John Paul II's

# S AND NOTES

Catholicism is the kind to be expected from someone of his national origins.

The present Pope is not only reactionary and authoritarian; he is dangerous as well. One of his predecessors, Pius XII, was about the nastiest piece of work to occupy the Chair of Peter over the last hundred years. But it showed; he was a cold fish who was neither liked nor trusted. John Paul II, on the other hand, appears to be warm, friendly and close to the people. His career has included a spell as an actor. He is still a skilful performer, capable of presenting the most inhuman and irresponsible social policies and at the same time exuding sympathy, concern and understanding, especially for young people. He is also a dab hand at projecting himself—no stage director could teach John Paul II anything about taking a curtain call.

Millions have been fooled by the strong and pleasing personality of Pope John Paul II. However, his decision to express "fullest papal confidence" in an outfit like Opus Dei, with its eliteness, secretiveness, emphasis on the worth of pain and mortification, sexual conservatism and Right-wing politics, should make Catholic liberals think seriously on what way their Church is going. It certainly should encourage Protestant ecumenists to ponder on what their position will be in an alliance with Rome.

## CLOWN PRINCE

Were it not for their manifestly harmful influence on gullible dupes—particularly, as in the case of the Moonies and Children of God, on young people—the barmy beliefs and outlandish behaviour of weird religious groups would provide welcome relief from the dreariness of life with Thatcher. Many of their leaders have a propensity for conferring grandiose titles on one another, an amusing habit which was recently highlighted by a Press Council ruling in a case brought by the Aetherius Society. That worthy organisation complained of a report which appeared in a Sunday newspaper, concerning a ceremony which took place in a London church. The *News of the World*, best known as a recorder of sexual frolics and consequently Britain's favourite Lord's day reading matter, published Gloria Stewart's account of the proceedings, with photographs by Michael Clark.

The report described the "coronation" of Aetherius Society leader, George King, a former chauffeur who now rejoices in the title of His Serene

Highness Prince George King de Santorini. The crowning ceremony was performed by a former sheep farmer from Italy, Prince Henri III of Paleologue, in the presence of about 250 followers. These included the self-styled "Sir" Richard Lawrence, holder of the much-prized honorary Doctorate of Divinity from California's International Evangelistic Crusaders Inc.

Reporter Gloria Stewart was refused an interview by His Serene Highness and therefore assumed there was no point in requesting an invitation to the coronation. She nevertheless attended the event at St George's, Hanover Square, a fashionable church in Mayfair which is often the scene of society weddings. Her report of the occasion upset the serenity of Prince George.

It was claimed that the Vicar, the Rev William Atkins, was misled over the booking of the church. He confused the Aetherius Society with a recognised chivalrous order. Mr Atkins would probably have been more cautious about accepting the booking had he realised that Aetherius Society members believed that their "master" would arrive in a space ship, or that George King collects foreign titles like school-boys collect foreign stamps. One of his titles is His Eminence Sir George King, Archbishop Metropolitan of the Aetherius Church. (The Editor of *Debrett*, who knows a thing or two about such matters, described the titles as rubbish.)

The Aetherius Society was founded in the mid-1950s after George King was contacted by "the Masters of Outer Space" and appointed "the voice of Interplanetary Parliament". Over the years the Society attracted numerous followers and its achievements include arranging a personal appearance of Jesus Christ at London's Caxton Hall.

From time to time members of the Society have taken part in what were known as "spiritual pushes". The object of this exercise was to frustrate the machinations of evil forces in outer space who were not well disposed towards the inhabitants of Earth.

Probably the most ludicrous and certainly the most dangerous operation which The Aetherius Society undertook commenced in 1959 and lasted for two years. It involved the ascent of certain "holy" mountains which were then charged with "spiritual power". George King and his colleagues travelled to the United States, New Zealand, Australia and Switzerland on this pilgrimage. It was by no means a piece of cake. One of the favoured peaks was 14,000 feet high and the climbers suffered from frostbite and other afflictions. Some of them were lucky to have survived.

The Press Council ruled in favour of the *News of the World*. While the report contained some minor inaccuracies, they were insignificant and "did not detract seriously from what was a generally fair and accurate account of what the newspaper described as a bizarre ceremony".

## RELIGIOUS MANIA, 1982

Over 200,000 spectators, many of them children, gathered recently at the town of Guardia Sanframondi in the Apennines to witness "purification from sin" rites which have been performed there every seven years since 1620. The 400 robed penitents inflicted wounds on themselves in what one newspaper described as a mixture of mysticism, hysteria, faith and good tourist business.

A long procession, which included tableaux of biblical scenes, left the church of St Sebastian. When the signal was given, penitents of both sexes and all ages started to beat themselves. Women screamed and fainted as bloodstains appeared on the white robes.

One of the organisers, a manager of the tourist board, said that in the 18th century the district suffered from drought, intense frost and pestilence. By such acts of penitence the people "sought to implore God's mercy and grace . . . The majority of the visitors see in the rite a deep spiritual significance".

Another display of religious fervour has been reported, this time from Australia, where crowds turned up for a ceremony at the Pavlou family's farm near a small community known as Campbell's Creek. Sick and disabled people were splashed with water from a "holy tank" which had been erected "according to the instructions of Our Lady". Mrs Despina Pavlou claims to have seen apparitions of the Virgin Mary on a number of occasions since March.

The Pavlous belong to the Greek Orthodox Church, but it was a Roman Catholic priest who led the recitation of prayers while spectators waited for a television crew to arrive.

As the faithful and the curious assembled, Mrs Pavlou's daughter, Niki, sold raffle tickets. "We need a lot of money to build a church here", she explained. Meanwhile, her brother Paul was busy collecting pledges of money which he entered in a notebook. Mr Pavlou, an invalid who receives a pension, also appealed for funds, promising that contributors' names "will be in the history of the church".

The Pavlou family claim that many people believe their "holy tank" will become Australia's equivalent of Lourdes. It is, most appropriately, situated near to Campbell's Creek rubbish tip.

## Halloween and all That

JOHN L. BROOM

In an article "Our Pagan Past" in the April *Free-thinker*, R. J. Condon erroneously stated that the last day of this month, Halloween, was the eve of All Souls Day. In fact it is the eve of All Saints Day (1 November), a Festival transferred by Pope Gregory IV from 21 February in the year 835. All Souls Day (2 November) did not become part of the Christian Calendar until the year 998. Both it and All Saints Day are, however, associated with the cult of the dead, the former commemorating the faithful dead said to be at present languishing in purgatory, the latter the blessed canonised dead believed to be in paradise.

Both dates were chosen deliberately, in accordance, as Mr Condon pointed out, with the Church's policy of transforming pagan festivals into Christian holy days, so that the customs of the people should be disturbed as little as possible. Thus, Halloween was originally the eve of the Celtic festival of Samhuinn (meaning, perhaps, the end of summer) which marked the beginning of the Celtic New Year on November 1. Since, in November, the sun's strength is on the wane, and all nature seems given over to the powers of darkness, the first of the month naturally became a day on which those who had died were remembered. On its eve, the souls of the departed were said to revisit their old homes, and witches to ride on broomsticks, egg-shells, or tabby cats on their way to their great annual convention or "Sabbath", which was usually held in the graveyard of a church, accompanied by unspeakable orgies. In order to combat these evil phenomena, and to burn up the witches who flew overhead, Druidic priests lit huge bonfires at dusk on the hilltops, as they did at dawn to welcome the summer on the other great feast of the Celtic Year, Beltane, on May 1. Effigies of witches were also burned on the Halloween bonfires. This tradition persists in some of the Celtic areas of Britain to this day, though in almost the whole of England, and even, alas, in most of Scotland, the bonfire burning has now advanced in date from Halloween to November 5, and the effigy transferred from that of a witch to the likeness of the ill-fated Guy Fawkes.

The practice of "guising", or dressing up in fantastic garments and wearing grotesque masks, was possibly originally intended to ward off the evil spirits abroad on Halloween, but nowadays the "guisers" (all children) represent the weird creatures themselves, in the form of ghosts, fairies, brownies, hobgoblins, gnomes, trolls and so on. The youngsters

---

**Hossein Dallil, a 54-year-old mat weaver, has been executed by firing squad in Isfahan for drinking alcohol and shouting abuse at the religious authorities. He had been found guilty by an Islamic court of being "a corrupter of the earth and waging war on God".**

(continued on page 153)

# The First Century

T. F. EVANS

When Jim Herrick vacated *The Freethinker* editorial chair last year he started to write a pamphlet on the paper's first hundred years. But he found so much interesting material that the projected pamphlet became a much longer work. *Vision and Realism—a Hundred Years of The Freethinker*, which was published last month, tells the story of a unique achievement in radical journalism.

Bradlaugh named G. W. Foote. It was Foote, a militant atheist, who founded *The Freethinker* in 1881. He was editor from the first issue until his death in 1915.

Chapman Cohen, who succeeded Foote, was a free thinker in a special sense. He had never rejected religion because he had never had a religion to accept or reject. He was pleased to see himself "examining the different forms of religious belief with the same detached curiosity that a Professor of Zoology would study and classify specimens in a museum". Differing in some respects from Foote, Cohen resembled him in his longevity. He began writing for *The Freethinker* in 1897 and took over as Editor in 1915, to continue until failing health forced his resignation in 1951.

Chapman Cohen had thus been closely associated with the journal for nearly 56 years and was Editor for 35. The paper had therefore had only two editors in the first 70 years of its life. In the next 30 years, it was to have as many as ten. This striking contrast reflects no discredit on those who undertook the task in the later period. Rather it is an indication of the changing circumstances of periodical publication and, in particular, the very great difficulty in finding an editor for a journal that was unable to pay a salary for a full-time post.

## The Battle Against Superstition

Cohen's immediate successor as Editor was F. A. Ridley, a writer who had a much stronger political commitment to add to his other qualities than did his distinguished predecessors. He was a convinced socialist and approached the problems of the day from a distinct Left-wing standpoint. In an article which he wrote after the death of Cohen in 1954, Ridley surveyed what he saw as the "three sequential phases" of the "historic Freethought Movement, which began with Owen, Holyoake and Bradlaugh". The first had been a period of "political Secularism" under the leadership of Bradlaugh; the second was the era of "Bible banging" led by Foote; while the third was the period of Cohen's more intellectual approach, in which "the positive philosophy of Atheism" was developed.

Jim Herrick gives splendid examples of the polemical journalism of each of these three periods. Foote, in particular, lends himself to most effective quotation. He believed in a belligerent style. In the opening issue of the paper, he declared that

the Freethinker is an anti-Christian organ, and must therefore be chiefly aggressive. It will wage relentless war against Superstition in general, and against Christian Superstition in particular. It will do its best to employ the resources of Science, Scholarship, Philosophy and Ethics against the claims of the

To score a century in any field is an achievement. To reach three figures when the bowling is always hostile and the wicket is always difficult is a very considerable feat. Without pursuing the cricket metaphor too far, however, it must be admitted that some of the bowling that has been directed against *The Freethinker* during its first hundred years has been rather poor in quality, even if it has never ceased to be unfriendly in intention; still the hundred has had to be scored. That this has happened is the result of great dedication and devotion and hard work by very many people, the majority of whom will remain unknown but who deserve to be included in the loud round of applause that now goes up. It is probably more difficult for a small magazine to reach the century than it is for many other publications or institutions, and our applause is even warmer because of this.

The story of the achievement has been told in *Vision and Realism*, by Jim Herrick, who left the Editor's chair a year ago. There is a foreword by Barbara Wootton, in which she remarks on the labour that must have been necessary in reading through a hundred bound volumes in preparation for writing the book:

The author of this book must have undertaken an immensely heavy burden of research, some of it, no doubt, more than a little tedious. But the reader need have no fear that any of that tedium will be passed on to him or her. Jim Herrick has produced a lively and highly readable story centred on the life of one unorthodox journal. But, incidentally, in his presentation of the setting of that story, he has written an exceptionally fascinating chapter of British social history, covering the past century's changes in beliefs, attitudes and conventions.

## Early Days

In the opening pages of the book, the origins of *The Freethinker* are traced back to earlier radical, secularist and atheist publications, among them Richard Carlile's *Republican*, G. J. Holyoake's *Reasoner and Herald of Progress*, the *National Reformer*, of which Charles Bradlaugh was a joint editor, and the *Secularist*, started by Holyoake in 1876, in co-operation with a young admirer of

Bible as a Divine Revelation; and it will not scruple to employ for the same purpose any weapons of ridicule or sarcasm that may be borrowed from the armoury of Common Sense.

So vigorously did he carry out this policy that, in 1882, he was sentenced to 12 months imprisonment for blasphemy, the effect of which was not to alter his views nor to break his spirit.

On the contrary, the prosecution of *The Freethinker* and its Editor gave him great encouragement and brought valuable publicity and fame—or, more probably, notoriety. Sales went up, even if they fell in the next few years. Towards the end of the century, however, the paper settled down to a more modest circulation, even while it became closely associated with other secularist and free-thinking bodies and was “the only substantial journal of the militant free thought movement to survive”.

Foote was restricted to the Bible for reading matter during the greater part of his spell in prison and, making a virtue of necessity, he contended that “searching the Scriptures is the best cure for believing in the Scriptures”. The paper accordingly continued to direct violent attacks against Christianity, Christian theologians and organisations such as the Christian Evidence Society, the members of which Chapman Cohen was later to call, in his autobiography, “unscrupulous and foul-mouthed liars”.

### No Thanks to God

It was a problem—not always successfully overcome—to avoid repetition, but *The Freethinker* was never afraid to comment on issues of social and political importance, without direct religious connection, even while, for the greater part, it kept away from any identification with party views. The Boer War and the Great War provided generous opportunities for comment on the way in which religion was called to the colours, but the paper did not take any firm line on matters of national or international politics. It was enough to ask scathingly whether, for example, when God was thanked for peace in 1918, thanks ought to be sent in the same direction for 20 million deaths. The answer to the question was that “really, the less said about God, the better”.

An additional subject of wry comment was the ex-Kaiser's subscription to the British and Foreign Bible Society. It is recorded solemnly that “no one doubted Wilhelm's religiosity until Christians found it convenient to drop him”.

In the 20th century, *The Freethinker* has continued the battle, but, as pointed out by Ridley, emphasis has necessarily changed. There has been the ceaseless campaigning, not so much against Christianity and Christian theology themselves, as against the injustices and perversions caused by the efforts of the so-called defenders of the faith to impose their doctrines and observances on other people and by

expecting them to accept such impositions without resistance. An example has been the BBC which has come in for well-deserved punishment. Lord Reith, not surprisingly, was a favourite target. Only one of his pronouncements is quoted in the book, but it is a rich one. In 1925, he told a committee of enquiry into the future of broadcasting that

there should be a definite association with religion in general and the Christian religion in particular. Broadcasting should not assist the secularization of Sunday.

In our own day, *The Freethinker* has been specially energetic, under succeeding editors, in boldly and resolutely resisting the influence of unthinking and arrogantly dogmatic approaches to such controversial subjects as personal mortality in sexual relations, “obscenity” in entertainment, a field in which the impertinent and opinionated Mrs Whitehouse has been put in her place on several occasions, about the problems of Ireland, South and North — countries which, almost more than anywhere else in the world, should stand as object lessons on the dangers springing from the dogmatic introduction of religious prejudice into every feature of life—South African policies on apartheid and freedom of speech, both in time of war and at peace.

The closing pages of the book give details of concentration on specific causes and against intolerance in general rather than on the simple “Bible banging” of the early days. This has given rise to questions about the paper's essential position. Some critics, longing for the battle to be carried to the very steps of the altar itself, as it were, have looked back with yearning to Foote's declaration of war against Christian superstition and have felt that anything less vigorous and less vehement is a betrayal of the cause for which pioneers have laboured with such energy.

### The Decline of Religion

Yet, in a world where, even though organised religion still has a privileged position and is enormously powerful, actual orthodox religious belief has declined catastrophically, the struggles have most profitably been joined in different areas. Campaigns for personal morality based on tolerance and understanding of the true human predicament rather than on outdated prohibitions have contributed to more enlightened thought and conduct. With all its faults, the present age treats subjects such as homosexual behaviour, divorce and abortion, to name only the most controversial themes, in a more adult and sympathetic way than in the past. *The Freethinker* has carried great weight here.

It has also helped to maintain traditions of tolerance in political areas, even to the extent of including an article supporting the racist views of Enoch Powell, on the principle that even the most iniquitous views should be heard in order that reasoned argu-

ment may be given the chance to prevail against them. This extreme practice of tolerance did not find favour with all readers. Indeed, it is hard for even the most tolerant to imagine the pages of *The Freethinker* being given over to defences of the more far-fetched manifestations of religious fanaticism, such as the evangelism of Billy Graham, the outpourings of the Rev Ian Paisley or the pernicious idiocies of such "sects" as the so-called Scientologists, the Moonies and other similar bodies.

To mention these is to indicate that there is still work to do. Even if, as mentioned above, we find that orthodox belief has declined, there is still an amazing amount of credulity abroad, ranging from primitive revivalism to the un-scientific and totally irrational astrology, which can evoke the interest of otherwise educated and intelligent people.

History provides many examples of those who, fighting fiercely against an evil, nevertheless find themselves adopting some of the methods and style of their enemy. This is particularly so when the cause of the enmity is a question of belief or dogma. Regrettably, not even the world of free thinkers has been free from these faults. There are secularists and humanists who can be as intolerant and dogmatic as the superstitious religious believers whom they condemn.

In Bernard Crick's book, *In Defence of Politics*, there are several valuable pages on the danger in politics of concentrating too fiercely on one solution to the ills of society. They may apply with equal force to those who are one hundred per cent convinced of the iniquity of all religious belief and practice as to those who cling tenaciously to superstition and dogma. A free thinker, therefore, must cling to his principles and lose no opportunity to show up the idiocies and the dangers of the unfree method of thinking, such as the confused "double-think" which marked the protests against the "wet" nature of the religious observances following the Falklands war.

### A Sense of Proportion

As Jim Herrick's book shows, *The Freethinker* has had a splendid first hundred years. It has changed. Circumstances have reduced its size and increased the length of time between issues. Yet, as a monthly rather than the weekly it used to be, it can have the opportunity to add to its record of good writing and perhaps to add to the succession of eminent writers who have contributed to its pages. A random selection includes Bernard Shaw and Bertrand Russell, Edward Blishen, Dora Russell, Brigid Brophy, Barbara Wootton, Maureen Duffy and Hermann Bondi. The freedom of the human spirit is inexhaustible and nobility and sweetness of thought may be expressed by many different voices—some of them even ostensibly religious.

If a final wish may therefore be given to the paper as it moves into its next century, it is that it may never be afraid of controversy and that it may never be afraid of expressions of the best that has been thought and said, even if some of it may come from sources that, at first sight may have nothing in common with the humanist, free thinking world that should be, as a matter of course, the main provider. As Barbara Smoker once said, "genuine knowledge and understanding of the enemy are far more likely to win battles than is ignorance fed upon one's own propaganda".

To that final wish may be added a corollary. It is that the paper and its adherents may never lose their sense of proportion, and this entails a sense of humour. It is good that the new Editor, taking over from Jim Herrick (whose excellent qualities may be seen clearly in this book), is one who has a sense of humour. With a combination of vision and realism and a good lacing of humour, the paper cannot go far wrong.

**JIM HERRICK**

## **VISION AND REALISM—A 100 YEARS OF "THE FREETHINKER"**

foreword:

Barbara Wootton

Price £2, plus 25p postage

Special rates for quantities

Orders (with payment) to:

G. W. Foote & Co, 702 Holloway Road,  
London N19 3NL, telephone 01-272 1266

## **Freethinker Fund**

Donations remain at about the same level as last month. Our thanks to the latest list of contributors.

J. Barr, £5; D. Batten, £1.50; B. and S. Beer, £20; B. and E. Brown, £2; J. Busby, £2; A. M. Chapman, £2; F. Davis, 2; D. Fyffe, £1; A. D. Gore, £1; R. Hoare, £2; A. A. Howse, £5; W. Irvine, £3; G. Jamieson, £1.50; D. A. Langdon, £3; J. L. Levin, £3; J. Manus, \$2; D. Marrietta, \$2; H. Newman, \$12; W. Ramsay, \$6; D. Scarth, £16.50; A. E. Smith, £3; P. D. Ward, £2; C. R. Wilshaw, £3; M. Wood, \$2; R. G. Wood, £2; A. E. Woodford, £3.

Total for the period 9 August 1982 until 3 September 1982: £83.50 and \$24.

# Jeremy Bentham's Analysis of Religion

DAVID BERMAN

Jeremy Bentham (1748-1832), the Utilitarian philosopher and reformer, influenced a generation of social thinkers. But the importance of his anti-religious writings is not appreciated; they were excluded by Sir John Bowring from the Collected Edition and are given little prominence in biographical works. Although Bentham had to disguise his attacks, perceptive readers understood that Christianity was his prime target.

On the 150th anniversary of Jeremy Bentham's death it seems appropriate to comment on his work as a freethinker, particularly since his three critiques of religion are—as Mary Mack notes in her *Jeremy Bentham* (1962)—“among the most submerged of Bentham's writings . . . [having been] excluded by Bowring from the Collected Edition.” (p.302). Bentham himself published only the *Church of Englandism and its Catechism Examined* (1818). The other two works were edited and arranged from his manuscripts by Francis Place and George Grote, who published, respectively, *Not Paul, but Jesus* (1823)—whose thesis is that Jesus' spiritual message was perverted by St Paul—and the *Analysis of the Influence of Natural Religion on the Temporal Happiness of Mankind* (1822), which exerted a profound influence on J. S. Mill. The *Analysis*, Mill writes in his *Autobiography* (1873), “contributed materially to my development [and] was one of the books which by the searching character of its analysis produced the greatest effect on me (pp.69-70). Mill's opinion is confirmed by J. M. Robertson, who describes it as “the most stringent attack made on theism between d'Holbach and Feuerbach”.\* Yet despite such tributes, Bentham's *Analysis* has been out of print for more than a hundred years.

This neglect is especially regrettable since the *Analysis* is more relevant now, I suggest, than 160 years ago; for the religious debate has shifted from the question of the truth of religion to that of its utility. Present-day Christians are scarcely interested in arguing for the existence of God, or for historicity of Jesus' resurrection and miracles; instead they urge that belief in God and in Christ is personally enriching, morally bracing, life affirming; that it makes for social cohesion, advances justice and peace, and so on.

The *Analysis* was (and perhaps still is) the most damaging assault on the position, dominant until this century, that morality and social order require a religious infrastructure. Others had argued that an unbeliever *could* be moral, and that a community of atheists is *possible*. The *Analysis*, however, takes

the war into the enemy's camp, showing how difficult it is for a *believer* to be a useful or happy member of society. And yet it does more than merely reveal the many-sided miseries of religion. It is a comprehensive attack on religion, although this may be overlooked by those who fail to see behind the disguises it employs as protection against prosecution. Thus the writer, who signs himself “Philip Beauchamp”, claims that he is not attacking revealed religion or the clergy who profess it (pp.6 and 11); his target, he says, is natural religion: the belief in an omnipotent and incomprehensible Being. However, intelligent readers would have recognised this defensive ploy widely used by freethinkers such as Collins, by Hume in his essays on miracles and immortality and, most recently, by Shelley in his *Refutation of Deism* (1814).

Bentham's complete attack on “Jug”—his nickname (from Juggernaut) for religion—has three prongs: religious belief is shown to be (1) irrational (2) naturalistically explicable and (3) pernicious. Let us first consider (1). Religious beliefs are irrational because they are “extra-experimental” (p.87), by which Bentham means something similar to Popper's notion of non-falsifiability. An extra-experimental belief is one which “precludes you from applying the process of refutation, and thus from detecting any falsehood whatever” (p.90). As belief in “God cannot be founded on experience” (p.87), no empirical evidence can either prove or disprove His existence. Similarly, belief in Divine design (p.87), miracles (p.89), the justice of trial by ordeal (p.93), and the existence of witches (p.91), are all extra-experimental. There is no way of falsifying them. It is in *this* sense that there is no point in considering whether they are true or false (p.5). Yet to detach experience from belief is to unhinge the mind, producing a “thorough deprivation of the intellect” (p.91) or “phrenzy” (p.106). No possible belief can be rationally rejected if extra-experimental belief is accepted.

## Fear and Belief

This indictment is damning, but Bentham does not rest his case here. He tries to show how religionists acquire their crazy extra-experimental beliefs. In this second prong of his attack on “Jug” he argues that we endow God with moral and intellectual perfections, such as goodness and wisdom, because we are intimidated by His power. Because we fear Him, we flatter Him as we would a powerful human tyrant (pp.29-31). We convince ourselves that He is benevolent just as a Roman sycophant might persuade himself that Caligula was a god. To argue



that the Deity is really good, and that the evils in His creation arise because the material He has to work with resists His good intentions, would imply not only that He is comprehensible but that "His power only extends to the production of the already existing amount of good. [But if] He can produce no more good . . . it is vain to trouble ourselves about Him" (p.24n).

So Bentham shows that our belief in God's endearing attributes actually arises from our desire to flatter a capricious and powerful despot. Next he subjects to genetic analysis the key attribute of omnipotence. Some men appear to perform astonishing deeds, and, continues Bentham, "We ascribe to the man who astonishes us by an incomprehensible feat, the ability of astonishing us still more by a great many others. Nay, the power, which we are led to conceive as exerted, seems too vast to be ascribed to him alone. We, therefore, introduce an omnipotent accomplice into the scene . . ." (p.106). So our belief in God's goodness stems from our fear of His power, which in turn is rooted in our amazement at wonder workers, for whom Bentham also offers a naturalistic basis.

Of course, to identify the non-rational origins of a belief is not, as such, to show that it is mistaken. Yet in the case of extra-experimental beliefs such genetic refutations are not, I think, fallacious. For if the believer has no reason or evidence for his belief, then I can see no reason why the genetic analysis should not be accepted as the correct explanation of his belief. "You do not really believe in God because of some mysterious faith"—Bentham is, in effect, telling the believer—"your fideism is explicable as the natural outcome of certain psychological tendencies".

### Religion—Evil and Pernicious

Finally, there is the third prong of Bentham's assault. Belief in "Jug" is not simply irrational and naturalistically explicable: it is also pernicious. It produces the greatest unhappiness for the greatest number. Hence even if God did exist, it would be better for our happiness in this life if we did not believe in Him. This is Bentham's central argument. Religious belief is "impotent for the purpose of resisting any temptation, and efficient only in the production of needless and unprofitable misery" (p.62). Thus devotion to God is measured by "the amount and intensity of pain which you . . . gratuitously inflict upon yourself" (p.64). Bentham lists: fasting; celibacy; abstinence from repose, cleanliness, personal decoration, and mirth; gratuitous surrender of property, time, labour, and honours (p.65).

Predictably, he dwells on "the universal prevalence of religious hatred" (p.76f); more characteristic is his reply to the common objection that only "post-humous apprehensions" are able to prevent the

"secret crime": "To say that earthly laws do not actually perform this, is merely to affirm, that governments are defective and ought to be reformed" (p.61). In short, Jug's all-seeing God is to be replaced by Bentham's architectural plan for universal inspection—the Panopticon. An apparent supernatural necessity points to a real need for social reform or scientific insight.

\*See *Short History of Freethought* (1906), p.376n. Robertson altered his assessment in the *History of Freethought in the Nineteenth Century* (1929), pp.86-88. I have referred to, and quoted from, Edward Truclove's 1875 edition of the *Analysis*.

---

**Christians in Belfast have taken time off from killing and maiming one another in an attempt to close down a sex shop in the city's "bible belt". Police have also raided the establishment. Conegate, a London-based firm which owns the shop, said that trading would continue. Another Conegate shop was recently set on fire in Leeds by a group called the Angry Women's Brigade. Mrs Christine King, a representative of Conegate, said: "We would not have expanded so rapidly—138 shops in under four years—unless there had been a need for us". Over 2,000 Leeds customers have signed a statement that the shop is well run and fills a need in the community.**

---

### Halloween and all That

go from door to door on Halloween, carrying turnip lanterns, and asking the householders to give them gifts of apples, nuts or money. Both the apples and the nuts are relics of our pagan past—in Celtic mythology the fruit of the apple tree or Silver Bough (see the Golden Bough of classical mythology), admitted the souls of the dead to the next world, while the hazelnut was the source and symbol of all wisdom. In many areas of Britain the children also play mischievous pranks on their elders on Halloween, though these, unfortunately, sometimes degenerate into outright vandalism.

The evening is usually rounded off with a grand party, in which apples and nuts again play a prominent part. Another part of the festivities is usually devoted to fortune-telling, a custom which, of course, also derives from the Celtic New Year, when omens and auguries were especially appropriate. Indeed, it is still believed in parts of the Scottish Highlands that a child born on October 31 will have the gift of second sight.

Halloween is one of the most attractive of all our festivals, and we must agree with Mr Condon that any attempt by Christians or anyone else to abolish or dilute it should be resolutely opposed.

# BOOK

**THAT'S THE WAY IT WAS: A WORKING CLASS AUTOBIOGRAPHY 1890-1950** by Walter Southgate. Foreword by Stan Newens, MP. New Clarion Press, 11 Silkham Road, Oxted, Surrey; £2.95

This fascinating book is quite outstanding among the growing number of ex-working-class autobiographies. For one thing it is exceptionally readable. One might have supposed that the education provided by London East End schools in the final decades of the nineteenth century would have been fairly primitive; yet the literary style of this book is one of its immediate attractions. Its pages are strewn with vivid images condensed into few words—such as the tall husband and frail little wife, who, when shopping together, resembled “an Alsatian dog, with a poodle trotting at its side”.

Moreover in telling his story, Walter Southgate has, as Terry Philpot's postscript observes, painted a lively picture of the “terrible poverty” of East London slums “lightened by the richness of the community and its life”. His mother, whose childhood was spent in the age of the stage coach, lived to see the birth of radio, but never had a new garment in her life. In Walter's boyhood soup kitchens (and pawn tickets) were regular and essential elements in daily life. Doctors were too expensive to be consulted except in cases where this was “absolutely imperative”, and children appear to have been constantly hungry. Walter himself as a schoolboy habitually worked 40 hours a week before and after school for three shillings and six pence. Yet when he left at age 14, he had never missed or been late for one single day's attendance.

But for all its poverty and squalor, the East End slum was also a close-knit community, with definite and generally recognised social obligations and standards. Street games on Sundays were forbidden to children, even in families in which no one went to church; a woman would repeatedly pawn her wedding ring in order to help a neighbour in distress. Even the destitute resisted incarceration in the workhouse as the ultimate indignity.

At the same time it was a wholly male-dominated community. For the men, the pub was virtually the only focus of social life, and excessive drinking became habitual (even if with gin at 2½ pence per “half-quart” the women did get an occasional chance to join in). Typically, Walter's father would haggle with his wife over a few shillings in the housekeeping money, though there was “never such tardiness when it came to treating his friends in the bar”.

As he grew up, Walter became sickened by the abject poverty around him, and began to reflect on the contrast between that and the “ostentatious display of wealth, the banquets, which one could read

# FREETHINKER

about, but not see”. Was the plight of the down-and-outs due to their own folly and wickedness? Why were the rich class rich? Such questions became increasingly insistent.

Unlike many of his contemporaries, whose education seems to have been one long sequence of excessive physical punishments, Walter records that he acquired at school “not so much vocational or academic knowledge” as a “set of ideals which he must strive to live up to”. (For that he gave credit to a particular, named, school teacher.) Nevertheless, when he left school and asked his father what his next move should be, he got the simple answer: “Anything you like, so long as you bring home money to keep yourself”.

Several chapters later Walter tells us that, notwithstanding an excellent character note from his headmaster and his exceptional record of school attendance, replies to advertisements from sculptors and such like for “a boy of talent” proved futile. He therefore soon abandoned an ambition to become an artist, and settled for an office-boy's job, licking stamps and copying letters in a lawyer's office. There his duties occasionally involved walking the corridors of the High Court, and thanks both to his own regular attendance at evening classes, and to some coaching by his employer, he thus became familiar with both the personnel and the ways of the law.

Then came the 1914-18 war. To that Walter's reaction was atypical, even of the attitude of many ardent socialists. In this book he describes his astonishment at the “abysmal ignorance of the masses as to the real causes of the European situation”. Likewise, when conscription was imposed, he sided with “those other young socialists” who did not accept that it was their duty to be “used as cannon-fodder because a Parliament of old men had said so”. Faced with the Tribunal which had to judge the sincerity of his conscientious objection to military service, he argued that his life should not be sacrificed “for politicians' slogans or guaranteed 5 per cent dividends on war loans”, while “the Bill Browns were wallowing in the Flanders mud, risking having their guts blown out” — to which the Tribunal's Chairman replied that he “could not understand this young man's mentality”. Nevertheless the final decision was that the said young man “had a conscience”. He was therefore directed, as an alternative to military service, to work of national importance as an agricultural labourer—or, as he put it himself, “ordered to pick up a shovel or hoe or hod and work like a

# REVIEW

slave for a pittance".

Even before the Kaiser's War Walter had landed a job in the Sheet Metal Workers' Union in which he dealt with claims under the National Insurance Acts from the Union's members. To this post he was happily able to return after the war; and, since by World War II (on the merits of which this book expresses no opinion) he was too old for military service, he stayed put with the Union till 1943, when the Essex County Council took him on as a Rest Centre officer.

On the conclusion of hostilities that job folded up, and there followed 18 months' unemployment, until he took the plunge of becoming a free-lance handyman and jobbing gardener. This proved sufficiently rewarding to allow him to build a bungalow in the Essex countryside as a basis for his operations and a home for himself and the beloved wife whom he had married shortly after the end of Hitler's War. With that wife's death in 1959, as a result of an accident four years previously, Walter ends his story. He is still alive, well into his 93rd year.

Walter Southgate is indeed a man of many parts. His voluntary activities in connexion with the birth and growth of the Labour Party, briefly listed in this book, would almost fill a volume on their own, though his name is not now often remembered. Although a life-long socialist, he seems somewhat surprisingly never to have been attracted by the ideas of standing for Parliament, as have so many others with comparable life-histories. Perhaps he was too sincere to face the inevitable insincerities of political life. Moreover, the story of how he built a bungalow in the Essex marshes, sinking a well and coping with problems of water supply and drainage (before there were any planning regulations) reveals him as no mean craftsman. Nor did he or his dear wife Grace fall victims to a craving for urban conveniences. For six years they lived in their handmade bungalow without gas, electricity, piped water or telephone.

Walter might indeed have been the original of the old Cockney song (not quoted in this book) about the small London boy who, on a Sunday school excursion to the country, had his first sight of "'orses with no carts be'ind and sheeps' 'eads with their bodies on". But, whatever its origin, Walter's eventual love of country life had something of the intensity of his passion for social justice. And, please remember, his first ambition was to have been an artist.

BARBARA WOOTTON

# EVENTS

**Brighton and Hove Humanist Group.** Queen's Head, Queen's Road, Brighton (entrance in Junction Road, opposite Brighton Station). Sunday, 7 November, 5 pm for 5.30 pm. T. F. Evans: "H. G. Wells". Saturday, 13 November, 6.30 pm for 7 pm. Annual Dinner. Tickets £5 from Russell Dale, 10 Buci Crescent, Shoreham-by-Sea, Sussex.

**British Humanist Association.** Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London WC1. Friday, 15 October, 11 am-5.30 pm. Book Sale. Books collected by John White (01-435 1274) or Diana Rookledge (01-672 9804).

**Gay Humanist Group.** Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London WC1. Friday, 12 November, 7.30 pm. Speaker: Maeve Denby, General Secretary, BHA.

**Glasgow Humanist Society.** Information regarding meetings and other activities is obtainable from Norman Macdonald, 339 Kilmarnock Road, Glasgow, G43, telephone 041 632 9511.

**Havering and District Humanist Society.** Harold Wood Social Centre, junction of Gubbins Lane and Squirrels Heath Road, Harold Wood. Tuesday, 2 November, 8 pm. John Loye: "Havering and Nuclear War".

**Humanist Holidays. 24-28 December:** Christmas at a central Brighton hotel. Details of this and other holidays from Mrs Betty Beer, 58 Weir Road, London SW12, telephone 01-673 6234.

**Leeds and District Humanist Group.** Swarthmore Institute, 4 Woodhouse Square, Leeds. Tuesday, 9 November, 7.45 pm. Professor E. Lees: "The Attack on Darwinism".

**Lewisham Humanist Group.** Unitarian Meeting House, 41 Bromley Road, London SE6. Thursday, 28 October, 7.45 pm. "World Poverty", an exchange of ideas.

**National Secular Society.** Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London WC1. Saturday, 6 November, 2.30 pm. Annual General Meeting. Members only. Please note change of date.

**Sutton Humanist Group.** Friends Meeting House, Cedar Road, Sutton. Wednesday, 13 October, 7.30 pm for 8 pm. Wm McIlroy: "Blasphemy Law—Should It Still be Tolerated?"

**The Steyning Humanists.** 49 Penlands Vale, Steyning, Sussex. Sunday, 14 November, 3.30 pm. Wm McIlroy: "A Hundred Years of 'The Freethinker'".

**West Glamorgan Humanist Group.** Friends Meeting House Annexe, Page Street, Swansea. Friday, 29 October, 7.30 pm. Open Forum.

**Workers' Education Association and the Thomas Paine Society.** Vaughan College, St Nicholas Circle, Leicester. Saturday, 27 November, 2.15-5.45 pm. "Thomas Paine and the English Radical Tradition". Tutor: Dr Edward Royle. Fee £1.70 payable to WEA, c/o T. F. Mahony, Vaughan College.

**Worthing Humanist Group.** Trades Club, Broadwater Road, Worthing. Sunday, 31 October, 5.30 pm. Peter Heales: "Ethics for Today".

# Paine, Carlile and the Vice Society

J. R. SPENCER

Whilst atheistical and deistical writings were circulated among the upper classes the authors and publishers had little to fear from the authorities. But when the works of reformers like Paine and Richard Carlile began to influence the "lower orders", Church and State retaliated with persecution, crippling fines and imprisonment. Evangelical Christians in organisations like the Vice Society played their customary role as spies and informers during the long campaign for a free Press.

It is nowadays generally forgotten that William Wilberforce devoted as much of his energy to locking up his fellow citizens as he did to getting the slaves set free. Because with Thomas Bowdler, the man who "bowdlerised" Shakespeare, John Bowdler, who energetically campaigned to have adultery made a criminal offence, and Bishop Porteous, the tireless campaigner for Sunday observance, Wilberforce founded an organisation which flourished under various long names, but was usually known as the "Vice Society". Modelled on the earlier societies which had prosecuted the theatres in 1702, the Vice Society was an Evangelical prosecuting society dedicated to enforcing the laws on sexual immorality, Sunday observance, obscene literature and above all—blasphemy. From 1797 it waged a Thirty Years' War against Tom Paine's *The Age of Reason*, which landed scores of publishers and booksellers in prison for blasphemy.

Part I of *The Age of Reason* appeared in London in 1794, without incident. But three years later, the Vice Society instituted a prosecution for blasphemous libel against one Thomas Williams for publishing Part II. They briefed the celebrated Thomas Erskine as counsel, who had recently enhanced his reputation by his brilliant defence of Paine himself on trial for sedition over *Rights of Man*.

They faced a tactical problem. Although Woolston's case in 1729 had decided that any public denial of Christianity was the crime of blasphemy, many deistical books had been published in England since then, and no one had been prosecuted for them. The works of Gibbon, for example, were widely read in educated society. Judges and juries would obviously be reluctant to condemn *The Age of Reason* if the implication was that their own reading was blasphemous too. Erskine got around this difficulty by suggesting that it was legal to publish irreligious books provided they were not—as *The Age of Reason* undoubtedly was—directed at the "lower orders", whose discontents were likely to be fanned by them.

The judges gratefully grasped this distinction, and in this and the trials which followed, directed juries to consider whether *The Age of Reason* "vilified" Christianity by "ridiculing" it to the lower orders. This, surprisingly, is the ultimate origin of the rule that the crime of blasphemy requires vilification or ridicule!

Williams was convicted. Erskine then tactfully suggested that having made its point, the Vice Society might make a Christian gesture by not pressing for Williams to be sentenced. But they would have none of this, and Williams received a year's imprisonment.

In 1812, Daniel Isaac Eaton made a second attempt to publish the religious writings of Tom Paine. As Eaton had already been in trouble for sedition, he now found himself prosecuted for blasphemy, not by the Vice Society, but by the Attorney-General. On conviction he got an 18-month sentence, and was set in the pillory as well. Luckily for him, he was a popular man, and the judge who sentenced him, Lord Ellenborough, was not; the crowd cheered him in the pillory, and passed him food on the end of sticks.

## Defiance of Authority

Possibly encouraged by this, Richard Carlile decided to try and publish *The Age of Reason* seven years later. In doing so he deliberately challenged the Government and the Vice Society, pasting posters advertising the book all over London. The Vice Society instituted a prosecution, but was nervous to proceed, and the case went on with tortoise slowness. Then Carlile offended the Government by publishing an unflattering account of the Peterloo massacre. The Attorney General promptly took the blasphemy prosecution over, and rapidly brought it to a triumphant conclusion with a £1,500 fine and a sentence of three years' imprisonment in Dorchester gaol.

But Carlile was out to wage a war for the freedom of the Press, and the Government and the Vice Society found to their surprise that Carlile's imprisonment did not stop the sale of Paine's blasphemous books. Carlile's wife took over the publishing business, and when she too found herself in Dorchester gaol, his sister carried it on. Soon there was a touching reunion of the whole Carlile family in prison. Then some of Carlile's freethinking sympathisers manned the shop. Undeterred by the automatic machine with which the sellers tried to confuse Vice Society as to who was selling what, the Vice Society prosecuted them too; and as each group of freethinkers was packed off to prison, so a new group came forward, until—broke and worn out with its

orgy of blasphemy prosecutions—the Vice Society could do no more.

### The Censors Retreat

At this point, the Government took over, and brought a further round of prosecutions. In all, at least 40 people were prosecuted, and at least 25 of them ended up in prison; possibly as many as a hundred people were prosecuted. Eventually, in the face of the seemingly inexhaustible supply of volunteers, and the mounting sales of *The Age of Reason* thanks to the publicity the trials gave it, the Government, like the Vice Society, gave up. Although repeatedly condemned as blasphemous, *The Age of Reason* could in practice be freely sold.

Despite this reverse, the Vice Society lived to prosecute another day. It secured the imprisonment of the Deist, Robert Taylor, in 1831. And its final fling was in the 1870s, when it procured the imprisonment on obscenity charges of a number of people who were distributing literature on birth control.

## LETTERS

### AN OPEN LETTER TO JIM HERRICK, AUTHOR OF "THE FALKLAND CRISIS—RHETORIC OR REALITY"

Having been absent from home for more than a month, I have only just seen your Article in "The Freethinker" (July). In it you castigate the rhetoric and jingoism which the Falklands crisis evoked in this country. In this I am in agreement with you. You then go on to a general discussion of the use of force to resolve disputes, quoting Edward du Cann: "If one tolerates a single act of aggression one connives at them all". This you describe as "The rhetoric of nationalism". In this I think you are less than fair to those who approve of Britain's action over the Falklands.

While negotiations over the Falklands were in progress Argentina sent a military force to occupy them, against the will of their inhabitants, and then sent over 10,000 armed men to fight for them. Had you been in Mrs Thatcher's position, what would you have done? Please answer this question in brief, direct words.

In my view now, and probably for ever, legitimate force is the only ultimate answer to illegitimate force. Does not every civilised country in the world recognise the necessity of police to enforce the law in its own territory, and to arrest or capture criminals, using force in the last resort? Law and order cannot be maintained in any modern society without the ultimate sanction of force. Do you consider that law-breakers should be asked to negotiate about their punishment or that robbers should be invited to negotiate with the robbed?

"Ah!" you may say, "but international law is not yet securely established or widely respected. Therefore you should fall back on negotiation". Let us look back into history and pre-history. There we see that the first codified laws were those which, in primitive societies, embodied customs which had been found desirable by experience and practice. Such in one respect is international law today. In order to be respected it must be seen that attempts to evade it have failed, and law has prevailed.

In Britain and other civilised countries it is recognised that the maintenance of law and order is the responsibility, not only of the police, but also of the private individual. For example, if I were to see somebody breaking into a house, or emerging with obviously stolen goods, it would be not only my inclination but also my duty, in the absence of police, to try to stop him and bring him to justice, even if in the process he or I may suffer injury.

Bearing this in mind, and as there is at present no such thing as a world police force, Britain's response to the Argentine attempt to steal the Falkland Islands by force was both morally and practically right.

Looking forward to the future, there is little doubt in my mind that in a few hundred years, certainly less than a thousand, there will be a world government controlling a world police force. Such a development is highly desirable, and units of power such as nations will have to accept the responsibility of acting within the frame of international law. As in a community of individuals, so in a civilised community of nations such as the world must inevitably become, the ultimate sanction available to the world police against those who violate law and order can only be force. Britain's action in the Falklands has demonstrated it, and in so doing we have helped forward the cause of world peace.

A. A. H. DOUGLAS

Jim Herrick replies: I would not expect freethinkers to agree in their attitude to the Falklands war, and I thank Mr Douglas for putting an opposite view to that of my own. We can agree in our distaste for the militaristic jingoism which the war provoked and in wanting to look at the question rationally. Here are my answers to his questions and my reasons for disapproving of Mrs Thatcher's precipitate military action.

What do I think should have been done? I think that much longer should have been spent in seeking a negotiated solution and much greater effort should have been made to use sanctions and international pressure to force Argentina to withdraw and negotiate a solution. It is clear that an honourable compromise might have been achieved, since some such agreement was being actively sought by the British Government in the years preceding the invasion. I know that economic sanctions do not have a record of great effectiveness, and the case of South Africa and Rhodesia is often cited; but it is worth noting that the European monetary system is dependent upon South African gold, while the Argentine economy is direly dependent upon European loans. (In moments of cynicism I wonder if the Conservative Government did not consciously prefer loss of life to the risk of the failure of any European bank.)

The negotiations in the United Nations failed, but they were being conducted under the hideous pressure of the timetable of an advancing task force and in a sense of political crisis with pride at stake on both sides. There was intransigence on both sides and I would not rule out the possibility that armed force should eventually have been used; but I do think we should have spent months not weeks trying to find a negotiated solution first. We did attempt to gain support from the international community—but, at first, there were difficulties in sustaining European and even American support, and I think that given time results might have been achieved by consistent and concerted pressure upon Argentina, whose economic and diplomatic ties are with America and Europe.

While negotiations and sanctions were taking place, I would have done my utmost to secure assurances

(with international observation) for the safety of the inhabitants. I do not think that there is evidence that Argentina initially planned to maltreat the Falklanders. (Our hasty military action has turned the island into a barracks and minefield.) Although many Argentines who opposed their Right-wing governments have been brutally treated and "disappeared", there is a large English community in Argentina which stays there by choice and is not, presumably, badly treated. I do not see any reason to believe that the Falklanders would not have been in a similar position. Of course, once a war was fully under way, property was bound to be damaged. Would the Falklanders have been harmed while negotiations took place if Britain had stayed an immediate military response?

I think a sense of scale and proportion are crucial to a consideration of the Falklands war. To use so much military muscle and economic resources for a dispute over a sparsely inhabited island was out of proportion. The amount of money available for compensation to any Falklanders who wished to leave if a compromise had been negotiated could have been enormous and still have been much less than the cost of the war. Falklanders choosing to leave the island might feel deeply that they were being uprooted: but what compensation has been given to those thousands in, say, Newcastle and Glasgow whose way of life has been destroyed by unemployment?

I do not think that law-breakers should be allowed to negotiate their punishment: but analogies are not always fully accurate. Argentine claims to the Malvinas have some (if dubious) basis in history and geography; can that be said for the large parts of the world annexed by Great Britain in its imperial past? Nation states are, alas, sometimes analogous to individual robbers; but it is not an analogy that Britain could take much comfort from.

If the analogy of robbery is to be pursued, I would see the Falklands business this way. If someone breaks down my front door with an axe and threatens to kill those I love and remove all my possessions, I should certainly use physical force to resist. If someone damaged a corner of a shed at the bottom of my garden (which I had almost forgotten existed), I would complain and seek reparation, but I'd not rush out and shoot the culprit.

I agree that there is a long way to go before international peace-keeping is a reality. But technology has made warfare such a heinous and potentially suicidal activity, that it is more than ever important to try and create such a reality. I do not, therefore, think that Mrs Thatcher has helped forward the cause of world peace; on the contrary, she has ensured that "you bash me and I'll bash you" is still the name of the game. And it's becoming a more dangerous game with every year that armaments continue to be stock-piled.

## NOT EXIT

I was very disturbed to see that in my letter (August) you substituted "EXIT (formerly the Voluntary Euthanasia Society)" for the true title which is still the Voluntary Euthanasia Society. The term "Exit", which I neither acknowledge nor use, was foisted on the membership by the previous executive in spite of its rejection by the only constitutional vote on its adoption, namely, that taken at the 1979 annual general meeting.

The sooner the Society gets rid of the frivolous term "Exit" and persists with its true title, the sooner is it likely to recover from its present depressed state and regain its former prestige in furthering the cause of voluntary euthanasia.

CHARLES WILSHAW

## FOX HUNTING

The British Field Sports Society has been making a fuss about the decision of the Board of the Co-operative Wholesale Society to ban fox hunting on its land. Fuss by petition, boycott, demonstrations, letters to "The Times", deputations and, when all else fails, fuss by abuse.

The letter you published last month from Ian Coghill of the BFSS is in the latter vein. The CWS Board's decision reflected a clear hardening of public opinion against fox hunting. Co-operative democracy is there for all to see. The Directors are answerable for that decision to the member societies which elect them, which own the CWS and which in turn are accountable to million of Co-operators in town and country around the United Kingdom. And none of them are accountable to the British Field Sports Society.

As for CWS Farm Management: of course there was consultation about the decision. There may indeed be individual farm managers who disagree with it; there will also be managers heartily sick of the "fuss"; but there are certainly no CWS Farm Managers whose views are treated by the Board — in Mr Coghill's ludicrous phrase — "with open contempt". The Co-op does not need lessons in humanity from the British Field Sports Society.

G. J. MELMOTH  
Secretary  
Co-operative Wholesale Society Ltd

## IS THERE AN ALTERNATIVE TO ROYALTY?

Having read Julia Atkinson's article (August), I can only conclude that the average republican is a bit like a juke box with only one record, churning out the same doleful dirge time after time.

I take her claim about the content of Prince Charles' speech to the people of Bougainville with a very large pinch of salt, because a favourite tactic of anti-monarchists is to quote out of context or twist the words of royalty to suit their prejudices. However, I notice that Julia Atkinson displays a typically obsessive interest in the cost of the monarchy. Leaving aside the point that £10 million is a drop in the ocean of Government finance, I have estimated that the cost to the public amounts to 16p per person per year. Bearing in mind that the Privy Purse is paid in return for Government control over Crown Land income (which amounts to several times the £10 million quoted), it can be argued that this system provides Britain with a singularly cost-effective Head of State. Nevertheless, if Julia Atkinson still considers this poor value for money, I daresay Buck House will gladly refund her 16p.

Besides, abolition of the monarchy would not remove the need for a Head of State, and I wonder what alternative Julia Atkinson would choose. A senile oligarchy which cynically affects the trappings of democracy, as in the USSR? Or an American-style Presidency, perhaps? It might be worth pointing out that recent occupants of the White House have included an unprincipled crook, a vacuous buffoon and a third-rate actor railroaded into power by a disgraceful crowd of fundamentalist yahoos.

Furthermore, it does not follow that a republic would necessarily improve democracy in Britain. Indeed, bearing in mind the political complexion of the most rabid anti-monarchists, the opposite would almost certainly be the case.

I wonder if Julia Atkinson has ever considered that the Royal Family's popularity might actually stem from a genuine affection, and that most people might regard it as an important focal point for the nation, a symbol

of permanence and tradition? Such considerations are not to be sneered at, however fashionable it might be in the more pea-brained radical circles. Certainly, the crowds who turn out for royal visits do so by choice, not because they have been dragged on by some commissar, and any "deference" shown is simply what any popular Head of State might reasonably expect. I hope Julia Atkinson isn't arrogant enough to assert that those crowds, and royalists in general, are victims of a confidence trick they are too dumb to recognise.

I see nothing inconsistent in supporting a system which, for all its shortcomings and inconsistencies, is as good as any, and far better than most of the alternatives. Like any product of the evolutionary process, the system of constitutional monarchy is imperfect, but on the whole it works well enough, and I think that the onus should remain firmly with Julia Atkinson and her fellow Cardboard Cromwells to devise some other form of leadership that is demonstrably superior.

PHILIP HARDING

### ROME FOR RATIONALISTS

I am obliged to R. J. M. Tolhurst for his kind remarks (August) on my Garibaldi article. I too have climbed the Janiculum, where Garibaldi's brave, half-trained young men fought and bled trying to prevent the French reinstating Pius IX as temporal ruler of Rome. Garibaldi's statue is massive, calm and heroic, as befits him; while that of Anita—brandishing pistol in one arm and clasping baby in the other—conjures up the romance and melodrama of 1849.

Freethinkers should also inspect the Vascello, just outside the Janiculum walls, which is still pitted with cannon balls and bullets from the siege. If they walk along the walls they will discern, from the areas of repair, where the walls were breached by the French artillery. Visitors will also find on the walls two plaques, one placed there by the Pope to mark his return to the Eternal City and another, put up to mark the liberation of Rome by Italian forces in 1870.

The Risorgimento archives at the Vittoriano are indeed well worth a visit. But freethinkers should also make a "pilgrimage" to the Piazza dei Fiori, where Giordano Bruno was burned in 1600. His brooding statue stands there now, put up in the teeth of clerical opposition in the first decade of this century. The National Secular Society arranged for a floral tribute to be laid there in 1969.

I suspect that Garibaldi—like me—would have shared Kevin Byrom's sentiments (August) about the Falklands war. The Lion of Caprera would, I am sure, have abominated Mrs Thatcher's domestic policies, but I think he would have offered her his sword to deliver the Kelpers from the Buenos Aires junta—so long as he was given absolute command of the operation! He made a similar offer to President Lincoln at the beginning of the American Civil War. Garibaldi knew a thing or two about Argentinian dictators: he stopped one, Rosas, from gobbling up Uruguay.

NIGEL SINNOTT

### SWINBURNE AND CHRISTIANITY

Nicolas Walter writes (Letters, August) of "the mutual affection and admiration between Christina Rossetti and Swinburne which should remind us that neither orthodoxy nor unorthodoxy are as simple as they seem".

Is this somewhat cryptic assertion meant to imply that Swinburne, though an atheist, had in some obscure sense a sympathy with or an understanding of Christina Rossetti's religious mania? Such a notion is surely impossible to reconcile with Swinburne's recorded

tirade concerning Christina: "Good Satan! what a fearful warning against the criminal lunacy of theolatry! It is horrible to think of such a woman and of so many otherwise noble and beautiful natures—spiritually infected and envenomed by the infernal and putrefying virus of the Galilean serpent". (C. Y. Lang's edition of the Swinburne Letters, vol 6, pp 176-7, quoted by Philip Henderson in "Swinburne, the Portrait of a Poet"—Routledge & Kegan Paul, London 1974).

It is clear from this that any sympathy on Swinburne's part was very much in spite of Christina's religion, and has nothing to do with the alleged complexity of orthodoxy or unorthodoxy. In any case, his attitude to Christianity was not mere unorthodoxy (i.e. disagreement on some point of dogma or ritual) but total rejection.

WALTER FORD

### GOING TOO FAR

In your extraordinary editorial, "The Zionazis" (August), it is untrue to say that "one of the most notorious murder squads was led by Begin himself". The victims of Begin's organisation, though mainly British citizens, barely concealed their pro-Nazi feelings.

By contrast, "The United States—a country whose social and political life is poisoned by anti-semitism"—where is the evidence for that? Of course, as in Britain and every other country, every shade of opinion exists in the USA from moderate to ultra-intolerant. But America's 5,000,000 Jews do not live in fear; I have been there and I have relatives there and I know what I am saying.

You assert there is a link between the Spanish fascists—called Falangists, and the Lebanese Phalangists. Is there any evidence of this at all, other than that in two very different languages, the English form of their names has the last nine letters the same?

All this does not stop me agreeing with you that, on the facts as I know them, Israel went very much too far, at much too high a cost in innocent lives and limbs, in dealing with the problem faced by herself and by her northern neighbour, Lebanon.

PETER DANNING

The Editor replies: It was David Ben Gurion, "the father of Israel", who described Menachem Begin as "a thoroughly Hitlerite type". It was a group of distinguished Jews, including Albert Einstein, who denounced Begin and his party for preaching "an admixture of ultra-nationalism, religious mysticism and racial superiority". It was the Chief Delegate of the International Red Cross who reported how Begin's Irgun terrorists attacked the isolated village of Deir Yassin, and "without any military reason or provocation of any kind, old men, women and children newly-born were savagely assassinated with grenades and knives by the Jewish troops of the Irgun, perfectly under the control and direction of their chiefs". No doubt those villagers, like the 91 victims of the King David Hotel explosion, also masterminded by Begin and carried out by Irgun, had "barely concealed their pro-Nazi feelings".

American society is riddled with racism, including anti-Semitism, although black people are now the prime scapegoats. Politicians are more circumspect than in the past; the Jewish vote can be crucial. American leaders are prepared to ignore Israel's history of terrorism and aggression so that the United States can maintain a foothold in the Middle East. As Theodore Herzl, the founder of Zionism, once put it: "The anti-Semites will become our friends, the anti-Semitic countries our allies".

# Humanists Oppose Courtroom Prayers

A quarter of the sitting magistrates turned up when prayer sessions were introduced in Coventry courtroom last month. Canon Peter Berry, who is on the staff of Coventry Cathedral, was reported to be excited because the scheme had been initiated by members of the court themselves.

But it was not as spontaneous as all that. The idea of formal prayers was canvassed by Mr David Yates, chairman of the Bench and an Anglican churchwarden for ten years. It is believed that Coventry is the only place in the country where prayers are part of court business. Judges are not obliged to offer prayers and even Law Lords do so only when they present their judgements to the House.

A Jewish member will conduct one of the sessions. Methodist and Free Church representatives will be invited to participate. There is also an Asian member of the court.

Warwickshire Humanist Group has called for a reversal of the decision to hold courtroom prayers. They say "courts should be prepared to stand by their judgements on human terms.

"We wonder what sort of guidance Coventry magistrates hope to receive when Christianity itself is so full of contradictions, and the contradictions of other religions are to be included as well . . . Human reason and compassion should be used in reaching judgements according to the facts and the law".

Commenting on the West Midlands Chief Constable's approval of courtroom prayers, the

humanists ask if it is part of his job to promote religion. And he may well know that according to Home Office statistics, Roman Catholics make up 22 per cent of the prison and only nine per cent of the general population.

The humanists describe Mr Yates' remark that defendants may eventually be invited to join in the prayers as "a most irresponsible suggestion". They point out that the right to affirm was hard won. Their statement poses the question: "If this scheme goes ahead, how will the suspicion be avoided that those who take part will receive more favourable treatment or job prospects than those who do not"?

That question is neither alarmist nor mischievous (as many teachers, for instance, will testify). Religious zealots quite shamelessly use their position in hospitals, classrooms and the armed forces to promote and impose religious superstition on others. There is good reason to believe that, given the chance, they would do so in courtrooms as well. If a strong protest is not made over what has happened at Coventry (where the Cathedral and the Parish Church are a minute's walk for court personnel who wish to pray) people like the chairman of Coventry Bench will endeavour to turn the nation's courtrooms into part-time churches.

• Readers are urged to protest against the introduction of prayers into court business at Coventry. Letters should be sent to the Rt Hon William Whitelaw, MP, Secretary of State for the Home Department, 50 Queen Anne's Gate, London SW1.

## *Atheists Show Indian Women the Way Forward*

of human behaviour. The Atheist Centre trains women to use the opportunities available to them.

"It has been said that men and women are the two wheels of the chariot of progress. The chariot moves smoothly only when both wheels function equally.

"It is easy to bring political and economic change. Social change is not so easy. Any problem of women is connected with the entire social fabric. Woman is the centre of the family, and the family is the centre of society.

"Men and women should be treated as persons, not as males and females. But the traditions and customs do not allow us to do that. Superstition, idolatry and religious rituals chain women to continuity rather than encourage them to change. Progress of women is linked with the advancement of atheism".

Hemalata Lavanam, who plays an important role in running The Atheist Centre, of which her husband is Director, also spoke. She said that "economic freedom coupled with the scientific outlook and

social awareness is the need of the hour for the emancipation of women in India".

She gave one example of how the Centre tries, in practical terms, to combat superstition. It concerned the traditional belief in India that if a pregnant woman views a solar eclipse the baby will be born deformed.

"In February 1980, several women came to The Atheist Centre and viewed the solar eclipse. They gave birth to normal babies. That practical example made many women think and reason out issues.

"Likewise women walked on fire and exploded the myth that fire walking was the monopoly of holy men".

Hemalata Lavanam concluded: "As every religion has limited woman's role to husband and children, kitchen and family, opportunities for greater enlightenment diminish with the spread of religious fundamentalism. We are clearly seeing this in Iran. The atheists in India are trying their best to see that women get more and more opportunities to be a part of the emerging great social change".