

The Freethinker

secular humanist monthly

founded 1881

Vol. 103, No. 8

AUGUST 1983

30p

BROOK'S GOOD YEAR—DESPITE IBA BAN ON SEX EDUCATION PROGRAMME

"A good year's work, but there is much more to be done", members of Brook Advisory Centres have been told in their latest annual report. "How much more is dramatically demonstrated by the number of teenage abortions. In 1981, 35,000 teenagers in England and Wales and 3,000 in Scotland had abortions. There is indeed much more to be done in helping young people to help themselves", the report adds.

During the year 60,000 clients made 130,000 visits to Brook centres. The service was provided by doctors working 7,000 sessions, nurses 9,000 sessions and counsellors and social workers 6,000 sessions.

The greatest frustration of the work is that while public debate continues on how best to prevent pregnancy, while motivational campaigns are launched encouraging those young people who are already sexually active to use contraception, the services are inadequate to meet the demand that already exists.

According to the report: "Too few GPs and family planning clinics are known by teenagers to be welcoming and helpful and as a result the demand for our services far exceeds our resources. . . Young couples are already informed and motivated, they want to act responsibly but we have to turn them away. . . Services must be adequate for young couples who have already decided to use contraception, but information and encouragement are also needed for the many young couples who have not yet faced up to the fact that they are risking pregnancy".

Reference is made in the report to the banning of a public service announcement on contraception. Officials of the Independent Broadcasting Authority decided that the film, made by London Weekend Television in association with BAC and the Family Planning Association, should not be screened as it might appear to condone promiscuity.

The announcement was intended to persuade

young men to recognise their responsibilities and see that getting a girl pregnant was nothing to be proud of. The script had been read by eminent physicians and psychologists.

The report says: "We were invited to submit a script which, if accepted, would be made into a 30-second film. . . Brook and the FPA decided to combine our energies. Since clearly the most at risk group is sexually active teenage girls and the group least likely to receive information the teenage boys who put them at risk, we created the script with them in mind. . .

"The IBA had not sought to discuss the script with Brook or the FPA. The IBA said that the announcement 'over-simplified the issue of responsible sexual behaviour by referring only to using contraceptives and might appear to condone promiscuity, especially when addressed to teenage boys . . . although it's idiom might well be recognised by the young, the announcement would also be seen by the general audience and would cause offence to a large number of viewers'".

Children by Choice

Despite this setback, the educational work of Brook Advisory Centres has increased enormously. As the reputation of the Education and Publications unit has grown, so have requests for advice from teachers and other professionals wanting to set up sex education programmes. In Avon alone, two part-time staff members have given 150 talks during the year.

At the annual general meeting of Brook Advisory Centres, which took place in London on 19 July, Madeleine Simms discussed the study of teenage mothers in England and Wales which she had carried

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The Freethinker

UK ISSN 0016-0687

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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.

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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: £3.60;
Six months: £2. U.S.A.: Twelve months: \$8.00;
Six months: \$5.00. 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 60p
or US \$1.20 for bank charges.

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

NEWS

NO NOOSE

As expected, prominent supporters of the "sanctity of life" (anti-abortion) lobby voted in favour of the restoration of capital punishment in the House of Commons last month. These included Sir John Biggs-Davison, Sir Patrick Wall (leading Roman Catholics), Mrs Jill Knight, Andrew Bowden and Nicholas Winterton.

Donald Stewart (Scottish Nationalist, Western Isles), a fundamentalist Sabbatarian, joined a group of clergymen in the pro-hanging lobby.

No Labour or Social Democratic members voted for hanging. And a tribute should be paid to those Conservatives—nearly a third—who voted against capital punishment. It takes courage of no mean order to defy the ghouls who run Conservative constituency associations and to publicly disagree with Hilda the Hun.

Cyril Smith was the only Liberal to support the noose. It would be difficult to find a noose that would support Cyril Smith.

● A Capital Result—page 116

BIGOTS AT LARGE

Northern Ireland had its annual outbreak of Christian love when thousands of orange-sashed Protestants swaggered through the towns and villages on 12 July. In a number of areas they indulged in a bout of religious enthusiasm by attacking the homes of fellow-Christians who, although belonging to the largest section of Christendom, have the misfortune to live in an area where a particularly nasty form of fundamentalist, born-again Protestantism is endemic.

One such area is the County Down town of Ballynahinch, where the Protestants, fervent supporters of law and order when it suits them, injured 31 policemen, three of them seriously, in anti-Catholic riots. A police spokesman said: "I have never seen so much hatred as there is in Ballynahinch today. . . It was really vicious".

But not so vicious, perhaps, as the speeches made at demonstrations all over the Province. A large number of clergymen belong to the Orange Order and invariably the platform proceedings took the form of a religious service. The theme of many speeches was a demand for the re-introduction of hanging.

The Rev Martin Smyth, MP, Grand Master of the Order, said he would vote in the House of Commons for capital punishment as it was "one of the penal-

S AND NOTES

preservation of unhappy marriages reflects God's fidelity to man.

"Why does the *Sun* have to put this narrow-minded, dangerous boss on a pedestal, above all criticism? (If ever he saw your page 3, he would certainly not hesitate to have you banned!)"

Any public figure who refers to the United States' hypocritical lamentations for human rights in Poland, while at the same time supporting "the most vile military dictatorship" in Turkey, is bound to cop it from the Fleet Street guttersnipes. The CND leader should regard such attacks as an honour.

Monsignor Kent's experience in recent times may enable him to face the fact that the Church he serves is a reactionary force with a vile political record. Under the leadership of a Pole, the most conservative of European Catholics, it is not going to change for the better.

MAYOR STANDS FIRM

Councillor Tony Prior, the new Mayor of Chard, in Somerset, has caused a few pious eyebrows to be raised in the town. He has refused to appoint a chaplain, a decision that has been criticised by some councillors who seem to regard it as their Christian duty to turn town halls into part-time churches.

Councillor Beryl Helbert tabled a motion "regretting" the Mayor's stand. After repeating the old, old (untrue) story that we live in a Christian country, she alleged that a lot of people in the town were disappointed that "the office of chaplain has not been filled for the first time in the history of Chard". Another critic, Councillor Dennis Bass, accused the Mayor of "breaking a tradition that went back to 1836".

These traditionalists overlook the fact that in past times, when Christianity was even more privileged and its adherents even more arrogant than at present, refusal to appoint a chaplain could have had serious consequences.

However, the Mayor was adamant. "I don't want a chaplain", he declared. "It is a personal appointment and I would have thought that no-one who is a Christian would want me to be hypocritical". He was supported by a majority of councillors, one of whom said that prayer was a private matter.

The Rev Basil Jenkyns, Vicar of Chard, was rather peeved by this display of mayoral independence. "It seems very strange to me", he commented sniffily, "having listened to the claims of the Liberal Party on the problems of unemployment, that the first act of our new Liberal masters should be to extend the scourge of unemployment to the Almighty".

The Mayor of Chard has not made the Almighty, only his alleged representative, redundant. But that is a good start, and we hope that other civic leaders will follow his example.

ties God has given in his word for the punishment of those guilty of capital offences". And the Rev Ian Paisley declared that "the State has God-given authority and responsibility, according to the New Testament, to exercise the power of the sword".

One of the resolutions passed at the assemblies declared that "justification is by faith in Christ alone. . . We determine to live by that biblical faith and to do all we can to persuade other people to find salvation and satisfaction for life in Jesus Christ".

Another resolution declared that "the education of our children is of primary importance". Orange demonstrations are obviously regarded as part of their "education". One distressing feature of such gatherings is active participation by large numbers of children, already being segregated, indoctrinated and conditioned to be the perpetrators of Christian fanaticism that has poisoned Ulster society.

STORM OVER KENT

In an interview published in *Woman* (23 July), Monsignor Bruce Kent—the Catholic priest who, as General Secretary of the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament, was recently attacked by the Papal Nuncio as a "blinker idealist"—spoke out about John Paul II. "He is a man of great zeal and honesty", Monsignor Kent declared, "but I don't think a man with his background and high level of Polish nationalism is able to meet the needs of the whole Church, and I don't think the amazing focus on one man is healthy. Within the Church, his whole attitude towards women and his view of the life of the clergy is unbelievable".

Equally unbelievable is the outcry that this mildly frank statement sparked off in the national gutter press. No doubt seizing their opportunity to denigrate a spokesman for unilateralism, the Tory tabloids abused Monsignor Kent for daring to breathe a word of criticism of the pop-idol Pope.

In a letter to the *Sun*, which described it as "effrontery", Barbara Smoker, President of the National Secular Society, wrote: "Is it 'effrontery' when any man dares to criticise his boss—or only when the boss happens to be Pope?"

"Most British people would agree with Mgr Bruce Kent if they had read the Pope's book *Familiaris Consortio* about 'God's plan for marriage and the family'. In it, the Pope shows himself to be utterly pig-headed about sex, the population explosion, and the place of women. To him, the idea of family planning is nothing but a selfish 'anti-life mentality'. And he completely vetoes divorce, saying that the

HERE LIVED . . .

London has another blue plaque. It commemorates the 32-year residency of the socialist writer and free-thinker, Henry Noel Brailsford, at 37 Belsize Park Gardens, Hampstead. It was unveiled last month by Lord Fenner Brockway who paid a warm tribute to "a champion of equal and free humanity".

Brailsford had a long career as a journalist, writer and campaigner for many progressive causes. He taught philosophy at Glasgow University and wrote for the *Manchester Guardian*, *New Statesman* and journals in the United States, India and Germany. *New Leader*, which he published, included Einstein, Bernard Shaw and Bertrand Russell among its contributors.

H. N. Brailsford died in 1958. His widow, Eva Maria Brailsford, still lives at 37 Belsize Park Gardens.

Those who attended the reception afterwards included Labour leader Michael Foot, Jill Craigie, James Cameron, councillors and representatives of the Labour Party. J. M. Alexander represented the Socialist Secular Association.

VIRGIN IN THE SUN

Last October we reported the goings-on at a farm near the Australian community of Campbell's Creek where a religious enthusiast named Despina Pavlou had claimed to have seen the Virgin Mary. Since then she and her husband, son and daughter have been running a flourishing family business, The Miracles Open Sanctuary Church.

The Pavlous claim that over 200 people have been cured of various afflictions, including cancer and blindness. But a Melbourne woman, who was told she would see the Virgin Mary if she stared at the sun, has been partly blinded. An eye specialist said his patient had been told to stare at the sun until it changed colour. "Naturally, it did", he added, "but it wasn't the Virgin Mary she was seeing".

Mr Pavlou agreed that people had been told to stare at the sun. He said that "sometimes the Virgin Mary is in the sun with 12 angels and you can look through the sun and see them. But they should do so only when the Virgin Mary says it is safe. We don't tell anyone to look unless my wife gets the message first". He believed that the woman, who has lost her central vision, may have been punished by the Virgin Mary for looking at the sun without her permission.

The eye specialist said other people may have had their sight damaged. "I've heard there may be another case and it's possible that a lot of people are about, so absorbed in their faith that they're waiting for some miracle cure".

A Capital Result

So once more the Press got it wrong! Not surprisingly, many MPs inevitably got fed up with being telephoned by reporters from umpteen newspapers all asking the same question, "How are you going to vote in the Hanging Debate?" In the end, they just refused to tell them. And so, instead of being the "close run thing" the Press had foretold, with a majority of possibly only six or eight on some of the important divisions — and there were six divisions altogether — the majorities on each were overwhelming.

The first on the amendment to Sir Edward Gardner's motion "That this House favours the restoration of the death penalty for murder" — to add, "resulting from acts of terrorism" moved by Albert McQuarrie was lost by 245 votes to 361. The amendment moved by Eldon Griffiths to add "of a police officer during the course of his duties" was lost by 263 votes to 344; that of "a prison officer during the course of his duties" moved by Peter Blaker was lost by 252 votes to 348; that of "by shooting or causing an explosion" moved by Vivian Bendall was lost by 204 votes to 374; that of "in the course or furtherance of theft" moved by George Gardiner was lost by 194 votes to 369.

The final vote on the main question, "That this House favours the restoration of the death penalty for murder", was lost by 223 votes to 368.

Hangers Routed

These were all decisive majorities and should now end the debate on the death penalty. Mr Speaker announced at the beginning of the debate that 60 members had intimated to him that they would like to speak. In the end, 31 of us were called and there were numerous interventions from other Members.

The debate was notable for a poor speech from the new Home Secretary, Leon Brittan, which will not have done his reputation in his new office any good, and for an excellent speech by Edward Heath. A copy of Hansard for Wednesday, July 13, 1983, price £1, would provide an interesting addition to the bookshelf.

Having defeated the retentionists so decisively, the abolitionists must now think positively about the prison régime. Those who kill will remain in prison for long periods. Our top security prisons are ill-equipped, understaffed and thoroughly unsatisfactory. Resources are urgently needed to improve and modernise our prison system. We compare badly with many other countries. The Government now faces the challenge of humanising the prison system with more long-term prisoners to care for.

RENÉE SHORT, MP

What They Believe

MICHAEL DUANE

Martin Rogers, as Headmaster of Malvern College, asked boys in their first year, at the age of 13, to write an essay entitled "What I Believe". Later, as Chief Master of King Edward's School, Birmingham, he invited other independent boarding schools to do the same. In a paper published by the Farmington Institute for Christian Studies he comments on some of the findings and suggests reasons for what he regards to be unsatisfactory about the teaching of religion in such private schools.

Martin Rogers makes no claim that this is more than an impressionistic report of "the mass of reading" with which he was confronted. The results, coming as they do from the offspring of a minority group (both by wealth and by social position), are hardly surprising. Religion—both the public rituals and the emotional and intellectual content—is part of the complex pattern of behaviour and beliefs that bind together the Establishment and the social, political and economic class that enables it to maintain power in a nominally democratic society.

Only the tiniest minority will seriously challenge any of the common assumptions by which the group is held together. Some may have "bizarre" (the author's word) variations of common beliefs; some may now reject what they had previously accepted, as young children believe in Father Christmas; some may profess belief either because they fear social rejection or because they are shrewd enough to judge that it may well be to their personal advantage.

So the author finds "some views . . . expressed so consistently by so many boys from all over the country that the results seem worth reporting". Few disbelieve in God—"How can you believe in someone you cannot see or hear?" The bible is commonly treated as a literal account; many find it "hard to swallow. Truth to them was literal; they showed no sense of the allegorical, or even of poetry". We have to keep reminding ourselves that the task has been set to 13-year-olds! Some find the pseudo-science of von Daniken so convincing that Jesus becomes "an alien from another planet", and the Ascension "just another blast-off".

Some boys find it difficult to reconcile science with religion: "I must have actual proof which I can see with my own eyes". The author then goes on to imply that the sense of awe arising from a study of science in some way indicates a belief in God. At no time does he distinguish between such a natural sense of wonder that seems to arise in all who contemplate the complexity and inter-relatedness of nature, and the specific dogmas of the various churches. "Religion" has been used to describe the former feeling by people who reject a personal God; who

have a fellow feeling with all human beings; who treat animals with dignity and a consideration for their wellbeing even where they have to use them for human purposes; and who see their own future as being bound up with the proper conservation of our material environment.

There is no conflict between science and "religion" in this sense, but there quite definitely remains a conflict between science and the irrational dogmas of virgin birth, resurrection and the conjuring tricks (e.g. water into wine) attributed to Jesus. Belief in such dogmas cannot arise naturally but has to be compelled by fair means or foul.

In a Postsript, the Director of The Farmington Institute gives general approval to Martin Rogers' conclusions and then goes on to say, "scientific evidence . . . cannot either prove or disprove religious faith, *but that other considerations need to be weighed*" (my italics. M.D.). It cannot be said loudly enough and clearly enough that scientific evidence cannot either prove or disprove religious *faith*. But it is not said loudly or clearly to children because to say it would provoke the reply: "Then I do not have to believe what my reason cannot accept, and if I, for aesthetic reasons, assent to a willing suspension of disbelief, it remains a matter of personal choice and only for so long as it pleases me".

The Authoritarian's Handbook

The real sting lies in the tail of the Director's statement. What he is discussing is the problem of interpreting the meaning of the bible. He writes "children *can* begin to appreciate the different types of literature in the Bible, and the different kinds of evidence upon which it is appropriate to draw in making judgements". This is to make of the bible what it actually is: a book of poetry interspersed with historical myths—a work that may or may not command admiration on literary grounds but has no other authority. But objection to the teaching of the bible rests precisely on the fact that it is *not* taught as literature but is taught as a code of dogma attended by punishment or the threat of punishment for rejection.

Why, then, is religion taught in schools? It is, as readers will remember, the only subject in the curriculum that has to be taught by law and from which the parent will find much difficulty in withdrawing the child. Reasons given for teaching religion range from the need for ethical teaching, through literary appreciation, history, comparative anthropology and psychology, to citizenship and social discipline.

But what is consciously to the forefront in these arguments may not be the most important reasons. For these we have to look to the *effects* of religion

on the personality of the pupil and his later development. Here we will find useful information from history and from psychotherapy.

In the years preceding the passage of the 1870 Education Act, as one may discover by reading *The Times* of that period, the employing class was torn between the financial burden of embarking on a system of universal education and the beneficial effects of such education on future employees. The only example they could look to were the church schools which had been in existence for nearly 50 years. These schools had been founded to teach children to read the bible so that they might be saved. It was noted by employers that children who had attended these schools were more amenable to orders, more disciplined, better timekeepers and more sober and industrious than those who had picked up their education at home or at work.

It was pointed out at the time that the objectives of organisation in the factory (and later in the schools which were modelled on the factory) included the turning of the labourer "into his own slave driver" so that "his moral machinery (runs) on equally sound principles with his mechanical" (Dr Andrew Ure, *Philosophy of Manufactures*, 1835). E. P. Thompson's chapter, "The Transforming Power of the Cross", in *The Making of the English Working Class* is an exploration of how religion has been used to discipline the energies of the working people to the requirements of the employers through religion.

Dogma With Decorum

In the independent boarding schools, other than the few progressive schools, care is taken to prevent enthusiasm for religion overstepping the bounds of "good form" and the more important loyalties to class. This concentration on deepening class loyalties extends even to deliberately setting emotional barriers between the boys and their families who are regarded as "a necessary nuisance" to be kept at a distance as much as possible. In *Chance of a Lifetime?*, Dr Royston Lambert explores in detail how these schools cultivate an élite in every possible aspect of the pupils' lives and do so the more powerfully and blatantly because the emotional and other distractions of home are kept so far away.

Psychotherapeutic writings are full of examples of clients burdened by guilt about sex and by the feeling that God is more of a threat than a blessing. In particular, those who have undergone the "Public school" culture at home, in preparatory school and in the Public school itself, more often find a split in their feelings about women. They tend to look for the attributes of their mothers and of the Virgin Mary in their future wives, but they look for real sexual pleasure with whores. So most women are regarded as sex objects and those of the lower classes

as unsuitable for motherhood of their children. The effect of this is to protect the upper classes from invasion by the standards of other social classes.

Freud held religion to be an illusion and wrote *The Future of an Illusion*. He later regretted to Ferenczi that his exposure had not been rigorous enough. Religion has too clearly been associated with power and the ruling class in all societies. The "divine right of kings" is not essentially different from the power of the priest/kings of Egypt or that of the ayatollahs of Iran.

In western societies social class has its effects on religion which supports and reinforces its structures. The *hoi polloi* do not sit in the same pews as the rich; church committees rarely include labourers or plumbers among the landowners. There is a further division among the churches: the middle and upper classes prefer to attend the Anglican rather than the Baptist or United Reformed churches: Catholics cannot aspire to the monarchy.

The essential feature of religion, as seen by the lower classes, viz its acceptance of all people as equal before God; its insistence on the brotherhood of man irrespective of colour or class; its vision of a perfectible world and its essential democracy—"Love thy neighbour as thyself"—is denied by the rich and the powerful and that denial is institutionalised in the very process of education.

Freethinker Fund

The latest list of contributions is given below with our thanks to all concerned.

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Total for the period 10 June until 6 July: £135.60.

It is often asserted that unbelievers are an unemotional lot, lacking in human warmth and unappreciative of the finer things in life. A correspondent in "The Spectator" has revealed what we are missing. He pointed out that the Archbishop-elect of York has said that his interests are household chores. And in a biographical note we learn that the new Bishop of Guildford lists among his recreational interests the act of sneezing. The collapse of the National Secular Society is expected hourly.

"Opium of the People"— Who's Abusing Drugs?

ANTONY GREY

There has been a disturbing new twist in the authorities' use of the Obscene Publications Acts, apparently prompted by MPs' complaints. Antony Grey discusses the implications of recent developments.

"Free choice is ultimately what life is about, what ethics is about. The whole of the case for freedom is a moral case because it involves choice. Do away with choice and you do away with human dignity". Brave words, noble words. I instinctively warm to their originator—or would do if she did not happen to be Mrs Margaret Thatcher, whose current caper after her own peculiar version of "Victorian values" is leading her and the country into some pretty strange social experiments these days.

What, I ask myself, is happening to freedom of expression, which in Victorian times was still an Englishperson's proudest boast? A good deal—and most of it worrying. Did you know, for instance, that the much-derided Obscene Publications Acts ("unworkable" according to Mary Whitehouse but not, it seems, in the eyes of the Director of Public Prosecutions) are now being deployed for the first time in a big way against material which isn't concerned with sex, bears no relation to previous concepts of what is "obscene", but is alleged to deprave and corrupt those likely to read it?

For the past year or so, Obscene Publications Acts prosecutions have been pending against a number of booksellers and publishers up and down the country in respect of various titles dealing with drugs, their chemical properties, use and abuse. Altogether some 200 titles, many of them non-fictional and of a factually descriptive nature, have been seized in a series of police raids. Proceedings are being taken under both section 2 (trial by jury) and section 3 (forfeiture proceedings before a magistrate). Some of the books have now been committed for trial; it is likely that the issues raised by these cases will eventually have to be decided by the House of Lords.

The Co-Ordinator of the Standing Conference on Drug Abuse, David Turner, has said: "Organisations working in the drugs field are particularly concerned about the effect that this action might have on their work. Many produce literature designed both to assist people involved with drug users and to avoid or reduce the harm which might result from drug use. The arbitrary seizure of drugs literature has created serious doubt as to whether they can continue

to publish such material".

What is sinister about these proceedings is that the Obscene Publications Squad do not appear to have suddenly decided off their own bat to seize all these books; they have, it seems, responded to sundry nudges and winks from the Home Office, itself spurred on by "constituents' complaints" passed to it by MPs. The prosecution seems likely to allege that merely to disseminate knowledge about drugs, drug-taking and the "drug culture" is of itself sufficient to deprave and corrupt: that reading such books leads to drug abuse and addiction.

Such a naive causal argument is of course not new. Courts hear, with monotonous regularity, of the 'sex fiend' triggered off by a girlie magazine. The late Pamela Hansford Johnson fervently believed that Ian Brady's perusal of De Sade resulted in the Moors murders. "Radical feminists" have an almost mystical belief that pornography breeds rapists—and, it seems (to judge from increasingly numerous public graffiti), that the only harmless men are dead ones. Any humanist could provide copious chapter and verse for the mind-boggling crimes induced by Bible-reading. And so on, and so forth.

Where is all this nonsense going to stop? (It better had, or I'll hazard a prophecy that you won't be reading *The Freethinker* for much longer.) If it doesn't, shall we all join in? Here's my own "little list", just for starters. All of Fleet Street—without exception! Cigarette advertising. Election "literature" (the June batch was abysmally illiterate and the lies weren't even convincing). The entire works of Dickens (some odd Victorian values are depicted *there!*). Non-Vegan cookbooks. Shakespeare (smutty!). And—of course—the Bible.

Totally absurd. Or is it? Doesn't the spectacle of Maggie's Nanny State protecting against themselves in 1983 those who may be curious about drugs make you wonder what on earth our "Bettors" will be preserving us from in 1984 and beyond? Anti-Tory propaganda, perhaps. . . ?

The whole enterprise of "protecting" grown adults *from themselves* is foredoomed to failure and is fundamentally undemocratic. Can this be Mrs Thatcher's vaunted "freedom"? If people *want* to smoke, drink or drug themselves to death, or to enjoy bizarre and socially-frowned-upon sexual high jinks with other consenting adults, who has the right to stop them? By all means ensure that consumable products sold to the public aren't adulterated with harmful substances; and use the fiscal weapon to dis-

(continued on page 121)

The year 1833 is of particular significance to freethinkers on both sides of the Atlantic. A former President of the National Secular Society considers the careers and personalities of the United States' and Britain's most famous unbelievers of the 19th century who were born that year.

One hundred and fifty years ago, within a few weeks of each other, there were born the greatest freethinkers of their generation—and arguably of any generation—in America and Britain. Robert Green Ingersoll was born in Dresden, New York State, on 11 August and Charles Bradlaugh in Hoxton, London, on 26 September. Both men died in the “Naughty Nineties”, whose naughtiness they found unappealing, Ingersoll in 1899 and Bradlaugh in 1891. Though they had a limited correspondence they do not appear to have met. This was probably as Ingersoll wished it, for George Jacob Holyoake sedulously fed the American his version of controversies with Bradlaugh, and Ingersoll accepted it implicitly.

Commentators have often remarked on striking similarities, other than date of birth, in the two men. Though not conventionally handsome in face or figure, both had imposing appearances as platform orators: portly well-clad physiques, commanding miens and faces that wedded intellectual eyes to emotional mouths. Both displayed unlimited physical and moral courage, devotion to their families, generosity to their friends and the causes they believed in. Ironically (for few public figures would have been as uncongenial to them as she, and reciprocally), both represented the 19th-century virtues extolled by Mrs Thatcher: devotion to duty, hard work, self-reliance and patriotism.

Despite differences in the two countries' political systems and the two men's parental affluence—Ingersoll's greater than Bradlaugh's—their careers showed significant parallels. Both had religious upbringings, backfiring into militant unbelief; became celebrated speakers, debaters, journalists and authors in a variety of theological, social and political controversies; were brilliant lawyers, one professional, the other amateur; and combined unofficial and official public careers in an interesting way. For a short time in their lives both served as cavalrymen in what amounted to civil wars, one in America and one in Ireland, and were profoundly influenced in their later thoughts and actions by these involvements. Indeed, Ingersoll was known as “Colonel” for the rest of his life.

There were many similarities in the two men's beliefs. Neither was acknowledged in the British or

American Cambridge—much less in Hampstead or Greenwich Village—as an “intellectual”, but what they may have lacked in “scholarship” they more than made up in breadth of knowledge, depth of analysis and sturdy commonsense. These they applied impartially to their manifold fields of investigation. Though they later acquired considerable knowledge of science and comparative religion, and Bradlaugh made some study of Hebrew, they believed that the best recommendation to religious scepticism was a study of the bible itself. This did not require familiarity with ancient texts or modern translations. A critical appraisal of the Authorized Version was enough to answer the basic question: if this document purported to be a family history of the people who lived next door, would you believe it? And if you wouldn't believe it as a chronicle of events, why should you believe it as a textbook of the physical, biological and social sciences or as a catechism of philosophical opinion and moral behaviour? Ideological opponents and squeamish ideological friends deplored the “crudity” of their attacks on the grand old book, but these attacks stand up very well to rereading today. If plain talk had not become increasingly unfashionable in the 20th century, we might not today be faced with the alarming growth of “creation science” and the worldwide proliferation of the Moral Majority.

Champions of the Powerless

Arguing from first principles of freedom, individuality and natural justice, they came to what, through most of their public careers, seemed very advanced political and social views. They advocated the emancipation of slaves and colonial peoples everywhere; freedom (and responsibility) of the Press; the rights of women and children, convicts and other powerless groups; abolition of capital and corporal punishment; the significance of marriage as a contract and not as a sacrament; and the secularisation of society. But, though they were often accused of being demagogues, they did not support a narrow populism or egalitarianism. They believed in human diversity within a framework of civil liberties and social justice, advocated free enterprise and staunchly supported, respectively, the American Republican and the British Liberal Parties. Both were therefore denounced by “advanced thinkers” in their declining years. Yet their reputation has outlived that of most of their detractors—and not only because of devoted daughters.

There were, of course, differences between them. Many of these arose from different nationalities and loyalties. Some resulted from different family

circumstances and others, I suspect, from temperamental differences. Perhaps Bradlaugh's greatest notoriety, and delayed acceptance by the official Liberal Party, stemmed from his republicanism. In 19th-century America this was not an issue. Bradlaugh supported free trade, while Ingersoll advocated protection. There were philosophical arguments in favour of each position, but mainly the stands reflected different national interests at that time. Though remaining a favourite speaker at Republican rallies throughout his life, Ingersoll was most active in politics when relatively young, serving as Attorney General for Illinois between 1866 and 1869. Thereafter he might have become the Governor of Illinois had he renounced freethought propaganda. Bradlaugh, on the other hand, did not become a member of parliament till 1880, and even then maintained a largely extraparliamentary career till 1886, when he was allowed to take his seat unchallenged. When he died, he was in line for the position of Under-Secretary of State for India. By that time British republicanism was moribund and he had demonstrated his public usefulness to sundry parliamentary committees and royal commissions.

Radical and Atheist

Despite his steady rise in respectability, I see Bradlaugh as the more radical of the two freethinkers. He personally formed organizations (some of them surviving) and led antiestablishment demonstrations on a score of issues: issues that involved changing the law as well as public opinion. On questions of press freedom and the right to affirm, he was himself prosecuted. In consistently supporting contraception, he made himself unpopular with many of his freethinking colleagues as well as with the authorities. Though there are philosophical arguments for both atheism and agnosticism, it is perhaps significant that Bradlaugh chose the first and Ingersoll the second label. From published speeches one gets an impression of the Englishman always on the frontiers of the politically attainable, long on specifics and short on generalities. Conversely, purple passages flow from the American like a coronation robe and some of his biographical tributes are positively gushy. Perhaps this contrast resulted from more than different commitments to activism. Bradlaugh was made a loner and malcontent—an outsider full of divine discontent—by circumstances: early poverty, failed business ventures, narrowly averted bankruptcies, no recognized profession, a broken marriage through his wife's alcoholism. Whatever the causes of their different styles, Bradlaugh's writings are now generally held to be "dated", while Ingersoll is credited with "timeless eloquence". Not that it matters, for Bradlaugh left other tangible legacies to posterity; and it is more useful to compare than to contrast the two freethinking giants.

Personal favourites are essentially personal.

To their contemporaries, one was known as "Honest Bob" and the other as "Thorough". The two adjectives were interchangeable. One was the "Colonel", the other the "Iconoclast". In many ways these titles were also interchangeable. For their sesquicentenary, at a time when "humanism" is the frontal aspect of freethought, we may well recall that their iconoclasm was no self-indulgent excess, no perverse denial of comfort to widows and orphans. Their attitude was neatly expressed by Ingersoll in his introduction to one version of his famous address on "Some Mistakes of Moses": *Now and then someone asks me why I am endeavouring to interfere with the religious faith of others, and why I try to take from the world the consolation naturally arising from a belief in eternal fire.*

DOING GOD'S WILL

The authorities in Michigan, USA, have taken over 50 children into care following the death of a 12-year-old boy, John Yarborough, at a religious commune run by the House of Judah sect. Police said the boy had been repeatedly beaten. There were bruises and marks all over his body and extensive spinal damage. Children at the commune were regularly beaten, usually with a pickaxe handle, to inculcate discipline. The boy's mother has been charged with manslaughter, but sect members say his death was a punishment by God.

William Lewis, the sect's "prophet" and leader, said: "We haven't done anything wrong because God tells you to put the rod to the children's back and that's what we're doing". Such beatings were necessary for children to enter the kingdom of God. John Yarborough was "the type of boy who would come and go when he wanted to. God killed him because he doesn't like bad children".

"Opium of the People"

courage irresponsible behaviour which could create unnecessary hardship and unwanted burdens for others: but beyond that, what social intervention against free personal choice is justifiable?

As an unreconstructed J. S. Mill-style Victorian radical, I am vividly aware that whatever else this Government stands for, its trumpeted championship of the individual's freedom of choice is hollow claptrap. A great American libertarian lawyer, Morris Ernst, wrote half a century ago: "When countries go to the Right politically, women go back into the kitchen, books are burned and taboos fence off new frontiers against human adventure". Will we *never* learn?

BOOKS

THE SPIRITUALISTS: THE PASSION FOR THE OCCULT IN THE NINETEENTH AND TWENTIETH CENTURIES by Ruth Brandon. Weidenfeld and Nicolson, £12.50

William James, the pioneering psychologist, was quite clear what was wanted. "If you wish to upset the law that all crows are black", he wrote, "you must not seek to show that no crows are: it is enough if you prove one single crow to be white". James's concern was proof of spiritualism, and his own white crow, he admitted, was the celebrated medium, Mrs Leonora Piper. She is just one of the spiritualists dealt with, and revealed as not quite white, by Ruth Brandon. But where there is a will to believe, the blackest of crows can still shine brightly, and therein lies the whole problem of spiritualism and all other manifestations of what has come to be called the paranormal.

The difficulty, in a nutshell, is this. People produce phenomena. Other people cannot understand how those phenomena have been produced. Therefore the phenomena are beyond the power of normal knowledge to explain. And even when many escapades of many practitioners have been exposed as frauds, there remain the few white crows. Gulled intellects can get no better exercise than from the gymnastics needed to cast aside these awful revelations. Mrs Piper confesses in a long piece in the *New York Herald*. Within days her supporters have engineered a recanting statement and she carries on business much as before, knowing no other way to support herself. The Fox sisters, who started the whole thing off with their spiritualist toes, expose their fraudulent methods on more than one occasion. They are ignored as poor, drunk, and destitute, and liable to do anything for a buck, even lie about their undoubted powers. (But not, of course, lie in the first place about the spirits.) Eva C's famous materialisations bear an uncanny similarity to pictures published in *Le Miroir*, even down to having *Le Miroir* visible on one. The Freiherr von Schrenk-Notzing declares that these are ideoplastic manifestations, "ephemeral, externalised precipitates of the medium's psychic impressions and reminiscences"; Eva C saw *Le Miroir*, and what could be more natural than that her psyche constructed the ideoplasts from hidden memories of its front pages. Believers continue to believe, in the very teeth of the evidence.

For that very reason this excellent book — thorough, well-researched, witty and engaging though it undoubtedly is — will convert no-one. Why not? Because evidence is, quite simply, irrelevant. That is not to say that it shouldn't be read by everyone with an interest in gullibility and belief. I would hope that it might persuade fence sitters to jump

FREETHINKER

bravely and join the sceptics. And it provides fresh supplies for the beleaguered sceptic who enjoys argument.

Arguments about spiritualism are like arguments about all the other branches of the paranormal. There are two threads to disentangle. First, the reality of the phenomena themselves. Then, the continued belief in those phenomena.

Most of the phenomena, as performed by most of the practitioners, have been well and truly exposed as fraudulent. There remains, it is true, a small corpus of events less readily accounted for (just as there remain a few truly unidentified flying objects). To James and others of his ilk, these are white crows. To me, they, like so many spirits, are black crows robed in mundane white muslin. My kind of open mind is willing to be swayed by evidence, but finds all the evidence so far adduced useless, that which isn't proven fraud tainted by the overwhelming majority that is. The believer's open mind accepts ideoplasts as a better explanation of reality than cut-outs from a popular magazine. How can it?

My own experience is that when challenged by the scarcity of paranormal phenomena, true believers, at least the more intelligent among them, switch tracks and open the issue of belief. That is, I think, the more interesting issue, but it is one that has received very little attention. Ruth Brandon does discuss it in her final chapter, "The Rejection of Disbelief"; but unlike the historical accounts and exposés this chapter is unsatisfying. I'm not sure why. Probably because there is so little that can be said. Brandon mentions the unwarranted importance we place on odd-matches, coincidences that simply must be more than coincidence and that form the key personal experience behind so many believers' acceptance of all the rest. The odder the match, the more importance we attach to it, even though very odd matches are bound to turn up in the long run, and a lifetime is a very long run indeed.

The human mind, like the human body, was shaped by evolution and natural selection. So what was it about this propensity to make connections that conferred a survival edge on those who had it? Nobody knows—which is fair enough. But nobody seems to want to know, and that is less pleasing. Perhaps it is simply part of our equipment as natural psychologists; connections and patterns undoubtedly are important, so much so that we may be unable to rid ourselves of the ability to come to obvious conclusions even when no conclusion is called for.

For too long the study of parapsychology has been the study of the phenomena, I suspect because the

REVIEWS

believers think they will convert sceptics with evidence. But just as exposure does not blacken all the believer's crows, so a single white crow will not convert a sceptic (though a single sufficiently stunning experience might, as Brandon demonstrates so amply). The latest manifestation of this is the Koestlers' bequest of £400,000 for a chair in parapsychology, presumably to enable some worthy to continue to test metal benders and table tippers. All the tests and investigations do nothing to further our understanding; we need a Professor of Belief, not a Professor of Parapsychology.

Ruth Brandon's excellent and readable book details the growth of belief in spiritualism, and I particularly liked her treatment of the peculiarly English notions of those two towering intellects, Sir Oliver Lodge and Sir Arthur Conan Doyle. But what I want to know is not whether there is a Borderland, complete with whisky, cigars, and golf. There is not. What I want to know is why so many people need to think there is.

JEREMY CHERFAS

THE TRUTH ABOUT URI GELLER, by James Randi.
Prometheus Books, £6.95

Professional illusionists, as a fraternity, have a strict code of conduct. One rule is that you do not attempt, as Uri Geller did, to hoax scientists into believing you can work miracles. James "The Amazing" Randi wrote the first version of this book in 1975 under the title, *The Magic of Uri Geller*, when its target was at the height of his fame and seemingly unstoppable. Randi's motive was anger at the way Geller had brought his profession into disrepute and the damage he was doing to respectable men of science, whose reputations must inevitably suffer as a result of being taken in by him. Before the book was printed Randi offered to discuss it with Geller in the hope that something might be worked out which would avoid the necessity of publication. He would have accepted a statement from the trickster that he was simply demonstrating how easily scientists could be fooled, and how readily the media would accept Paranormal claims. The response was a threat to sue for libel.

Randi thereupon published what could well be the most thorough and devastating exposure of a charlatan ever written. This new edition has been updated to include the subsequent history of Uri, not that there is much to add. No scientific institution is

interested in him now, nor does he count for much with the general public. He was last heard of turning a dishonest buck giving individual "readings" like some seaside Gipsy Lee. Randi was never sued.

Many of Geller's "psychic" feats are explained in detail. Photographs show him bending a spoon, not by will-power but with his strong hands. But what really shakes one is the incredible sloppiness of the so-called scientific tests which were hailed as proof of his powers of extra-sensory perception.

Had the prestigious Stanford Research Institute thought of probing their subject's background there would have been no tests, for Geller had already been exposed as a fake in his native Israel. The two scientists in charge of the project were eminently suitable from his point of view, one being extremely near-sighted and the other a believer in Scientology.

As is usual with "psychics", the test conditions were laid down by Uri Geller himself. Safeguards against fraud were virtually non-existent. It did not strike Stanford as odd that Geller was accompanied everywhere by a number of his "friends". Even the closest of buddies are not normally on hand all day and every day. For all Stanford knew or cared they could have been his paid assistants. One in particular, Shipi Shtrang, was always underfoot during the tests. He could easily have signalled information to his employer, but nobody at Stanford worried about that. They failed to realise they were being had even when Geller made his preposterous claim to be in touch with flying saucers from the planet Hoova!

It was a similar story in Britain. Professor John Taylor of London University was conned into writing a book endorsing Geller's marvellous powers. Taylor found children who could also bend metal by will-power alone—after they were allowed to take their metal strips out of his sight. As others had done, the professor noted what he called the "shyness effect", the refusal of the fork or spoon to bend while it is being watched but only when the observer's attention is distracted. He had here all he needed for solving the mystery and never realised it.

Making fools of experts is a time-honoured game. Randi cites the example of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, who in 1922 was shown photographs of fairies taken by two little girls and thought them genuine. Since this book was published one of the girls, now an elderly lady, has confessed that the "fairies" were cardboard cutouts. Doyle believed in fairies for the rest of his days. What Sherlock Holmes thought is not recorded.

R. J. CONDON

A defendant who appeared before Brighton magistrates last month and pleaded guilty to stealing groceries from a supermarket gave his name as The Lord and his address as The Tabernacle of God. The magistrates made an order committing him to a mental hospital.

"The Unholy Mrs Knight"

THE EDITOR

MARGARET KNIGHT

1903

1983

With the death of Margaret Knight, at the age of 80, we have lost an indomitable advocate of freethought and rationalism. Mrs Knight had been a member of the National Secular Society and a contributor to the columns of *The Freethinker* for many years. She will be remembered for her many admirable qualities; among them, great courage, total dependability and unfailing consideration for others.

Younger readers will probably find it difficult to realise the impact of her two historic broadcasts on "Morals Without Religion" 28 years ago. In an introduction to the published version, Margaret Knight gave her reasons for broadcasting views which caused such consternation and outrage. She was convinced that "besides millions of frank unbelievers" there were large numbers of half-believers "to whom religion is a source of intellectual and moral discomfort. . .

"I had been uneasy about religion throughout my adolescence, but I had not the moral courage to throw off my beliefs until my third year at Cambridge. Then, reading for the Moral Sciences Tripos, I made contact with the books and lectures of the philosophers Bertrand Russell, J. M. E. McTaggart and C. D. Broad. A fresh, cleansing wind swept through the stuffy room that contained the relics of my religious beliefs, and ever since I have lived happily without them".

Referring to the problem faced by the ordinary person seeking to throw off orthodox beliefs, she agreed that books on atheism could be found in shops and libraries. "But they must be actively sought, and a person must have acquired some measure of confidence in his unbelief before he will seek them".

On the other hand, it is impossible to avoid Christian propaganda. "Organised indoctrination begins at school at the impressionable age of five; and the process is vigorously continued by the BBC, which, besides its religious broadcasts to schools, regularly devotes some ten hours a week to religious services and exhortations. . .

"This high-powered propaganda has not made us a nation of believers, but it has created strong deterrents to the expression of unbelief. In some cases the threat is financial; a teacher, for example, who is openly agnostic, finds his chance of promotion threatened. But more subtle than the financial deterrent is the effect of mass suggestion—the feeling, sedulously fostered, that 'inability to believe' is a

regrettable and slightly embarrassing condition, to which it is best not to refer".

The first broadcast took place on 5 January 1955. It was not long before the storm broke. The *Daily Express* proclaimed: "Woman Psychologist Makes Remarkable Radio Attack on Religion for Children". Peterborough, the *Daily Telegraph* columnist, denounced the talk as "one large slab of atheistical propaganda" and implored the Almighty and the BBC to prevent the second one being given.

Two days later, Margaret Knight had a visitor at her home near Aberdeen. She related how the agreeable young reporter discussed the broadcast and tried — unsuccessfully — to persuade her to be photographed for his paper. The following Sunday, her photograph—acquired from an Aberdeen newspaper—appeared in the now defunct *Sunday Graphic* with a headline in two-inch letters: "The Unholy Mrs Knight". There followed a warning: "Don't let this woman fool you. She looks—doesn't she—just like the typical housewife; cool, comfortable, harmless. But Margaret Knight is a menace. A dangerous woman". The misguided BBC should not have allowed "a fanatic to rampage along the air lanes, beating up Christianity with a razor and a bicycle-chain", the "agreeable young reporter" added with characteristic Fleet Street subtlety.

Fortunately, the Almighty and Broadcasting House ignored the *Daily Telegraph* plea, and the second broadcast took place as planned. Next day the headlines included: "Mrs Knight Says it Again", "Godless Radio Repeat Shocks Nation" and "God Compared to Santa Claus". All of the national and many of the provincial papers carried hostile comments. The most malevolent diatribes were churned out by the *Daily Telegraph* and the *Daily Sketch*. (Rupert Murdoch's *Sun* had not yet risen.)

Critics described Margaret Knight's views as wrong-headed, pernicious, glib, complacent, sterile, menacing, fallacious and easily refuted. "But they did not themselves attempt to refute them", she commented drily.

The torrent of abuse and criticism from churches and newspapers was predictable. But the really significant result of the broadcasts was the hundreds of messages of support that Margaret Knight received from all over Britain. The theme common to the majority of them was: "Somebody has said it at last!"

One correspondent wrote: "You have made a stir, such as I cannot remember in my lifetime of 70 years. . . You allowed the plain truth to be told in the homes of ordinary people. Philosophising on the Third Programme they can ignore, but like the child in the story you exposed the fact that the emperor is wearing no clothes at all. We have been allowing

assumptions to blind us to facts; the Church, that there is a religious revival; freethinkers, that the battle is won. You have brought us back to facts again".

In the three weeks after the first broadcast about 1,500 people wrote to the BBC, an unknown number to newspapers and 1,200 to Margaret Knight. Her supporters were drawn from across the social spectrum and their ages ranged from 16 to nearly 100. A former clergyman wrote: "At 93, I am more clear in my mind about it than I was at 33, when I found it necessary for the sake of mental integrity to break with my profession as a minister".

Not all Christians joined in the hue and cry against Mrs Knight. Some of those who wrote to disagree with what she said congratulated her for having expressed her unbelief with honesty and forthrightness.

Margaret Knight's views changed profoundly in later years — but not in a way that pleased her Christian opponents. In *Christianity: the Debit Account*, she explained that until the time of the broadcasts her interest was in philosophical theism rather than historical Christianity. The vehemence of her critics prompted her to study the bible and read many books on the origins and history of the Church.

"At the time of the broadcasts", she wrote, "I held two assumptions that were common among the more highbrow type of sceptic. These were: (I) that Jesus, though he was deluded in believing himself to be the long-awaited Jewish Messiah, was, nevertheless, a great moral teacher, and a man of outstanding moral excellence, and (II) that although Christianity is now rapidly being outgrown, it was a great force for good in its day.

"In the light of wider knowledge, both assumptions now seem to me to be false. . .

"If one reads the Gospels with a fresh mind, one gets a picture of the founder of Christianity that is quite startlingly different from the traditional 'gentle Jesus' . . . Jesus, in fact, was typical of a certain kind of fanatical young idealist: at one moment holding forth, with tears in his eyes, about the need for universal love; at the next, furiously denouncing the morons, crooks and bigots who do not see eye to eye with him. It is very natural and very human behaviour. But it is not superhuman".

Just as the rationalist philosophers brought a "fresh, clean wind" that swept away the relics of her religious beliefs, Margaret Knight, in two short broadcasts, swept away faint-heartedness and superstition from the minds of thousands.

● Margaret Knight suffered a stroke and died in her sleep. In accordance with her wishes there was no funeral.

ROCK SOLID

At the time of the famous radio talks, "Morals Without Religion" (1955), I happened to be involved with those in the BBC who were planning controversial broadcasts, on which there was a new policy, and I was given Margaret Knight's scripts to read, long before it was decided, at the instance of Barbara Wootton, that they could be delivered. There was nothing in them of a kind that had not been said before often enough on radio; indeed, I had myself said things more offensive to believers, about Jesus. I think there were three reasons why they occasioned a stir. They were given as straightforward talks, which at that time seemed to many to imply the imprimatur of the BBC. They were centrally concerned with what should and should not be taught to children. It was the "silly season", when newsmen scrape the barrel, and they made a meal of it. For Mrs Knight, torn to pieces in print, it meant not merely notoriety, which she did not love, but mainly that she found a constituency: she was hailed enthusiastically by the Freethought/Rationalist/Ethical movement, and given an ambit for her influence, especially with students in the universities at that time when most of them had newly formed Humanist Societies. This was the experience behind her *Humanist Anthology* (1961).

Margaret Knight's background was Roedean and Cambridge, where she was strongly influenced by the powerful mind of McTaggart; and she taught psychology in the University of Aberdeen, in the department headed by her husband. Antony Flew and Ronald Hepburn were junior colleagues in the University, and she had a particularly high opinion of Hepburn, who now has the philosophy chair at Edinburgh. In psychology, she took the line, following Shaftesbury against Hobbes, that there is an innate social and co-operative bent in human nature, which is the root of morality, a naturalistic foundation.

In her *Humanist Anthology*, she gives the heading "Doublethink" to no less than four excerpts, including one of her own. This is a clue to her intense detestation of this characteristic intellectual dishonesty among theologians, and its fascination for her.

She wrote: "It is sad to see first-class minds self-banished to this intellectual half-world; but there is a fascination none the less, to the sceptic, in watching the gradual deliquescence of Christian dogma under the influence of re-thinking".

I remember sharing with her a WEA weekend course in Northumberland. In her forthright way, she set up the classical Christian doctrines, and demolished them; an efficient and polished performance. I noticed the gathering bewilderment on the faces of her young (Christian) audience. This was not what they believed. What they thought they did

believe was of course even more vulnerable; and of course even more obscure and elusive than "Doublethink".

Margaret Knight was herself rock solid. I could not help thinking of her as a Roedean head girl. Possibly she never was, but she was an immense credit to the school.

H. J. BLACKHAM

SURPRISINGLY MODERATE

I was saddened to hear of the death of Margaret Knight at what I was about to call a comparatively early age till I turned up a reference and found she was born in 1903. Certainly she seemed to have the freshness of style and enquiring mind one associates with perennial youth.

It may be too early to judge her importance to British freethought, but her position was certainly unique. Though she made little original contribution to its philosophy and less to its organisation, she was for many years its best known figure and a certain drawcard on public and university platforms. Her fame—or notoriety—derived from two broadcast talks that in retrospect look surprisingly moderate. Ten years and much research later she declared in an NSS pamphlet (*Christianity: The Debit Account*) that "the conversion of Europe to Christianity was one of the greatest disasters of history". But then the brazenness of her publishers, or herself, was so taken for granted that few eyebrows were raised.

The BBC's choice of Mrs Knight in 1955 to lead it gingerly into the twentieth century was not surprising. If she were at that time a member of any humanist body, she was very much a sleeping member, and her appearance and voice were suitably schoolmarmish. Her style was donnishly restrained, yet conversationally direct, and she later wished that mine could be "a trifle less pugnacious". So no one was prepared for the fury of denunciation that greeted "Morals without Religion" and virtually blacklisted her on the BBC. Many years later she declined to join an NSS deputation to the Corporation in the hope that the "softly, softly, catchee monkey" approach of the Humanist Broadcasting Council might rehabilitate her, but it caught nothing bigger than a coryza virus. A great pity, for she deserved the status of a Muggeridge.

DAVID TRIBE

THE FREETHINKER, 1982

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LETTERS

OBJECTIVE AND RATIONAL

Most of those who read my carefully-worded letter on the Falklands (May) no doubt nodded approvingly and passed on. Four freethinkers however felt moved to write to you. The scoreline runs: Bennion 0, Correspondents 4.

In that letter I made a plea for unclouded thinking (following the guidance of our President). The four ignored it. Rather than thinking, they emoted. The scoreline could be revised as follows: Rationality 0, Emotionalism 4.

These four wish to dump the whole Falklands problem into a convenient sack labelled "Reject". They do not want the headache of sorting through the issues objectively, on rational grounds refuting some arguments and accepting others.

The four cloud the point I made with irrelevancies, dragging in anything from de Valera to those dear dead Empire Loyalists. They ask rhetorical questions which do not arise from what I said (a hoary stratagem). Mr Evans rejects my courteous inference that his review was impartial (as reviews surely ought to be). My friend Jim Herrick says, which he cannot believe, that negotiation will solve every problem if it is carried out with sufficient determination. He knows well enough you cannot "negotiate" wrong into right.

Not one of these four addresses the issue of the islanders' terrible plight on the awful day of that invasion. Perhaps they simply lack imagination.

The closed mind, the emotionalism, the lack of imagination, the knee-jerk response — what do they remind you of, Mr. Editor? Could it be that old "Freethinker" target — the religious bigot?

FRANCIS BENNION

AGAINST ALL VIOLENCE

The priest in charge of the King's Cross, London church which not long ago was taken over for a "sit-in" by local prostitutes and feminists protesting at police harassment, recently announced in a television interview that he was withdrawing his support for these women because he had found that they had completely closed minds and that any kind of logical discussion with them was quite impossible. After reading the letters from Rita Craft and Brenda Able (July) in response to my article, "Persons Against Repression Against Persons", I think I know just what he meant, although I am surprised to find such great lack of rational thought from freethinkers.

I shall refrain from replying to their charges in detail since the answers are all to be found in my original article. Suffice it to say here, however, that I, too, am against violence against women—and men, or indeed against anyone. I am certainly not a misogynist as Rita Craft implies, and have been an ardent supporter of equal rights and opportunities for women since long before the terms "feminist", "sexist" or "women's lib" were even heard of.

Brenda Able's comparison of the trade in "pornography" with that of drugs is, frankly, absurd. Drug abuse is of known and proven harm, often lethal—and I of course here include cigarettes and alcohol, both legally available and from which source, furthermore, the Exchequer receives hundreds of millions of pounds' worth of precious revenue every year.

No-one has ever been killed by seeing a sexually explicit book or watching a sexually explicit film, or, indeed, even harmed by the experience. Brenda Able may also like to know that women are not the only sex to be "at risk of violence" in the streets of London.

EVENTS

In 1971 I was myself "mugged" a few hundred yards from my home in Chelsea, robbed of about £11 and left lying unconscious on the pavement. Would she attribute that attack to the assailant's contact with available "pornography"? Oh yes, and I would also like her to know that on at least four separate occasions I have been sexually harassed by females at work. Women do not have a monopoly on that one.

It was extremely interesting that in their letters, your correspondents both introduced the irrelevant paedophilia topic. I would suggest that this points either to plain mischievousness, or a desperate, last-ditch resort to the emotive "Save our Children" tactics so beloved of the Whitehouse brigade. Sorry to disappoint you there, too, ladies. You don't have a monopoly on child welfare either!

The philosophy of the National Campaign for the Reform of the Obscene Publications Acts (NCRAP) is based on those same thoughts expressed so eloquently by John Stuart Mill, in his famous essay "On Liberty". We are only concerned for the consenting adult's freedom to choose for her or himself.

DAVID WEBB

Director, National Campaign for the Reform of the Obscene Publications Acts

REALITY AND FANTASY

I think your correspondents Rita Craft and Brenda Able are very unfair to "The Freethinker", which has, in fact, opposed sexist practices in the world, whether religious in origin or otherwise. But basically their letters show the same confusion between reality and fantasy (and the belief that fantasy somehow affects reality) that is shown by the pro-censorship, anti-sex brigades.

This seems to me to be a great pity, because a rigid line can, and should, be drawn between fantasy, which hurts no-one, and real crimes and exploitation. To brand the two together, as Brenda Able does in her letter, shows a state of mental and moral muddle which is singularly unhelpful in the argument; most of her letter departs completely from the issue of pornography. I think readers will appreciate this point after reading the last paragraph of her letter.

Surely there is all the difference between real violence and simulated violence? The first should be a crime anywhere (and is); the second is a completely harmless activity, whatever arguments may be brought against it on artistic and aesthetic grounds.

ELSIE KARBACZ

DOWN AMONG THE NASTIES

In the July "Freethinker" Michael Duane writes on Solzhenitsyn while Antony Grey reviews a new book on the ultra-Right Christian political fringe.

Secularists should know that there is a connection between the two. Among those invited to hear Solzhenitsyn's Templeton Prize Address was a representative of "Home", a journal which supports the British Housewives' League. Part of the League's policy is "to show that over-control by the State is not in the interests of a free and happy homelife and the development of personality in accord with Christian tradition". Not surprisingly, therefore, "Home" waxed lyrical in support of Solzhenitsyn's attack on the "vortex of atheism".

"Home" is published by Bloomfield Publishers who in turn are connected with Don Martin's British League of Rights—the British section of the World Anti-Communist League which has the support of such as the fundamentalist Islamic Government of Saudi Arabia. Mr Martin has addressed meetings of the Christian Affirmation Campaign and a recent BLR meeting was addressed by Father Arthur Lewis of the Rhodesia

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

Brighton and Hove Humanist Group. Queen's Head, Queen's Road (entrance in Junction Road, opposite Brighton Station). Sunday, 4 September, 5 pm for 5.30 pm. Barbara Smoker: The Secular Humanist Spectrum.

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

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

National Secular Society. Annual Outing, including visit to Northampton to commemorate 150th anniversary of Charles Bradlaugh's birth. Sunday, 18 September. Coach leaves central London; fare £5. Details from NSS, 702 Holloway Road, London N19, telephone 01-272 1266.

Humanist Holidays. Christmas in Eastbourne and Paris. Details from Betty Beer, 58 Weir Road, London SW12, telephone 01-673 6234.

Warwickshire Humanist Group. Details of activities obtainable from Roy Saich, 34 Spring Lane, Kenilworth, telephone Kenilworth 58450.

Christian Group, whose activities are enthusiastically reported in "Home". On the BLR's booklists, alongside the writings of anti-semitic clerics such as the Rev Denis Fahey, founder of the Maria Duce organisation, and those of Mary Whitehouse, are to be found several titles by Solzhenitsyn. In turn, Solzhenitsyn has contributed to "Replica", the organ of WACL's Mexican branch.

There are numerous other Christians active on the far Right. Some examples are the Rev Brian Williams, faith healer and publisher of racist tracts; Cyril Eastaugh, former Bishop of Peterborough and New Britain Party member; and Joan White, a former National Front activist who stood in the General Election as a Christian Nationalist. Nor should we forget Francis Radcliffe, the founder of the Christian Party, whose favourite pastime was terrorising his wife. He thought she was possessed by the devil!

It would take years of painstaking psychological research to discover why many Christian fundamentalists are drawn to fascistic ideas. But one thing is certain—these cranks pose a real, if as yet small, threat to our freedom and must therefore be opposed.

TERRY LIDDLE

Sister Aldina always took poems and a bible when she visited the Naples prison where Mafia gang bosses are held. "I was trying to redeem those poor young men and bring them back to the straight and narrow path", she explained after being arrested with 60 others and accused of criminal conspiracy. Police claim that Sister Aldina was a messenger for Naples area branch of the Mafia. She concealed money and coded letters in the bible she carried.

Gathering of the Godless at Helsinki

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The third World Atheist Conference was held in Helsinki at the end of June. **Barbara Smoker reports.**

During the first few decades of its history, the National Secular Society, reflecting Charles Bradlaugh's international outlook, forged links with free-thinkers and freethought organisations overseas, and maintained those links with visits and international conferences, in spite of the comparative slowness of travel in those days. As well as its campaigns at home, the NSS supported the movement for the

separation of Church and State in France and protested loudly against the martyrdom of Francisco Ferrer in Spain.

These international links had, however, been rather neglected during the past few decades, until a decision was made two years ago to strengthen them. We therefore sent delegates to the Lausanne conference organised in 1981 by the World Union of Free-thinkers, then the Hanover conference organised in 1982 by the International Humanist and Ethical Union, and, most recently, the third World Atheist Conference. Three international secular humanist conferences in 20 months!

Brook's Good Year

out with Christopher Smith at the Institute for Social Studies in Medical Care.

When some 460 teenage mothers were interviewed while their children were 18 months old, all but 11 per cent said that they were pleased to have had their baby when they did. Madeleine Simms thought that the reason for this high degree of satisfaction was that those who would have been displeased were able, by use of birth control or abortion at an early stage, to contract out of the undesired responsibilities of premature motherhood.

"This high degree of satisfaction is a tribute to the work of birth control and abortion law reform movements over many years that has made these choices possible", she said. "The result of this self-selection process into motherhood was that most of these young women ultimately felt they had made the right choice. This is good news indeed.

"The 11 per cent of teenage mothers who considered they had made the wrong choice felt this largely for material reasons. Two fifths of these women explained their negative feelings in terms of inadequate housing and insufficient money, which put a great strain on them once they had a baby to look after.

"One third of these young mothers felt they were simply too young and immature to have had a child so early. They had missed out on their youth. One quarter regretted they had not had enough time in which to know their partner better before starting a family, or alternatively they had not had enough time to put an end to a hopeless and disruptive relationship before being trapped by a baby. Others mentioned lost job opportunities and a few said they did not really want to have a baby at all, at any time. Several had been thwarted when trying to obtain an abortion".

A lively discussion followed the talk. The view was expressed from the body of the hall that this was research that was useful to planners and should be continued despite funding shortages.

Though our participation in them all has been useful, a little ecumenism is surely called for, if only to reduce the effort and expense involved. We recognise the historical, ideological, terminological, temperamental, and linguistic factors that have given rise to this triplication, but perhaps the British skills of diplomacy and compromise can help to rationalise it for the future.

The conferences arranged by the WUFT and IHEU in the immediate postwar period were all held in NATO countries, with hardly a thought of Asia. The first two World Atheist conferences were therefore held in India, organised by Lavanam. The choice of Helsinki for the third in the series was partly motivated by the desire to attract delegates from the USSR, and one Russian delegate did indeed attend, representing an organisation dedicated primarily to the scientific method.

This presented some linguistic difficulties—especially as this was not one of those highly organised conferences with expensive simultaneous translation electronics, which have become *de rigueur* in Humanist and Ethical conferences. But somehow the lack of simultaneous translation was a contribution to the friendly human scale of the proceedings. The translation, for instance, from English to Russian was achieved by a translation first into Finnish by a young Finn who had learned English, followed by a re-translation into Russian by another Finn who had learned Russian, and the reply followed the same relay in reverse.

On the second evening, when we met the local atheists socially, we were entertained by a young woman singer who had written many of her own songs in several languages, including excellent English. All that in addition to a remarkably strong voice and confident personality. Another form of entertainment with an atheistic message was provided by an Indian magician, Mr Premanand, who showed us how the Asian "godmen" trick the gullible. (His relentless exposure of their tricks in India has led to attempts on his life by godmen there.)