

The Freethinker

secular humanist monthly

founded 1881

Vol. 103, No. 10

OCTOBER 1983

30p

CHARLES BRADLAUGH: CELEBRATION OF "A BOLD FREETHINKER"

There was an impressive gathering of freethinkers at a function in London on 26 September to mark the 150th anniversary of the birth of Charles Bradlaugh. The meeting, wreath-laying ceremony and exhibition took place at Shoreditch District Library, near the site of the Hoxton house where he was born. Members of the Bradlaugh family in attendance included Basil Bradlaugh Bonner, a great-grandson and Nicholas Bradlaugh Bonner, aged seven weeks, the latest descendant and great-great-great grandson of Charles Bradlaugh.

Barbara Smoker, President of the National Secular Society, was in the chair. She said we were very proud to be the successors of Bradlaugh in the NSS which he founded in 1866. It was appropriate, she added, that India was well represented at an event to commemorate Charles Bradlaugh, for his memory is far greener in that country than it is in the land of his birth.

Michael Foot, fulfilling his last public engagement while leader of the Labour Party, recalled the names of many distinguished participants in the centenary celebrations 50 years ago. "I hope", he added, "that Charles Bradlaugh's name will always be remembered and celebrated. And I hope that when the 200th anniversary comes, we'll have the NSS to ensure that proper celebrations take place then."

"There are a whole host of reasons why the name of Charles Bradlaugh should be honoured. He was, of course, a bold freethinker in everything he did, and that is chiefly how he should be celebrated. But there were many other causes he fought for as well.

"He was a great defender of the rights of women. That arose partly from his belief in and advocacy of birth control. He and Annie Besant and others

defied the laws of those times in order to produce humanitarian laws on the subject.

"But he was also a believer in the rights of women on other matters, and he was a great champion, long before it was introduced in this country, of the right of women to vote. People often said to him that if women got the vote in Northampton he would never be elected. He said this didn't deter him, and he continued to argue in favour of votes for women 30 or 40 years before the terrible deed was done".

Mr Foot said that Bradlaugh became a very skilled Member of Parliament as well as a courageous one.

"It was partly the arguments he had with members of the House, who tried to disqualify him, which gave prominence to all the causes in which he was interested. The battle over the oath never deflected him from saying what he wanted. Augustine Birrell, a prominent Liberal MP of those times, wrote an account of what it was like when they had such arguments, and here is a brief extract.

It was not what Bradlaugh said, but the people he said it to, that drew down upon him the censure of the magistrate and (unkindest cut of all) the condemnation of the House of Commons. Of all the evils from which the lovers of religion do well to pray that their faith may be delivered, the worst is that it should ever come to be discussed across the floor of the House of Commons. The self-elected champions of the Christian faith who then ride into the lists are of a kind well calculated to make piety hide her head for very shame. Rowdy noblemen, intemperate country gentlemen, sterile lawyers, cynical but wealthy sceptics who maintain religion as another fence round their property, hereditary Non-

(continued inside back page)

The Freethinker

UK ISSN 0016-0687

Editor: WILLIAM McILROY

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 A

VIDEO CENSORSHIP

The National Council for the Reform of the Obscene Publications Acts (NCROPA) has strongly condemned the proposed parliamentary Bill to regulate video "nasties", and describes it as "a further unnecessary, severely restrictive measure in an area where individual freedom of choice is already virtually non-existent". Graham Bright (Conservative, Luton South), who drew first place in the ballot for private members' Bills, has outlined proposals for the Bill which NCROPA describe as "alarming", and if enacted "will deprive millions of British subjects of yet another slice of freedom by State repression".

Last month NCROPA submitted its views on the Bill to the Home Secretary, declaring that it is "unequivocally committed to fight for the removal of censorship for consenting adults and is therefore categorically opposed to any legislation, whether existing or proposed, which prevents adults from exercising a free choice over what they see, read or hear". NCROPA's observations to Leon Brittan are confined to commenting on proposals for the basic framework of the Bill, which has Government support, as set out in a Press release issued by Mr Bright on 14 July.

The only part of the proposals with which NCROPA would not disagree is that which would make the sale of adult video cassettes to children an offence. Even here, however, there are differing views about what the actual age limit should be.

NCROPA suggests that "for consistency's and simplicity's sake, the choice of 18 years would probably arouse least opposition, although many parents do not wish their children to be subjected to such State 'nannyism' as the Bill would provide". It disputes Mr Bright's claim that his Bill deals with a subject that is a cause of great public concern. "Great public concern" over the issue is a myth.

Any such concern is chiefly confined to a minority of self-appointed busybodies who wish to dictate to others and to force their own tastes and standards on them. Their dangerous cause is often aided and abetted by irresponsible elements in the media who make highly inflammatory and unsubstantiated claims about the damaging effects of uncensored films and publications.

NCROPA comments: "Some repressive religious groups and often seemingly fanatically motivated police chiefs and members of the judiciary contribute further to these lies. In any event, Mr Bright himself admits that 'the great bulk of the trade (in videos) is, of course, entirely harmless.'"

S AND NOTES

"NCROPA goes further and maintains that there is no intrinsic, proven harm caused by watching sexually or violently explicit material. This is what all the *bona fide* world investigations have concluded.

"Attempts are often made to cite the dangers of 'copy-cat' behaviour after people have viewed a particular scene or activity depicted in a film. If the activity is of a dangerously anti-social or violent nature, like murder, for example, it is very rare indeed for any 'copy-cat' behaviour to be incited simply by the film on its own.

"In most cases where this does occur it is as a result of other much more complex, deep-seated psychological reasons. Even if there is a small risk, however, in the much wider public interest of the freedom of the majority as a whole, it is a risk which, in a free society, must be taken.

"Living itself is a risk. Every year thousands of people are killed in motor vehicle accidents. Those thousands of lives could all be saved if we removed the risk involved by prohibiting all motor vehicles completely. No one would seriously suggest such a drastic measure because, in the wide interest of the freedom of the majority, the existence and availability of motor vehicles is deemed a proper risk to take. We must have a sense of proportion over this matter".

Mr Bright's reference to "objectionable" video cassettes prompts the question, to whom are they objectionable? To himself, the Government, or Mrs Whitehouse? People who object to certain video films "have a free choice to decide whether or not they want to be offended by them. But there is no justification for banning something simply because someone, somewhere, is offended by it".

NCROPA argues that there are many things which personally offend people but which they would not expect to be banned. Boxing, for instance, offends some people greatly, masquerading as it does in the guise of "sport" when the aim is to render one's opponent unconscious and almost certainly inflict actual bodily harm in the process.

"Nevertheless, as long as people are stupid enough to want to indulge in such an 'offensive' activity, and are not coerced into doing so, nor forced to watch it, and as long as those participants are fully informed of the risks involved, then it is their business, and no one, including the State, should interfere. Likewise, if people wish to watch sex videos or video 'nasties', that too is their own business, especially in the privacy of their own homes".

NCROPA is "horrified" by the suggestion that censorship of video cassettes should be the respon-

sibility of the British Board of Film Censors, which it describes as "a self-appointed, self-perpetuating body accountable to no one, as the Home Office Committee on Obscenity and Film Censorship (the Williams Committee) discovered.

"To afford such a body statutory backing would be a most dangerous and retrograde step . . . it is intolerable in a supposedly free society for any such body with statutory powers to be accountable only to itself. It is still more intolerable that any institution, however democratically elected and however responsible to Parliament or the populace, should possess the right to prohibit adults from viewing video cassettes they choose for themselves. Such a system of pre-censorship is not democracy, which respects the rights of minorities too, but tyranny by the majority".

NCROPA says it is deplorable that a Government, formed by the Conservative Party, the cornerstone of whose philosophy is "freedom of the individual", has shown such scant regard for this noble sentiment whilst in office. It has, in fact, "presided over an ever growing, insidious curtailment of individual liberty, by the introduction of ever more restrictions. . . .

"This Bill, if and when enacted, is a further manifestation of such dishonesty and hypocrisy".

ROBOTS IN THE PULPIT

The Church of England in the Midlands has been lent some top training management executives to train clergy to run their parishes more efficiently. The consultants, from Austin Rover, are making no charge—presumably a course which they would not normally advise.

Will the Midland clergy now have computerised voice-over texts above their pulpits? When will the designs for the robot clergyman be complete? Will there be trouble from the newly formed NUC (National Union of Congregations) if the prayer hours are extended and the number of collections increased?

The management executives will no doubt seek to encourage greater efficiency, which as we all know these days means reducing manpower. But a new Church of England report, *A Strategy for the Church's Ministry*, states that there is now a shortage of a thousand clergy needed to cover the work required. The report's recommended strategy is a replacement of the traditional parish priest by teams of clergy covering larger areas. Perhaps Austin Rover should shepherd them around at 70 mph—after a time and motion study.

John Blue, a Baptist convert aged 47, slipped and drowned during a total immersion ceremony in a lake near Boston, in the United States.

SCIENCE AND FICTION

We reported recently on a survey of religious beliefs among pupils aged 13 in public schools which revealed that many pupils think science and religion are in opposition. The results of the survey, carried out by Martin Rogers, headmaster of a public school in Birmingham, so concerned him that he wishes to investigate further and the Farmington Institute for Christian Studies is to finance a more extensive research project.

Although individual scientists are sometimes religious, science does tend to discourage religious belief: its rigour, its determination to solve problems, its striving towards objectivity, its interest in the tangible, material world, are all inimical to the vagueness, subjectivity and other-worldliness of religion. Historically, the development of science and decline of Christianity have been interlinked, even if in a more complex way than that of simple cause and effect.

The children in Mr Rogers' study were also inclined to accept pseudo-scientific beliefs such as the notion that Jesus was an astronaut. (Von Däniken has replaced Biggles books for modern children.) This ambivalence is encouraged by the media and a frequent culprit is the *Radio Times*. What has turned out to be a fairly one-sided programme on ESP in the usually excellent *Horizon* series is publicised by the headline, "May The Force Be With You"—the slogan of *Star Wars*. The *Radio Times* article admits that "the great majority of scientists are non-believers" and points out that "British universities haven't exactly been queuing up for the £400,000 which Arthur Koestler left to found a Chair of Parapsychology".

However, the *Radio Times*' front cover—a big selling point for a weekly which reaches almost every household—has a headline, "Mind Over Matter?" and a mysterious picture of a shadowy cranium with starry thought-waves radiating around it. Perhaps research into teaching discernment in the face of advertisements and understanding of the distinction between science and science fiction would be more valuable than worrying about whether religion is being elbowed out by science in schools.

Speakers at a rally in Vienna last month called on the Austrian authorities to "ban visits by all Popes, Imams, Dali Lamas, cardinals, gurus, prophets and witch doctors". A crowd, estimated by witnesses to be at least a thousand strong, demonstrated in the streets against Pope John Paul's visit, denouncing him as a lackey of the CIA. He had earlier broadcast a homily which included his usual condemnation of abortion. One large banner carried by demonstrators proclaimed: "If the Pope were pregnant, abortion would be a Holy Sacrament".

SEGREGATION REJECTED

The Bradford education services committee has rejected plans by a religious pressure group to buy five city schools and turn them into Muslim voluntary aided schools. The proposal had been condemned by parents, teachers, pupils and social workers.

A group known as the Muslim Parents' Association backed the scheme. Its secretary claimed that it had a membership of 7,000. Councillor Peter Gilman, chairman of the education committee, described the Association as "a two-man band". A MPA spokesman said that the money to purchase the schools would be provided by Islamic governments.

Bradford education officials should be congratulated on their firm stand against elements who regard religious indoctrination as being more important than education and integration. Acquisition of the schools by the Muslim Parents' Association would have been a triumph for religious zealots and racists. It is unfortunate that Christian grabbers are not resisted with the same determination.

Daniel Lander, pastor of the "Church of Sharing" in Manhattan, has been charged by the New York police with running a prostitution ring. The authorities claim that a club run by the Church encouraging "sharing and loving" by parishioners was in fact a brothel.

Freethinker Fund

The Fund total is very low this month. Throughout its history, *The Freethinker*, like all independent radical publications, has relied on the financial support of its readers. We have been celebrating a notable anniversary in the annals of British free-thought. Although much has been achieved since Charles Bradlaugh and other pioneers laid the foundations of the movement, there are still many battles to be fought. *The Freethinker* has made a significant contribution to past campaigns. Although produced in a mainly voluntary capacity, it is heavily subsidised. So please contribute to the Fund if you believe that the regular appearance of a journal devoted to freethought and secularism is important.

The latest list of donors is given below. Thanks are expressed to them and to all who have contributed to the Fund.

B. Bradlaugh Bonner, £7; W. M. Duane, £10; E. L. Deacon, £6.40; R. C. Goldman, £2.40; A. D. Gore, £1; N. Haemmerle, £1.40; M. A. Hawkins, £2; R. Huxtable, £1.40; W. Irvine, 50p; A. Jagger, £1.40; W. Johnston, £1; J. Lippitt, £5; E. J. Little, £6.40; M. P. Morf, £6.40; C. G. Roberts, £1.40; O. Thompson, £6.40; P. D. Ward, £1.40; R. G. Wood, £1.40.

Total for the period 10 August until 9 September: £62.90.

Science and Religion at the British Association

BEVERLY HALSTEAD

It was not so very long ago that the President of the British Association for the Advancement of Science read the lesson at a Church of England service in the nearest Cathedral. Fortunately this curious tradition is now quite defunct; but there is a tendency for the scientific community to treat the subject of religion with a degree of circumspection, presumably for fear of antagonising the "public".

The annual BA meeting, held this year at the University of Sussex, came up with a session among the engineers entitled "God the Master, Man the Apprentice". Professor M. J. French, Lancaster University, was concerned to emphasise the need for the engineer to learn from natural design, be it humming birds, fleas or horses. His contribution was to design a large flying bird, based on the fundamental principle of design of separation of function. The giant 200 kg "swan" had two wings for lift and two smaller ones for propulsion. Altogether a more efficient design than that produced naturally by evolution, which has to work on what it has got to begin with. It is exceedingly difficult to attribute the design observed in nature to an omniscient deity, without acknowledging that, when it comes to engineering, man is master and God the apprentice.

At the other end of the scale the chemists considered "The Origin of Life", and especially what Dr H. Kroto, Sussex University, termed "bioemotive molecules in space". It was the claim by Fred Hoyle and Chandra Wickramasinghe in their book *Evolution from Space* (reviewed in *The Freethinker*, February 1982) of the existence of micro-organisms in space that led these two authors to God, to the ecstatic delight of the churches. Although their discussion of the origin of living cells was but a measure of their ignorance of the process of natural selection, there still remained the scientific data of the infra-red spectrum, which supposedly gave a similar curve to that of the well known bacterium, *E. coli*.

Dr Kroto noted "for some reason the authors in their comparison choose to omit the eight data points which delineate prominent features . . . The fit of the complete spectrum is rather poor except for the features where the general shapes are roughly comparable . . . Features like these are well known to organic chemists who see them almost every time they take the spectrum of a compound containing carbon-hydrogen bonds" (e.g. methane or any other hydrocarbon; over 60 such simple compounds are well known from space). There is simply no evidence whatsoever that will stand up for the presence of

proteins and polysaccharides in space as Hoyle and Wickramasinghe have claimed. Dr Kroto has rendered a signal service by finally disposing of the entire basis of Hoyle's "evidence" for God, his "giant silicon chip in the sky".

The third session in which aspects of religion came under scrutiny was in the Zoology session on Sociobiology. As E. O. Wilson, the father of Sociobiology, has stressed, the widespread nature of religion must be because it conveyed some biological advantage for the survival of the species. Dr V. Reynolds, University of Oxford, asked the question: "How do religious rules affect the survival and reproductive success of individuals?" He focussed on the topics of conception, contraception, abortion, infanticide, birth, marriage, divorce, death and disease.

For example, sex may be considered holy or sinful depending on the religion, time and circumstances; abortion may be a dreadful sin or none at all; to be childless may be shameful or unimportant. Where the environment is unpredictable and people are living near subsistence level, religion encourages high levels of reproduction, with a great emphasis on fertility. In environments with stable conditions and affluence, greater emphasis is placed on the husband-wife relationship and the need to have large numbers of children is no longer considered the primary motive for marriage. The lower the standard of living the more children they are encouraged to have, which simply exacerbates the conditions of poverty.

Religious rules do not seem able to anticipate this and certainly do not instruct them to restrict reproduction in these circumstances. In societies with a high standard of living, the religions contain rules in which contraception is explicitly tolerated and emphasis placed on hygiene and the care of the few offspring produced, rather than on reproductivity itself.

It is interesting to note that from the standpoint of Sociobiology, the long term welfare of man will not be helped by an assault on religion in general but rather on one type in particular. The latest pronouncements from the Vatican on just these issues seems destined to ensure that the poor of the world remain caught in the poverty trap. It seems perfectly evident that there is no place in a civilised and advanced society for the sort of hideous nonsense being promulgated by the Roman Catholic Church. It is valuable to have a scientific explanation of why such abhorrent policies arose in the first instance. To understand this is also to understand their irrelevance to modern life.

The Christian Origin of Science

PETER HODGSON

Peter Hodgson's article, "The Christian Origin of Science", published in "Atheism and Dialogue", journal of the Secretariat for Non-Believers, was the subject of a critical commentary by David Tribe in our January issue. Replying, Dr Hodgson asserts that the origin of science can be found in Christian theology.

Perhaps I can most usefully begin by briefly summarising the main lines of my article in *Atheism and Dialogue*. I began by noting that science has achieved a level of development in our civilisation that is incomparably higher than any of the attempts to understand the world that were made in any preceding civilisation. We can try to see why this is so by first clarifying what we mean by science, and then reflecting on the conditions necessary for its birth and development. In addition to the material conditions found in many civilisations I suggested that these include pre-scientific beliefs about the world, in particular its goodness, order, rationality and contingency. If this is accepted, then we must enquire how these beliefs became firmly fixed in the minds of Europeans by the 17th century, the time when science really took off for the first time. I then noted that all these ideas are to be found in Christian theology, and so it is plausible to speak of the Christian origin of science.

Now I would like to comment on Mr Tribe's article under three headings relating to the definition, the origin and the history of science.

The definition of science. Definitions are always to some extent a matter of personal judgement, and my attempt is certainly influenced by my own experiences as a physicist. Certainly I wanted a definition that applied to 17th-century work and made clear its difference from all the attempts to understand the world that were made in earlier civilisations. Mr Tribe suggests that "the essence of science is its attitude to the natural world". This I think is true, but then we have to explain in detail just what we mean by the scientific attitude.

In parenthesis, I do believe that scientists have achieved a detailed understanding of the behaviour of matter. Not of course a complete understanding, but one that will stand the test of time. This includes the work on subatomic particles and antimatter, as can be easily verified by examining recent work on elementary particle physics.

The origin of science. The historical connection between the rationality of medieval theology and the rise of science has been pointed out many times, for example by A. N. Whitehead in his *Science and the Modern World*. It has been explored in detail in

many later works, and we can continue to examine it objectively. If I were an atheist I would not feel obliged to reject this connection. If, for example, I am told that a Hindu invented the symbol for zero I should be grateful to him for doing it, but I would not feel obliged to become a Hindu.

I think that it would be going too far to maintain that science could never have developed without the Christian revelation; I do not see how such a proposition could ever be proved. But as it happened, there does seem to be such a connection. Of course this does allow me to go on to say that there is a basic harmony between science and Christianity.

The history of science. History is a record of the glories and follies of mankind, a mixture of good and evil, existing in communities and indeed in each individual. We read of the long uphill struggle to achieve understanding, with many setbacks and errors. I am well aware that many Christians have not valued science as they should have done, and that these have included some in high places. I have much stronger reasons for deploring this than Mr Tribe. In each generation we have to try to do better than the last. In spite of all the sordid history, in spite of all the ignorance of individual Christians, I still believe that it was the Christian revelation that brought into the world the ideas that over the centuries permeated the minds of men and eventually made possible the rise of science.

I conclude by submitting some suggestions for further reading: S. L. Jaki's *Science and Creation* (Scottish Academic Press, 1974) and *The Road of Science and the Ways to God* (University of Chicago Press, 1978); E. C. Mascall's *Christian Theology and Natural Science* (London, 1956) and S. H. Nasr's *The Encounter of Man and Nature* (Allen and Unwin, 1968).

David Tribe replies:

I'm pleased Peter Hodgson accepts that the essence of science is its attitude to the natural world. Briefly, this is one of informed curiosity, of respect without veneration, of acceptance as an object of study in its own right, and of belief (based on experience and repeatable experiments) that it is neither sympathetic nor antipathetic to human beings, unplanned but not unpredictable if all the parameters could be known, and knowable up to the limits of detection. One cannot describe these views as suddenly coming into existence at any point in time, though there has been increasing acceptance of them in recent centuries for reasons that have nothing to do with theology or Christology. Much less can one bestow absolute significance on the detailed world-view accepted by the scientific community in the 17th, 20th or any other century. For it is one of

EVENTS

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). Sunday, 6 November, 5 pm for 5.30 pm. Peter Wells-Thorpe: The Prospect for Youth — From School to Social Control?

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.

Golders Green Unitarians. Hoop Lane, London NW11. Sunday, 23 October, 11 am. G. N. Deodhekar: Atheism in India.

Harrow Humanist Society. Gayton Road Library, Harrow-on-the-Hill. Wednesday, 9 November, 8 pm. Harry Stopes-Roe: The Roots of Morality.

Havering and District Humanist Society. Harold Wood Social Centre, corner of Gubbins Lane and Squirrels Heath Road, Harold Wood. Tuesday, 1 November, 8 pm. Speaker from the National Council for Civil Liberties.

Lewisham Humanist Group. Unitarian Meeting House, 41 Bromley Road, London, SE6. Thursday, 27 October, 7.45 pm. Ted Goodman: Freedom of Expression — Legal Aspects.

Republic. Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London WC1. Wednesday, 26 October, 7 pm. Public meeting. A. E. Standley, Secretary, 55A Netley Road, Barking-side, Ilford, Essex, telephone 01-554 8848.

West Glamorgan Humanist Group. Friends Meeting House Annexe, Swansea. Friday, 28 October, 7.30 pm. Harry Stopes-Roe: Work—How Necessary is it?

Worthing Humanist Group. Trades Club, Broadwater Road, Worthing. Sunday, 30 October, 5.30 pm. Public meeting.

In a world that is outgrowing the supernatural how are we adequately to meet the needs of people that were formerly covered by belief in God? Dr James Hemming posed this question when he spoke at the annual re-union of South Place Ethical Society in London on 25 September. Dr Hemming said: "The god-concept, in spite of claims made for fundamentalist 'revivals', is rapidly losing its grip on the human mind because the foundation for belief in supernatural intervention has totally collapsed. Hence a growing vacuum of belief in the world today, and the proliferation of cults and groups to fill the gap—some atavistic, some forward-looking".

the axioms of science that knowledge evolves. To some it may seem surprising that a secularist should be less committed to subatomic particles than a Christian. The important thing, however, is that when you press a switch the light comes on.

The only connection between the rise of science and medieval theology is that in the later Middle Ages the influence of Aristotle gained an ascendancy over that of Plato. A renewed curiosity about the natural world, suppressed since the time of Constantine, allowed discoveries like that of gunpowder reputed by Roger Bacon (actually a rediscovery by the West, as the Chinese had known of it for centuries), to be made.

Like Mr Hodgson, I dismiss all argumenta ad homines. It wouldn't matter if a Hindu or a Christian "invented science". The fact is they didn't.

REMEMBERING MARGARET KNIGHT

The announcement of Margaret Knight's death saddened *Freethinker* readers, particularly those who had been associated with the author of *Morals Without Religion*. John L. Broom, who lives in Stromness, Orkney, has sent the following appreciation.

"I had the privilege of chairing two public debates between Mrs Knight and different Church of Scotland ministers on the truth of Christianity, in Aberdeen and Edinburgh in October 1957 and March 1958 respectively. As I reported in *The Freethinker* at the time, both were extremely well attended (over 300 turned up at the Aberdeen meeting) and Mrs Knight's ability to marshal her arguments cogently and clearly, together with her unflinching courtesy towards her clerical opponents, were impressively demonstrated.

"She also effortlessly refuted believers of many varieties in the correspondence columns of *The Scotsman* throughout the years. On one occasion, I remember, a Free Church clergyman from Kinglassie, in Fife, claimed that Charles Darwin's son, Horace, testified that his father had, on his deathbed, repudiated the theory of evolution. Mrs Knight wrote to point out that this was an old and cruel lie, and a few days later a letter confirming her denial from Horace Darwin's daughter, Lady Barlow, was published. As Mrs Knight wrote delightfully to me the same day: 'There'll be mourning in the manse of Kinglassie this night!'

"I last met Margaret Knight at a Humanist Group meeting in Aberdeen in the early '70s, when I was glad to see that her fighting spirit and sense of humour were as well developed as ever. She was a very great lady, and her death is an inestimable loss to the freethinking and humanist movement".

The Future Individual Versus the State

KEITH HUDSON

The computer is widely recognised as a major threat to personal freedom and privacy. Keith Hudson argues that the real threat comes from political élites. The coming "information explosion" has serious implications for those in authority who defend their own secrets while prying into the affairs of others.

When Citizens' Band radio came here from across the Atlantic some years ago the initial reaction of the Government was to ban it, full stop. Attempts were also made to turn public opinion against it by using emotive, specious and sometimes farcical arguments (e.g. that radio paging in hospitals would be jeopardised, that runaway radio-controlled model aeroplanes would rain upon our heads, etc.). However, CB enthusiasts took no notice and continued their chatter. We owe CBers our thanks for helping the cause of free communication.

But this attitude of British Government has been typical for many years. We have, in fact, one of the most closed élites in the Western world. As Patricia Hewitt pointed out last December in *The Freethinker*, the United States has had a Freedom of Information Law since 1967. We are nowhere near this stage yet. The Data Protection Bill saw the light of day in the last Parliament only because of pressure from the EEC. Due to the General Election it was dropped, of course, but the Government have said that it will be tabled in the new Parliament without any major changes.

The DP Bill, like the Police Bill, purports to be a step forward in clarifying and confirming our basic rights; but it also contains curiously phrased clauses which could in some instances be interpreted by the Courts in ways inimical to the rights of the individual. The notorious Clause 28 of the Bill, for example, stops individuals seeing certain sorts of information about themselves in the interests of possible proceedings by the police. But, as the British Computer Society said recently in a strongly worded statement: "Information relating to the prevention of crime could be a blanket cover to conceal practically any information about anybody".

Then again, we learn that there are now computer links between the Inland Revenue and the DHSS. There is also great disquiet as to whether the police, for "fraud investigation" purposes, will also be linked into this network. The police have been on a technological "high" ever since the Panda car and are now seeking to extend their "C" Department greatly as part of a 20-year programme.

None of this is new, of course. Throughout history kings have always had their ambassadors carrying secret information between them. Such information was doubly protected by encrypting in code as early as 1900 BC. Political élites have always wanted to keep secrets, stop ordinary people seeing those secrets, and also pry into anybody's private business. The British Government's communication headquarters in Cheltenham does a great deal more than to eavesdrop on diplomatic communications. The GCHQ contains some of the most powerful computers in the world.

Those who are fighting on our behalf in maintaining what individual liberties we have often see the computer as the main enemy. But, of course, it isn't: the true enemy is the typical hierarchical paranoia of governments. It doesn't really matter whether personal information is written on an index card in a filing cabinet or in electronic form in a computer's memory. Indeed, there is some force in the arguments of those who say that we ought to be grateful to the computer for bringing out into the open the whole matter of secret information.

Challenge of the Computer

Moreover, the computer may well assist the cause of the individual's situation vis-à-vis the State in a way that is not yet obvious. It may well become clearer in the years immediately ahead. The thesis is that the power of the Establishment has always been reduced when ordinary people have gained access to more information than previously—not just information that the authorities regard as secret but all sorts of other information, too — technical, general, even biographical trivia of kings and politicians. Widespread literacy, for example, encouraged the popular Press to examine areas of Government practice and policy in a way that could not have happened before.

Then again, radio and television have contributed enormously to this sharing of information by making it so much more assimilable. Penetrative interviews of politicians by a Robin Day or a David Dimbleby can expose more than the most thunderous newspaper editorial.

We are now on the verge of having a network of information vastly more extensive than anything man has experienced hitherto. And it would seem that the authorities will be powerless to prevent its development as they were in previous times in stopping the spread of the Gutenberg press. I refer to satellite communications. Just as the invention of

the moveable metal typeface produced books so cheaply that ordinary people could buy them, so will satellites transmit information so cheaply that ordinary people will have the potential to consult almost any source of information.

The means by which they will tap this information is the microcomputer. It is the most rapidly developing innovation of all time. Mass production means that the average home micro costs only about £200; and this, astonishingly, is already as powerful as the mainframe computer of only about 15 years ago. Well within the next 10 years the home micro owner will not only be able to consult thousands of electronic libraries all over the world at a cost much less than a local telephone call, but will also be able to print it while he sits in his armchair. And, because transportation costs are not involved, a micro-produced book printed at home is likely to be cheaper than one bought from a shop.

The costs of putting communications satellites in orbit have been dropping steeply since the successful development of the space shuttle. Because a satellite can transmit to hundreds of millions of people (and also, of course, to other satellites around the globe) the cost appears to be something like £1 per head per year. The two or three large consortia already involved in satellites intend to put up about 300 satellites within the next ten years. Well within that period the average person in the advanced countries will probably have 20 to 30 satellites of all sorts overhead from which he'll be able to receive films, documentaries, news, scientific information, specialised consultancy, educational programmes, shopping catalogues and so on *ad infinitum*. The amount of information that a satellite can transmit and receive is prodigious. The communications satellite put up in April this year by the Challenger shuttle is able to transmit the contents of 140 volumes of Encyclopaedia Britannica every second.

We cannot possibly comprehend the full implications of this information explosion. The one I do draw in the course of this short article is that the power of the individual will in due course be enormously strengthened and that the power of the corporate State will be proportionately reduced. It is clearly analogous to the printing press, but even more so.

Mary Margaret Dunne, who prays in the streets of Dublin, refused to give evidence on oath when she appeared at the District Court on a charge of obstruction and behaviour likely to cause a breach of the peace. Mrs Dunne declared: "I am a Catholic. Surely you can trust me". Judge Ruane ignored the Prayerful lady's appeal and imposed a fine of £2 on each of two charges. She refused to pay and had to spend a day in prison.

A Great Director

The death of Luis Buñuel will grieve freethinkers and all lovers of intelligent cinema. It's said that a picture is worth a thousand words, and in recent years filmmakers have understandably been returning to something approaching the verbiage of silent films (though horrendous musical and other effects make many of them far from silent). Unfortunately, the other adage that every picture tells a story is often forgotten, and I rarely see a new film I want to sit through again, reflect upon or write about. In fact, I've abandoned film reviewing with few regrets.

Whether or not one approves of Buñuel's anarchic politics, atheistic philosophy or surrealist aesthetics, he demonstrated a rare genius for capturing the imagination and provoking thought. Images and moods from his numerous classics stay vividly in one's mind and emotions even when one has forgotten how some of them end. For the story his films tell, with countless variations, is that of the human condition. In its portrayal he is unfailingly honest, even to the point of embarrassment. It's a common failing of people with advanced social views and liberal opinion, when dealing with the brutalisation of people by unjust society, to ennoble their hero-victims. Buñuel made no such mistake. His earthy peasants remained grubby in every sense. He is also one of the few artists to expose Jesus and the disciples not merely as hypocrites, fanatics and bigots but as dangerous idealists whose gospel of turning the other cheek could, if practised, lead to social disaster.

There is no shortage of people who are, or claim to be, followers of Jesus, and quite a few who pretend to be reincarnations. I wish the same could be said about Buñuel.

DAVID TRIBE

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WHY BELIEVE IN GOD? by Michael Goulder and John Hick. SCM Press, £2.50

A day-long public "dialogue" that took place last November between two of the seven authors of the Church-shaking revelation *The Myth of God Incarnate* (1977) has been edited and expanded to make this slim paperback volume. The chairman of the Day School (organised by the University of Birmingham's Extra-Mural Department) contributes an introduction. The four central chapters of the book comprise two pairs of lectures: the first pair dealing with the question of God's existence and his possible attributes, the second pair with the possible actions of such a God in our world.

The first chapter (additional to the "dialogue" itself) is a potted religious autobiography by Michael Goulder, who reveals that, since the publication of the *Myth*, he has lost the remnants of religious faith to which he was still clinging at that time, and, having resigned his clerical orders (after three decades) in 1981, is now an atheist, and takes the atheistic position in the ensuing debate. What he had come to realise was that the degree to which God's function had been whittled down by advanced theologians such as his co-authors in the *Myth* really left God with nothing to do of any consequence. Since God therefore had no *raison d'être*, Dr Goulder, with commendable honesty, if some reluctance, let him go.

The other protagonist, Bishop John Hick, is now a Professor of Religion in California. Though more advanced in his theology than Goulder at the time of contributing to the *Myth*, Hick has not since changed his theological position. He is as much a theist now as in 1977—though that is not saying a great deal, in terms of traditional Christianity. In fact, his attenuated theism, unencumbered by any orthodox Christian doctrine apart from that of divine purpose in the moment of creation, is, as Goulder points out, Deism in all but name. In its 18th century heyday, Deism was associated with Rousseau, Voltaire, and the *philosophes*, followed by Thomas Paine—all regarded in their time as wicked, heretical freethinkers, rather than respectable Christians. To be a self-confessed Deist in those days was to risk persecution and imprisonment at the hands of the pious; now, it seems, it is quite compatible with being a Christian bishop, a theological don, and an author for the SCM Press.

To his Deism, however, Hick tacks on a nebulous belief in some sort of personal survival, that seems to be closer to oriental ideas of reincarnation than to the traditional Christian heaven. His "reasons" for this belief, as for his belief in divine purpose, are couched in fine academic prose, but really boil down to subjective feelings and wishful thinking. Without

these residual beliefs, human lives of deprivation and impoverishment would, he points out, be "final and unredeemable". Quite. But the realities of the human situation are not changed by our wishing them to be otherwise.

A third contributor to *The Myth of God Incarnate*, Don Cupitt, though not a participant in the Birmingham debate or a contributor to the present book, is included in the book in the third person, both in Goulder's preliminary chapter and, more importantly, in a final additional chapter by John Hick. Since publication of the *Myth*, Cupitt has, like Goulder, abandoned belief in a God; unlike Goulder's straightforward secular atheism, however, Cupitt's sort of atheism is, to quote Hick, "a religious atheism, or religious naturalism, which he describes as a form of Christian Buddhism". In other words, he remains a mystic, falling halfway between Hick and Goulder.

A quarter of a century ago it would have been unthinkable for anyone who had abandoned so much of the traditional Christian doctrine as Hick, let alone Cupitt, to retain the Christian label and continue in the role of a leading theologian in the established Church. It was in the early 1960s that I first came across this brand of demythologised Christianity in the person of John Wren-Lewis, whose new-fangled theology was brought to public notice through Bishop John Robinson's *Honest to God*. At the time it looked as though the bishop, if not Wren-Lewis, was hanging on to church membership more from opportunism than from any genuine residual belief. But now Cupitt has gone even further, and it has become almost commonplace for bishops and theologians to expound a sort of mystic atheism. One wonders how much the simplistic souls in the parishes are aware of what is happening to the creed among the elite.

Hick, however, draws the line at atheism. But, as he admits in his final chapter, "I do see the Goulder and Cupitt moves as revealing both the difficulties and the dangers of serious and fundamental theological thinking today". In other words, as freethinkers have always said, freethought is the inevitable result of thinking freely.

Hick's residual faith rests on the defensive attribution of psychological phenomena ("religious experience") to external causation. Goulder, on the other hand, apparently never had the sort of feelings categorised as "religious experience". (How unjust it seems of the Christian God to withhold personal revelation of his presence from a man who continues in prayer and good works for half a century, thus abandoning him in the end to reason!) Hick

REVIEWS

declares that he always thought Goulder might finish up as an atheist, owing to the combination of his lack of personal religious experience with his literal belief in such traditional but untenable theological concepts as divine intervention in human affairs. His mind is too straightforward in thought to allow him to combine atheism with mysticism. For him, atheism means the end of religion.

Goulder's atheistic journey thus follows a path familiar to most readers of *The Freethinker*—except that few of us have taken so long on the way. We mostly completed the journey by our mid-twenties, whereas it took Goulder, turning over every pebble, till his late fifties to reach the only possible conclusion. But perhaps, like the Prodigal Son, he should be welcomed all the more warmly for that.

To use another metaphor, Goulder slowly peels away the layers of the theological onion, and finds nothing inside. But his painstaking slowness enables him to develop some of the familiar arguments along personal lines with new instances that hold the attention, whereas I sometimes lost patience with the sophistry of the Hick chapters.

Since both authors are university dons, it is not surprising that the tone of their "dialogue" is rather academic, but it never sinks to the fuzziness of some modern theology. And since they are also long-standing friends and colleagues who know and respect one another, it never sinks to the mere scoring of cheap points. Though intellectual and urbane, the style is generally clear, with no deliberate obfuscation.

Years ago, the SCM Press kept strictly to faith-boasting publications, often presenting simplistic rejoinders to the same anti-theistic arguments that make up this book—not only in the God-is-dead Goulder chapters but in the greater part of the God-is-deaf Hick chapters too. Theology is not what it was.

No longer is it enough for the atheist debater to know he is to take on an Anglican theologian: he needs to know whether the God that is being defended is a supernatural, personal, paternal God who actually intervenes in the world today, or the eternal self-existent creator that programmed the Big Bang, then stood aside; or no more than a poetic image for human sensibilities and aspirations.

If you would like a glimpse into the current theological academic scene, do read this little book. Its brevity, its readability, and its (with a few Hick lapses) comprehensibility, prompt me to recommend it as a book to be read—though not as a gift to your church-going grannie.

BARBARA SMOKER

KRISHNAMURTI: THE YEARS OF FULFILMENT, by Mary Lutyens. John Murray, £15

Krishnamurti is an enigma. He is not really a free-thinker, though his ideas roam as freely as any thinker. He is not a guru, though with worldwide lecture tours, schools established to educate the young according to his principles and a foundation to promote his outlook, he has not escaped the trappings of gurudom. He is not learned, though many consider he possesses wisdom. He condemns religion, sects and political parties, "for organised belief is a great impediment, dividing man against man and destroying his intelligence; these societies and religions are fundamentally based on vested interest and exploitation". Yet, he would seem to suggest a spiritual — whatever that means — component to life. He defies labels. That, no doubt, he would say is the point.

Mary Lutyens, at the end of the second volume of her biography of Krishnamurti tries, unsuccessfully, to probe the enigma and answer Who or What is Krishnamurti? But there is no answer. Devotees of clarity may be impatient with Krishnamurti's writings. He denies that he is in touch with a spiritual or other-worldly force, but places great value on those moments poised between mystical experience and psychosomatic illness which have recurred throughout his life and which he terms the "process". In answer to the question what is the truth about the source of his power he replies: "There is an element in all this which is not man-made, thought-made, not self-induced. Is this something which we cannot discover, mustn't touch, is not penetrable? I am wondering. I have often felt it is not my business, that we will never find out". Mary Lutyens implies by quoting from Krishnamurti's description of a mystical moment in India in 1979 that he is in touch with "the source of all energy".

Freethinkers are suspicious of enigmas, but before readers abandon this review in disgust at taking such a man seriously, let me explain that he is of interest both as a link with early secularism and for some of his ideas. Krishnamurti was for many years Annie Besant's protégé, a child destined to become the next messiah, according to her Theosophical beliefs. Krishnamurti utterly repudiated this expectation and the story of this was well told in the first volume of the biography, *The Years of Awakening* (reviewed in *The Freethinker*, March 1976), a much more interesting volume than this meticulous, but flat, account of Krishnamurti's travels, friendships and lectures.

The remarkable Annie Besant died 50 years ago last month, having entirely lost her memory. Krishnamurti had refused to be her messiah, but he retained an affection for her after their rift, writing of her at the end of her life in her 86th year: "Dear Amma, it is tragic to see her like this". Krishna-

murti is himself now 88 and he remains intensely vital. Hearing him speak a few days ago I was impressed with his charm and sincerity as well as by his ideas, which are close to secularism, yet quite distinct.

The aspects of Krishnamurti's outlook which merit attention — and he wants a critical ear not adulatory acceptance — concern his rejection of organised religion and sects, his examination of the psychology of fear and conflict, and his educational ideals. In a recent letter he wrote: "God is disorder". He explained: "Consider the innumerable gods that man has invented, or the one god, the one saviour, and observe the confusion that this has created in the world, the wars it has brought about, the innumerable divisions, the separating beliefs, symbols and images. Isn't this confusion and disorder?" He made a similar point in a public lecture, when he said: "If man is the creation of God, God must be rather horrible, a monstrous entity. . . He must be total disorder, for we live in disorder. If he created us in his image and we are killing each other, then he *must* be monstrous". Which free-thinker could put it more clearly?

He is especially harsh on gurus. Apparently he once travelled on the same plane as the Maharishi, he who sells Transcendental Meditation and the chance of levitation. They were only polite, according to his biographer. A dialogue between the two would have been entertaining and illuminating. Mary Lutyens is often particularly reticent about those encounters which most fascinate. The lack of information about what Krishnamurti said to Aldous Huxley, who met and admired him, is disappointing.

A brief summary of Krishnamurti's ideas about time, memory, fear and conflict would not do him justice. Let a quotation suffice to give the flavour and appeal of his words: "When you are seeking comfort, when the mind is trying to evade struggle, conflict, sorrow, it must create various avenues of escape, and these avenues of escape become our illusions. This drives you from one religious sect to another, from one philosophy to another, from one teacher to another. This you call the search for truth, for happiness.

"Now, there is no security, no comfort, but only clarity of thought which brings about understanding of the fundamental cause of suffering, which alone will liberate man. . .". He believes that change is urgent because "Technologically we have gone very far and psychologically we are very primitive".

A few schools can hardly be adequate agents of change, but any belief that education involves the development of the complete personality, internationalism, and learning as a process of participation not instruction, would be healthy in the current Thatcherite climate of a production line of ambitious, greedy, ladder-climbers.

There are times when Krishnamurti's vagueness is irritating. I have my doubts about his belief that "all thought corrupts", about his rather individual view of meditation, and I wonder whether human society could exist without conflict—should not the aim be to make conflict creative, not destructive, rather than to eliminate it?

There are two routes for changing society; social reform or changing the hearts of aggressive, angry, human beings. Krishnamurti firmly chooses the latter, believing that social reform is only scratching the surface. He has been surrounded by wealthy supporters, who provide him with beautiful places to live in and indulge his taste for Savile Row suits and trips in Mercedes, and perhaps he underestimates the need for greater social justice. On the other hand, reduction of poverty and hardship will not ensure contentment, as has been seen in the period of affluence in post-war Europe now coming to a pause.

Freethinkers and humanists can get attached to their secular sects, and Krishnamurti's reminder of the danger of attachment to belief systems or parties is valuable. All individuals are concerned with ethical behaviour at some level, with how to get on with life and others, with how to allay anxiety and endure suffering. There are no simple answers to be found in manuals, as Krishnamurti would be the first to point out, but he constantly provides gold nuggets: "One of the main features of fear is the non-acceptance of what is, the inability to face oneself. The more you know about yourself the greater the quality of maturity".

JIM HERRICK

LOUISE MICHEL, by Edith Thomas. Translated by Penelope Williams. Black Rose Books, Montreal, and Housmans, 5 Caledonian Road, London N1, £5.95

Honest people in power are as ineffective as dishonest ones are harmful . . . Liberty and power cannot possibly go together . . . Power creates ferocious egoism.

During September and October 1873 such thoughts began to dominate the Communard, Louise Michel (now Deportee No. 1), on the old frigate, *La Virginie*, bound with its caged prisoners for the French penitentiary on the island of New Caledonia in the south Pacific, more than 12,000 miles away from Paris. Released for exercise on deck, Louise physically breathed the word "Liberty", amidst the vast expanse of sky and ocean. The poetic and revolutionary intermingled in the thought: "Anarchy alone gives us liberty".

Anarchism (this "song of our tomorrows", comments her biographer, Edith Thomas) and its nature became part of the conversations among Communards during the long voyage, and in exile, not

least for the passionate humanist, Louise Michel. For her, any future Social Revolution to liberate disinherited humanity, especially women, meant the overthrow of the institutionalised brakes of religion and government. No question in her mind of separating them, for neither were to exist! Louise's ideal—neither God nor Master—remained constant; conscience alone should be the right guide to action.

French historian, Edith Thomas, herself a heroine of the French Resistance in World War II, singled out Louise Michel in an earlier work when describing the phenomenon of working class women taking a very active part in forming organisations, to keep the life of Paris going during war and siege, whilst at the same time becoming politically involved. The Right-wing press called them "viragos", retaining the title "women" for courtesans or high-class prostitutes. "Red Virgin", the gossip columnists flung, among other epithets, at Louise Michel.

What was the legend and what the reality? Edith Thomas set out to clarify this in her biography of the woman she called, under sub-title, "Chief Priestess of Anarchy", and whom she considered importantly and intimately linked with the extraordinary events of the 1871 Commune and its tragic aftermath. "An irreplaceable eye-witness account", remarks Edith Thomas of the vivid writing in Louise Michel's *La Commune*, detailing the crowd scenes and the setting up of the Commune, the daily life during those 73 festive days, the ferocity of mercenary soldiers, the defence and fighting (when women took to the barricades) and the final drama of Bloody Week, when the rampant French army massacred, irrespective of age or sex, 23,000 Parisians, shot in heaps, so vividly recorded by the young painter, Edouard Manet.

Between the ambiguous birth certificate (of illegitimacy) which opens the book and the false death certificate (of age) in January 1905, Edith Thomas presents a critical balance of this exceptional woman, of her unshakeable confidence in her destined task in which action and poetry fused, of her many-sided traits: her limitless generosity, her courage, her quasi-naive, romantic, even farouche temperament (her love of the untamed). Above all, her single-minded devotion to the Cause she made her own and, certainly, which after her return from New Caledonia led to police surveillance, terms of imprisonment and assassination attempts on her. Meticulously researched (almost to the point of nausea) for her biographer waded through sheaves of military and police reports, the second part of the book bears witness to this. However, Edith Thomas is well served by her Canadian translator with a smooth, readable style and with the additional benefit of an improved clear-print publication over the original French edition.

Teacher, poet, feminist, writer and lecturer, Louise

Michel is one of the most unusual legends in the literature of freedom—and particularly so because of her dignified, fearless and outspoken stand at her trial before the War Council. Charged with attempting to incite and overthrow government, a woman wearing military uniform and carrying arms, her judges asked whether she wished to say anything in her defence.

"I am an accomplice of the Commune since it stands for Social Revolution. for women as well as men, that is my cherished wish. . .". An attempt was made to prevent her speaking. Undaunted, she lashed out: "Since it appears that any heart which beats for Liberty has only one right—to a bit of lead—I ask you for my share. Kill me, unless you are too cowardly to do so!" The *Illustrated London News* journalist present wrote: "It caused a considerable sensation!"

Indeed, *legendary* is the term used for Louise Michel today even in Noumea, New Caledonia. During my own research visit there, when I had in mind writing about her as a worthwhile European heroine of the working people involved in women's emancipation and unknown in England, I learned from local historians of the marked impact she had made on their island history during the seven years' exile.

Anti-racist, she soon showed great compassion towards the local tribe, the Kanaks, teaching them to read (inventing her own methods), undertaking a study of their music and dialects, and writing a book around their Legends. She alone among the exiled Communards supported them in their revolt against colonial exploitation of land and harsh treatment. Certainly from childhood in the harsh Haute Marne countryside there was deeply rooted in her a strong sense of social justice for the disinherited. She taught them to cut telegraph wires thereby shutting down the island's entire communication system. Their faith in her is expressed in the incident at midnight when she heard a knocking on her hut. Before her stood the Kanak leader wishing to say 'goodbye' to his teacher and friend before going off to fight the whites!

Animal liberationist too, from childhood, she defended them against human cruelty. Of her many wild cats in Noumea, I heard that she had taken some with her to Paris.

To her farsighted vision of the harnessing of Science to liberate humanity, she applied her lively mind and love of learning. Although a prisoner, Louise had taken with her commissions from learned societies; during this exile information flowed from her to them on the island's flora and fauna, on the use of vaccines for sickly plants and on the sending of special seeds whose botanical specimens flourished 20 years later in colonial Algeria.

Working for her Cause continued wherever she

found herself; writing letters to officials about prisoners' conditions, to Paris friends asking them to help others, and even to the President of the French Republic, the same General McMahon involved in the French defeat of 1870. No early pardon for her through influential friends (like Clemenceau), she informed the President; she would return with all deportees. Later, persuading whoever she could in Paris to find jobs for older ex-deportees became her first task.

In July 1880 came total amnesty. Hundreds of weeping Kanaks escorted her to the ship, begging her to return. But due to her commitment later as "the eternal, tireless travelling salesman of the Revolution" and, adds Edith Thomas, "used by socialists and anarchists alike as a figure-head for

fund-raising", a visa was never granted.

She made front page news in the Paris press when she stepped off the train at Gare St Lazare. Traffic within a mile of the station came to a standstill for thousands came to pay their respects and to welcome this charismatic figure with shouts of "Vive Louise Michel!" and "Viva La Commune!".

Exile had aged her physically but did not dim her "flame" — that permanent enthusiasm — which she used for the next quarter of a century for the liberation of the disinherited, with her impassioned voice ringing out clearly: "The Old World has suffered enough . . . we are at an epoch when Science must liberate humanity. . .".

BEATRICE CLARKE

LETTERS

GOOD NEWS

The Bible Society recently commissioned Gallup Poll to investigate the attitudes of the English public to God, the Bible and the Church. This report shows that 12 per cent of the English population read the Bible regularly at least once a week or more, while 70 per cent never read it and 60 per cent "not only do not read it now but have never read it on any regular basis".

Bible reading is quite closely related to church attendance. Fifteen per cent of the public claim to attend church at least weekly, while 56 per cent never go except for other people's weddings. Even at Christmas, only 40 per cent attended church (in London only 30 per cent).

The report states that "more than half the people who stop reading the bible have no particular reason for doing so". This reminds me of the story Peter Quennell tells of Roger Fry, the art critic and denizen of Bloomsbury, in his delightful volume, "Customs and Characters" (Weidenfeld, 1982): ". . . having been told by his friends that he ought to re-read the bible, which, although the offspring of a pious Quaker family, he had very seldom opened since he lost his faith at Cambridge, he was discovered lying on his back, shaken by a paroxysm of amusement and, while he turned the pages, ejaculating again and again, confronted with each appalling new revelation of Jehovah's tyrannical turpitude and the bloodthirsty behaviour of the Chosen People: 'Ha! Ha! Ha! Simply-Too-Extraordinary!'"

MADELEINE SIMS

THE ALLIANCE VIEW OF HUNTING

Whilst welcoming the birth of the Conservative Anti Hunt Council, its members cannot be altogether surprised if popular opinion does not couple the anti blood sports movement with the Conservative Party.

If we ignore the fact that the landed gentry, who can afford to don fancy dress and desecrate the countryside, do not give the impression of being card-carrying Socialists, we are left with the unpalatable reality that the party in power for so many years does not even have a policy on hunting, let alone draft legislation. Their record on animal rights has been dismal.

I cannot speak for the Labour Party, but the SDP

Liberal Alliance has an animal welfare programme which includes the abolition of hunting of animals with hounds. (Policy information is obtainable from the Liberal Animal Welfare Group, 16 Valingers Road, Kings Lynn, Norfolk.)

When I steered the anti-hunting legislation through Brighton Council it was heartening to receive all-party support. I suggest that this is the only way we will achieve desperately needed new laws.

FRANCIS HIX
Liberal Councillor

PUTTING ANIMALS INTO POLITICS

While the formation of the Conservative Anti Hunt Council is very welcome indeed, the sideways swipe by its Director, Clive Skinner, at the other political parties is uncalled for and quite unfair ("The Free-thinker", September).

I have been chairman of co-ordinating committees for animal protection at the past two general elections so I have close knowledge of how animals got put into politics. After 25 years in the House of Commons, I saw the futility of trying to get substantial and probably contentious reforms on animal welfare through Parliament without the goodwill of the Government. They alone have the majority and the control over the business of Parliament which is indispensable in piloting a Bill through.

My remedy was to "put animals into politics" in order to get party political commitments which would be translated into action by the party of Government. In 1978-9 and again in 1983 the animal protection societies joined together to obtain assurances from all political parties that if they formed any part of Government they would act on pledges to bring about reform.

The outcome in 1979 was that for the first time ever in British politics, all three major parties included promises about animal protection in their respective manifestos. All three gave undertakings on changes to tighten up permissible experiments on living animals. All three were also concerned about the transport of farm animals to Europe for further fattening or immediate slaughter. Only the Labour Party came close to making any promises on hunting.

(continued on back page)



Barbara Smoker, President of the National Secular Society, with Michael Foot (left) who hoped that "Charles Bradlaugh's name will always be remembered and celebrated". With them is Brian Sedgemore, MP for the area in which Bradlaugh was born.

Photo Barry Duke

conformists whose God is respectability, and whose goal a baronetcy, contrive, with a score or two of bigots thrown in, to make a carnival of folly, a veritable devil's dance of blasphemy. The debates on Bradlaugh's oath-taking extended over six years, and will make melancholy reading for posterity. Two figures, and two figures only, stand out in solitary grandeur, those of a Quaker and an Anglican, Bright and Gladstone. . . Whether Bradlaugh was the last of his race or not, he was a brave man whose life well deserves an honourable place amongst the biographies of those Radicals who have suffered in the cause of Freethought and into the fruits of whose labours others have entered.

"The people of Northampton paid him the honour of continuing to vote for him with great loyalty. And while Bradlaugh argued against Socialism in many public debates he had strong links with the early Labour movement".

Mr Foot said that the House of Commons finally redeemed itself, when Bradlaugh was dying, by unanimously passing a resolution rescinding the motions of expulsion which they had passed previously. He concluded by saying that Bradlaugh's "was a wonderful life given to the service of his people".

Brian Sedgemore, MP, said that Charles Bradlaugh aroused the anger of the British Establishment, and there were three main reasons why he did so.

"First, he was an intelligent freethinker, and the Establishment has always regarded intelligence and freethinking in terms of sedition, blasphemy and

treason.

"Secondly, there was his atheism. There were atheists and sceptics long before Bradlaugh, but they followed the advice of the philosopher, David Hume, and had not discussed scepticism in front of the servants. Bradlaugh discussed atheism and scepticism in halls and market places all over the country.

"Thirdly, he mentioned the unmentionable—birth control".

Mr Sedgemore said that if Bradlaugh were alive today there are many things he would be happy about.

"He would be happy to see that humanism has basically triumphed over Christianity in our society. He would be happy to see that birth control was widely and safely practised.

"But he would of course face difficulties. If he went into Parliament and the town halls and were actively to preach republicanism and atheism and freethinking, you can bet your bottom dollar that Margaret Thatcher would describe him as a Communist, the Pope would see him as the devil incarnate and Mary Whitehouse would condemn him for producing sperm which contained the seeds of licentiousness and promiscuity.

"I think he would also be sad at some of the secrecy of modern government, the propaganda that the Government uses—the kind that we saw in the Falklands War. And he would be sad about the revival of blasphemous libel law that we saw not so long ago in our country.

"Lastly, I think if he represented this area, as I do, he would be horrified that in 1983 there can

be so much poverty and inequality compared with the bulk of people in our country. And I think that he would have ensured that every single person in this land knew the kind of problems that were faced in this borough.

"Bradlaugh was a big man, an astonishing man", said Brian Sedgemoor. "There was a sweep of history, a breadth of understanding, a boundless energy and a freshness about almost everything that he did. To some extent, it is rather sad to report, he makes some of our modern politicians look so wizened and shrivelled in their introverted respect for the modern corporate state and its seedy corporatist attitudes.

"It is an extreme delight and a pleasure for me as the local MP to stand here today and to mark the birth and the passing of a colossus of a man, of a true son of Hoxton".

Renée Short, MP, read extracts from Bradlaugh's writings and speeches. He held the attention of large audiences on a wide range of subjects, notably Indian independence.



Renée Short, MP,
who paid tribute to
"a lion among men".

Photo: Barry Duke

"Bradlaugh was a marvellous man", she said. "He was a lion among men in the House of Commons of his day. We all have to carry on his tradition".

After the meeting there was a ceremony in the library vestibule where a marble bust of Bradlaugh stands. Michael Foot placed a laurel wreath, and Councillor Bella Callaghan, Mayor of Hackney, a bouquet on behalf of the Borough.

• There was also a commemoration of the Bradlaugh anniversary at Northampton on 18 September. Freethinkers from London and the Midlands, including a party of Indian guests, assembled at the statue of the town's most famous Member of Parliament. Town Councillor John Dickie and County Councillor Marie Dickie welcomed the visitors who placed a wreath at the statue. They were later joined by the Mayor and Mayoress of Northampton. Afterwards they travelled to Leicester and were entertained by members of Leicester Secular Society at their hall.

Letters

In the 1983 election the Labour Party came out firmly in favour of making unlawful the hunting of wild animals with hounds. Conservatives and Liberals took the view that fox-hunting particularly was not a matter for Government policy but one for the individual consciences of MPs.

I do not call this "cashing in" at all. It is a matter of judgement whether a pledge to ban fox-hunting is exactly a winner for any political party. The simple prescription is for all who have convictions about "blood sports" to pursue them through any or all of the political parties. What is clear is that no Bill is ever likely to get through Parliament unless it is introduced by the Government of the day or has both substantial all-party support and Government goodwill.

That is the importance of the Conservative Anti Hunt Council and why it should be given every support by all who feel the same way.

HOUGHTON OF SOWERBY

FREETHOUGHT BIBLIOGRAPHY

I should like to comment on some items in David Tribe's review of Gordon Stein's "Freethought in the United Kingdom and the Commonwealth: A Descriptive Bibliography" (September).

Tribe's reference to my review ("New Humanist", Summer 1982) needs to be clarified. He says that I "named 65 omitted authors", but adds that "about a third of these are in fact mentioned, although little or nothing is said about their writings". What I said was that there are 65 "authors of significant freethought works who have been omitted", and my point was not whether some of the people are briefly mentioned in the historical sections but that their works are omitted from the bibliographical sections, although they include several of the most important freethought texts published in Britain. Stein's reply ("New Humanist", Winter 1982) was not that they are mentioned but that the works were not published by or the authors did not belong to the freethought movement—although more than half were published by freethought publishers and more than a third were involved in freethought organisations.

Tribe's remark that the mistakes in the historical sections are "innocent errors of fact or omission and not wilful perversions of history" needs to be questioned. The references to the Rationalist Press Association, for example, are so extraordinarily inaccurate that it is hard to think of an innocent explanation, and there are many other glaring howlers. Stein's response to such criticism has been either to ignore it or to deny it, rather than to explain what has happened.

Tribe's remark that the book shows "how little really original freethought . . . material has emerged in the twentieth century" needs the obvious comment that the book tends to ignore such material—as in the case Tribe mentions of his own book, "Nucleoethics".

I must repeat the conclusion of my review: "This book should be used with great care; indeed it may be safely used only by people who already know the subject well, and they will hardly need it. But a corrected and enlarged edition could be really valuable".

NICOLAS WALTER
Rationalist Press Association