

The Freethinker

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FORMAL RELIGION "UNACCEPTABLE" TO MANY YOUNG PEOPLE

The Scottish Humanist Council was formed at a time when it seemed possible that Scotland might achieve autonomy over her own affairs. "But the absence of a Scottish Assembly does not deprive the Council of all useful functions", Nigel Bruce, SHC chairman, told the annual conference in Edinburgh on 7 April. The Council forms a link with humanists all over Scotland. It is also associated with other national and international bodies.

Mr Bruce said that Scotland has its own central machinery in the Scottish Office and its own legislation in the field of law, education and social work. "The Council claims the right to represent humanist views in these areas", he added.

"We have kept an eye on developments in religious education, where the first ever Scottish examination papers for an 'O' grade qualification are about to break on an unsuspecting world. The Council commented on various preparatory documents issued by the Scottish Central Committee on Religious Education and by the Scottish Examination Board".

Dr James Hemming was the guest speaker and the subject of his address to the Conference was "Education for the Future".

He said that life today for young people is more challenging than it has ever been. It is full of the uncertainties of change and the risks that go with change. Industry itself now sets personal qualities like reliability, responsibility, enthusiasm and social skills right at the top of its list of requirements.

The speaker recalled Dr Samuel Johnson's words: "It is better to know something than not to know it".

"Nevertheless", he added, "what we need as a society, and what people need as themselves, are fit minds rather than full ones.

"Today we can get most of the information we require by pressing buttons; but you cannot make young people competent or enthusiastic or cooperative except by years of formative experience, in which they have become used to directing their energies, with others, in the attainment of agreed common purposes. You certainly cannot develop the essential life skills by filling young minds with facts and processes and then sitting them down to answer once-for-all examination questions to show how much they have remembered. There is nothing to be said in favour of that system".

Dr Hemming said that the traditional secondary education will not do any more. The starting point in its replacement should be the quality of the school community. Children want to develop their powers and only become hostile after they have lost heart in getting anything worthwhile from their schooling.

"People of any age who have failure imposed upon them become angry and aggressive. Successful learning and successful discipline are rooted together in the level of motivation a school can arouse. The most fundamental source of motivation is the quality of the school community—a community that draws everyone in and gives everyone his, or her, own place and dignity. It follows that such a school will be democratic in climate, not authoritarian; and also that it will maintain significant relationships with the wider community. . .

"In a friendly, purposeful, democratic school community, children learn to work on, and discuss with others, the various issues that arise in the school's life. They learn the dignity and responsibility of being involved. Because they feel cared for they become capable of concern for others. From being respected, they learn self-respect. From being trusted

(continued on back page)

The Freethinker

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NEWS

A RIGHT (WING) CARRY-ON

Two short items in the November 1983 issue of *The Freethinker* sparked off a controversy over the paper's alleged Left-wing bias. The first, a "News and Notes" item, referred to a nuclear disarmament demonstration in London and to an anti-CND statement signed by a group of academics, including Professor Antony Flew. The second was a letter criticising *The Freethinker*; Professor Flew was one of the eight signatories.

A number of readers, including two former editors, joined in the ensuing debate. Perhaps it would be useful at this stage to consider some of the complaints.

Geoffrey H. L. Berg (Letters, January) takes umbrage at our linking the two statements which Professor Flew signed. *The Freethinker* has nothing to apologise for. Freethinkers' participation in a massive peace demonstration is newsworthy; so is Professor Flew's and other academics' criticism of the CND standpoint.

The Freethinker's description of its critics as "a mixed bunch" and "strange bedfellows" is also justified. It is not every day that a group of anarchists and Conservatives make common cause, even in *The Freethinker*. On this occasion they created more amusement among readers than Mr Berg realises.

Mr Berg apparently considers it "a snide personal remark" to mention Professor Flew's association with a dubious outfit like the Unification Church. We assert that the involvement of a vice-president of the Rationalist Press Association with a harmful religious sect like the Moonies merits comment in *The Freethinker*.

Professor Flew told the *Daily Mail* newspaper in April 1981 that he was planning to attend a Moonie conference in Seoul. He said: "I have been to the last two conferences. . . Wives are invited and the organisers pay for fares, food and accommodation. . . I do have a general interest in eccentric religions".

Now the Unification Church does not pay out large sums for fares, food and accommodation, and expect nothing in return. Dr John Vane, a Fellow of the Royal Society, said at the time: "The vast Moon organisation gets valuable internal propaganda from these conferences".

It can be only the Moonies' ultra-Right politics, not their weird religious beliefs, that attract Professor Flew.

The *Daily Mail*, which even Geoffrey H. L. Berg would hardly describe as a Communist propaganda sheet, commented: "For such eminent academics and their wives, with a passing interest in 'eccentric religions', an expenses-paid journey to South Korea

S AND NOTES

may seem a harmless diversion. But for those young people who are dazzled by their names and their reputations, who see their presence as a mark of approval for the Rev Moon and his propaganda machine, there can be a bitter price to pay for such junkets".

Carl Lofmark concluded his letter (January): "... the movement must not commit itself regularly to the policy of one party and abuse those who favour another". Quite so; but Mr Lofmark should proffer his advice to Right-wingers like Professor Flew who stormed out of the National Secular Society's annual general meeting after denouncing those present as "socialist bastards".

Such awkward facts may incommode our Right-wing critics. They indicate a real source of political extremism in the movement.

Professor Flew may be our only critic of any eminence, but Antony Milne and S. E. Parker are the most industrious. It was Mr Parker who initiated the protest against "the increasing amount of Left-wing political propaganda" in *The Freethinker*. He then joined forces with Mr Milne to write an article, *The Freethinker — Quoting From the Left?* (February).

Antony Milne and S. E. Parker commence their article by acknowledging with approval "that *The Freethinker* is a radical and anti-Establishment journal of dissent". Later they complain because it considers itself to be a "campaigning newsletter". This complaint is partly justified, but their reasoning is muddled and their knowledge of the paper's history decidedly scanty.

During its 103 years the radical dissension of *The Freethinker* has taken many forms, including biblical criticism, opposition to censorship, blasphemy law, sabbatarianism, religious indoctrination in schools and privileges enjoyed by the churches and their front organisations. It has supported family planning and law reforms relating to divorce, abortion and homosexuality, defended civil liberties and exposed evil religious sects. It has recorded the support of individual Conservatives, including Members of Parliament, for these causes. The only justifiable complaint about the paper's current campaigning role is a lack of forcefulness. But we are working on it.

Antony Milne and S. E. Parker plead for "a distancing of the movement from other radical groups". Here again the Exclusive Brethren of the Right reveal a rather defective knowledge of the movement's history. As G. H. Taylor points out in *A Chronology of British Secularism*, we make no claim that either *The Freethinker* or the National Secular Society is the sum total of British secularism.

There are many other groups promoting policies and programmes which many *Freethinker* readers endorse. It is perfectly correct to report and publicise the work of such groups, particularly at a time when, at national level, the secularist-humanist movement is deep in the doldrums.

"What would the public and the media make of the sight of freethinkers and Christian pacifists marching together in an anti-nuclear demonstration?", Messrs Milne and Parker enquire. The public and the media are accustomed to seeing the most disparate groups in such demonstrations. And we suspect that far more freethinkers would prefer to be seen marching with Monsignor Bruce Kent in an anti-nuclear demonstration than participating with Antony Flew in a Moonie conference.

Antony Milne and S. E. Parker admonish *The Freethinker* for declaring that the Conservative Party "attracts jingoists, racists, capital punishment freaks and other nasties like a dunghill attracts flies". Their criticism would be in order if it had been asserted that the Conservative Party membership consisted entirely of such elements. That assertion was not made. But the Conservative Party certainly attracts the types described. This is obvious to anyone who has attended or listened to broadcasts from the party conference and fringe meetings — particularly when the racists and law-and-order enthusiasts are given their head.

"When it comes to the gentle art of downright nastiness, the Right-wing Tory fringe takes a lot of beating", Anthony Shrimmsley, the political journalist, wrote in 1973. Mr Shrimmsley should know. He went on to be the party's Director of Press and Publicity. And with the triumph of the Thatcher-Tebbitt Tendency, the fringe of '73 came into its own.

It is undeniable that extreme Right-wing and racist groups have sympathisers among Conservative MPs, some of whom have spoken from their platforms. Such groups nearly gained another ally in the House of Commons at the last General Election. But to the Conservatives' embarrassment it was revealed that their candidate in Stockton South had been the National Front parliamentary candidate at Birmingham Erdington in 1974.

The Freethinker has always been critical of jingoism and sabre-rattling. It was not alone in its refusal to get caught up in anti-"Argie" hysteria over the Falklands war, although recognising the Argentine regime for what it was — a Right-wing, American-backed dictatorship.

Who were the real winners of the Falklands war? Not the Argentinian leaders, disgraced and stripped of their powers. Not the islanders, treated with contempt by British servicemen and exploited by absentee landowners. And certainly not the British people who will have to pay a very high price for Fortress Falkland.

But the United States did quite well out of it. It

was entirely predictable that in an atmosphere of gut patriotism fostered by the Falklands exercise the Conservatives would be returned at the General Election. And with Mrs Thatcher in 10 Downing Street, the Americans were assured of an even stronger hold on 102 bases in Britain and the installation of their Cruise missiles.

Nigel Sinnott (*The Critics' Case Examined*, March) gave the answer to those who clamour for the death penalty to be restored. Two points may be added. First, in recent weeks two men have been released after spending eight years and six years in prison for murders they did not commit. These victims of injustice were fortunate when we recall the fate of others like Derek Bentley and Timothy Evans. Secondly, despite the bayings of their constituency associations, a substantial number of Conservative MPs voted against capital punishment last year.

The rejection of Antony Milne's article on "Catholic excesses in Latin America" did not signal a mellowing of this paper's attitude towards the Roman Catholic Church. Quite simply Mr Milne's article was ridiculously one-sided. The Church has much to answer for in most countries, but by ignoring the United States' role in South American affairs he demonstrated (yet again) a pro-Americanism which borders on sycophancy.

Perhaps the most preposterous suggestion in the Milne-Parker article is that "Left candidates for the presidency of the National Secular Society, like Terry Liddle" offered themselves for election because "the radicalism of *The Freethinker* has assumed a distinct political slant". By standing for office, Terry Liddle (who was aware that *The Freethinker* editor did not support his candidacy) only exercised a basic right of all members. But it seems that some anarchists and Conservatives regard anyone to the Left of Genghis Khan as a second-class citizen.

Every *Freethinker* editor since 1881 has been castigated for being too Left-wing or too Right-wing, too aggressive or too timid, too extreme or too moderate. For in the words of a former editor (Jim Herrick, Letters, December 1983): "Factions will ever bemoan an inadequate representation of their viewpoint".

The Vatican newspaper, "L'Osservatore Romano", has stated that the heresy accusation against the astronomer Galileo Galilei "appears to have no foundation". Galileo defended Copernicus's hypothesis that the earth revolves around the sun. The Church described this as "formally heretical, inasmuch as it expressly contradicts the doctrines of Holy Scripture in many places". Galileo's work, "Dialogue on the two Great World Systems" was also condemned and he spent his final years under house arrest. In a speech to 200 leading scientists honouring the Dialogue, the Pope virtually admitted that the Church had been wrong.

CoE AND MUSLIMS IN SCHOOLS CARVE-UP?

The religious clauses of the 1944 Education Act and the churches' privileged position in the education system continue to create confusion and divisiveness.

The latest development is a suggestion that Anglican schools should be handed over to Muslims and Sikhs for a limited period of five or seven years. This proposal has been greeted with caution by a Church of England discussion paper and alarm by the National Secular Society. In *A Future in Partnership*, Canon Robert Waddington refers to the danger of young people from ethnic minorities finding themselves isolated, and to the practical problems educationists would encounter in organising and running schools.

The National Secular Society stated in a Press release that it is surely bad enough that there should be Anglican, Roman Catholic and Jewish schools that segregate children according to their religion.

"The divisiveness that this causes (as is seen at its worst in Northern Ireland) would be exacerbated by the addition of schools for immigrant religions, with segregation on the basis of skin colour as well as creed. Indeed, many responsible immigrant leaders themselves realise the danger of this.

"In any case, since at least 85 per cent of the capital cost and 100 per cent of the running costs of church schools are paid for out of the public purse, the C of E has no moral right to hand them over to any organisation except the local education authority".

The NSS also issued a statement condemning Bradford City Council's decision to continue supplying Halal meat to the city's schools. This meat is produced by slitting animals' throats without pre-stunning.

Animal protection organisations have also been protesting against the practice. But the matter is often complicated by the infiltration of such groups by racists who exploit the campaign to stir up prejudice against the coloured and Jewish communities.

But the NSS, which has always opposed special religious privileges at law, declares that if Muslims are prohibited by their religion from eating meat that has been humanely killed, it certainly does not prohibit them from becoming vegetarian. The Society "not only demands an end to the provision of Halal meat in State schools, but also urges the repeal of the anomalous law that allows this cruel method of slaughter in this country. We support freedom of religion but not at the cost of such cruel practices.

"Supposing an immigrant group insisted that the barbarous practice of female circumcision was required by their religion, would this be made legal?"

NO BETRAYAL OF YOUNG

The British Medical Association has issued a statement declaring that doctors will be compelled to act as police informers, if their action in giving contraceptives to girls under 16 without parental consent is held to be illegal. It was commenting on an appeal by Mrs Victoria Gillick against Mr Justice Woolf's ruling that doctors would not be committing a criminal offence by prescribing contraceptives to protect young girls from pregnancy.

"If the appeal is successful", the BMA declares, "it could have very wide implications for the confidential relationship between doctor and young patients which could lead to confidential treatment being withheld from young people in other areas of medicine. . . Mrs Gillick is seeking measures to force doctors into actions that will betray confidences and damage a fundamental principal of medical practice".

The BMA has always advocated that when doctors are prescribing contraceptives to under-16s it is most important that, on medical grounds, the support of parents is obtained. This is in accordance with DHSS guidelines. But "it has to be recognised . . . that not all children are fortunate enough to have parents who are able or willing to give this support. It is these disadvantaged and vulnerable girls who are most at risk. . . In such cases, the doctor may be the only responsible adult to whom these girls may turn".

The Association believes that if young patients seeking contraception know that their parents will be informed many will not do so and become pregnant. An increase in abortion rates is likely.

The BMA says that the best method of managing the problem "is to place no obstacle in the way of girls seeking contraceptive advice. . . To say that it is better to deny this age group access to contraceptive advice, thereby leaving a minority to suffer the consequences of unwanted pregnancy as an example to others, is not only draconian, but also an inadequate solution . . . doctors, parents and social workers would still be left 'to cope' with these casualties".

How many parents of these girls, the statement concludes, would not have preferred their daughters to have sought medical advice rather than risk pregnancy?

• The Royal College of Nursing has defended the right of doctors to prescribe the contraceptive pill to girls under 16, if necessary without parental consent. It says that the DHSS guidelines should not be changed.

• The Society for Protection of Unborn Children (SPUC) spent £200,000 on anti-abortion campaigning last year. They aim to raise £300,000 during 1984.

CLASSROOM PROPAGANDA

President Reagan is making a determined bid to win support of the religious Right in his campaign to be re-elected. He told the National Association of Evangelicals that the United States is on the verge of "a spiritual awakening" which he regards as being as important as economic recovery.

The Moral Majority, which played a key role in returning Reagan to the White House in 1980, conducted a nationwide campaign to get prayers back into the classroom. They had been encouraged by Reagan's promise that "we should see if we can't find room in our schools for God".

During a recent debate in Congress, hundreds of Moral Majority members travelled to Washington to exert pressure on members. Their approach was not always subtle. With loving Christian concern the Jesuites warned Senators that they would "burn in hell" if they did not support a constitutional amendment to allow prayers in schools.

It is not only in the West that religious zealots are constantly endeavouring to turn State schools into part-time churches. A decision by the authorities in Poland to remove crucifixes from school buildings has enraged Catholics who have been organising boycotts and demonstrations.

Polish Catholics, egged on by militant priests and with all possible encouragement by the Vatican, have been provoking confrontation and wresting privileges for their church from the Government. But on the issue of school crucifixes they are being resisted by the authorities.

However, in order to avoid needless dispute it seems that a compromise is desirable. Perhaps the following arrangement would be suitable: the Church may continue to exhibit its representation of sado-masochism in classrooms, but allow the Government to display the Hammer and Sickle emblem on pulpits throughout the country.

SUNDAY SHOPPING

Last month we published a letter from Mr A. Hamilton, North Eastern Deputy Divisional Officer of the Union of Shop, Distributive and Allied Workers, putting the social and economic case against Sunday trading. He warned that prices would rise and that conditions for shop workers would become intolerable.

Mr Hamilton said that any amendment to the 1950 Shops Act "should be considered by people who really understand distribution". Wendy Greenop would surely be included in this category. Her Brighton shop has been open on Sunday for the last 32 years, and 1,700 customers recently signed a petition of support. But Mrs Greenop has just been

fined £150 for Sunday trading offences.

After the hearing before Brighton magistrates Mrs Greenop said that Sunday was by far the best day for takings at her shop. Without it she would go bankrupt. She added: "The laws are crazy".

They are indeed. Even in nearby towns like Hove and Eastbourne, Sunday trade laws differ, causing confusion for shopkeepers and public alike. In Hove, shops may open from 9 am to 8 pm on Sundays between 14 May and 17 September.

In Brighton, however, the specified Sundays are Easter Sunday, Whit Sunday and the first Sunday in June, continuing until there has been exemption for 18 Sundays. Opening times are different in Brighton, too. Between 7 am and 8 pm the following goods may be sold—books, stationery, photographs, reproductions, postcards, toys, souvenirs and fancy goods. But shops selling photographic requisities can only open between 9 am and 8 pm, while those selling groceries and provisions can open at 9 am but must close at 7 pm.

All of the above goods can be sold in Hove shops which are also permitted to sell items for bathing or fishing. This is not allowed in Brighton.

Mr Henderson argues that Sunday trading would bring all kinds of problems. He even raises the Continental Sunday bogy, already worked to death by the Lord's Day Observance Society. But he does not explain why none of the dire consequences he claims would ensue if Sunday trading were introduced in England and Wales have occurred in Scotland where there has been Continental-style Sunday trading for many years.

It is true that shop workers are still grossly exploited. But they should realise that sabbatarian informers and the major retailers are opportunists and dubious allies. They can best defend and improve their conditions by joining a trade union, rather than sheltering behind daft and outdated Sunday observance laws.

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SISTER MARIAN HITS BACK

A group of Jesus bully-boys came a cropper in an American courtroom last month when Marian Guinn, a 36-year-old divorcee, was awarded \$390,000 (£267,000) against the Church of Christ. She sued three church elders in the bible-belt town of Collinsville, Oklahoma, for invasion of privacy after being denounced from the pulpit for "the sin of fornication".

Marian Guinn's "sin" was that she was having an affair with a man of her own age, also divorced. And she had missed attending church for seven Sundays because of her duties as an orthopaedic nurse. The elders mounted a campaign of intimidation to "save the soul of Sister Marian". They refused to accept her resignation from the church, insisting on a public confession and apology.

The pressure started in earnest with a letter informing her: "It is with tremendous concern for your soul and the welfare of the Lord's Church that we exhort you to consider the impact of the results of the course you have elected to pursue.

"If by the close of worship Sunday morning, you have not indicated a penitent heart by a public acknowledgement of your sin of fornication, a statement will be read aloud to the congregation, so you might hear and repent.

"If you choose not to heed these exhortations, a statement will be read by the elders to exclude you from the Fellowship Of The Body Of Christ and notify sister congregations, which means not to associate with you. Our purpose in exercising this discipline is to save your soul".

Marian Guinn resisted the elders' demand which she described as "moral blackmail", and the following Sunday, before a packed congregation, they carried out their threat. She and her children suffered harassment and social ostracism. "People who met me in the street would avoid my eyes and turn away", she said. "Friends and relatives who belong to the church went against me".

She consulted a lawyer who was not a run of the mill practitioner. He decided she had a case to go before the court. The elders contended that a trial would be an "impermissible enquiry" into church affairs. Their objection was dismissed by the Supreme Court.

Here is a piece of good news from the Emerald Isle. Over 20,000 people in Dublin city and county, and the neighbouring borough of Dun Laoghaire, claim to have no religion—and that's official. These figures are given in the latest population statistics issued by the Central Statistics Office. They represent a four-fold increase in the number of unbelievers in the same area over a ten-year period.

Easter as Egyptian Mythology

R. J. CONDON

Recent years have seen a transatlantic revival of interest in the theories of a little-known British scholar. Following Gerald Massey, this article traces certain aspects of the Easter myth to sources in the religious literature of ancient Egypt.

The period roughly between 1830 and 1930 might well be called the century of the autodidact, one who acquires a great deal of learning without formal training. The names of Charles Bradlaugh and John M. Robertson come readily to mind, and indeed the freethought movement at that time could congratulate itself on the many fine scholars, academic as well as self-taught, who were attracted to its ranks. Some, like Robertson, interested themselves in the problems of Christian origins. Their reconstructions naturally varied, but there was general agreement that the gospel story is to a large extent re-worked pagan mythology.

To orthodox scholarship this was radical enough, but one homespun savant held views so extreme that his work is hardly ever referred to even by his fellow mythicists. As more than one researcher in this field has told me, Gerald Massey went too far.

Massey was born in 1828 to parents so poor that he had to earn his living from the age of eight. As a young man his work for the Chartist movement cost him five situations in a year. He managed to educate himself and became something of a minor poet, publishing two books of verse. A strong mystical streak led him into occultism of the kind later associated with Aleister Crowley, and he adhered to spiritualism until his death in 1907. None the less he called himself a freethinker and in that capacity undertook lecture tours in Britain and abroad.

The last 40 years of Massey's life were devoted to the study of the ancient Egyptian religion, which he soon convinced himself held the key to all subsequent religious beliefs and practices. He published his findings in three large works, each of two volumes. *A Book of the Beginnings* appeared in 1881, followed two years later by *The Natural Genesis*. The last of the three, *Ancient Egypt: The Light of the World*, was published in the year of Massey's death. The books have never been well-known. They were printed in limited editions, and not all were read—my set of *A Book of the Beginnings* stood on somebody's shelf for 80 years with its pages uncut. All three works have been reprinted in the USA within the last two decades.

The subject matter of these books is far-reaching.

but what makes them of particular interest to freethinkers is their emphatic condemnation of Christianity as nothing more than a quasi-historical rehash of the Egyptian Mysteries. Massey goes through the gospels almost line by line, finding Egyptian parallels for every situation. One should beware, of course, of following this line of argument uncritically. Massey himself thought that perhaps half his grapnels would hold, as he put it. My feeling is that he hit the nail on the head more often than not. A good example is his treatment of The Raising of Lazarus, in John chapter 11. This is shown to be a close copy, names and all, of The Raising of Asar (Osiris) in Het-Annu, the Egyptian Bethany. Massey's Egyptology is perfectly orthodox, but he could afford to spell out in full where other scholars, holding positions under the establishment, dared no more than hint.

In my own writings I find Massey useful for suggesting lines of enquiry, but there are times when I am reluctant to accept his argument. Take for example the use he makes of chapter 112 in *The Book of the Dead*. Here it is, somewhat abbreviated: "Do ye know for what reason the city of Pe hath been given to Horus? Behold, Ra gave the city unto him in return for the injury in his eye, for which cause Ra said to Horus: 'Let me see what is coming to pass in thine eye', and forthwith he looked thereat. Now Suti (Set) had transformed himself into a black pig, and it was he who had aimed the blow of fire which was in the eye of Horus. Then said Ra: 'The pig is an abominable thing unto Horus'. Then said Horus to Ra: 'Give me two divine brethren in the city of Pe, who shall be with me in the guise of everlasting judges, then shall the earth blossom. I know the souls of Pe, namely Horus, Kesthi and Hapi'".

This, says Massey, is the source of the drama in the Garden of Gethsemane. And here, I feel, is where he has definitely gone too far. None the less the suggestion remains an intriguing one, so we will see how it works out.

The city of Pe is also called Am-Semen, whence the Gethsemane of the gospels. Horus keeps watch in Am-Semen for Ra, as Jesus is the watcher in Gethsemane (Matthew 26:40). The black pig Set matches the black-hearted Judas, in whom is Satan. In both cases the betrayers know where their victims are to be found and seek them there. Horus means Lord, and the Lord weeping blood in Am-Semen corresponds with the Lord sweating blood in Gethsemane. The pig Set becomes abominable to Horus just as Judas (Satan) is cursed by Jesus (Matthew

(continued on page 60)

Last month Lord McNair, a Liberal peer, attacked Freemasonry during a debate in the House of Lords. He expressed suspicion that rather than "indulging a penchant for wearing fancy dress, exchanging secret signs and funny handshakes", they make up a kind of secretive conspiracy. There have been many demands for an investigation into this extremely wealthy and influential movement.

The cult of Freemasonry has had a shockingly bad Press in recent times. First, there was the Roberto Calvi banking scandal and then a furore surrounding the publication of Stephen Knight's exposé, *The Brotherhood*. The book was originally commissioned by the New English Library and the final typescript was delivered to them in June, 1982. Meanwhile, however, the firm had been taken over by Hodder and Stoughton, and some months later, Knight was informed that the whole project had been abandoned on the orders of the new directors, Philip and Michael Attenborough. It eventually transpired that although neither of the Attenborough brothers were Freemasons, their father, John Attenborough, CBE, was a senior official in the organisation and would be greatly displeased and hurt if his sons' company published the work. Fortunately, Knight subsequently managed to place the book with Granada, and although there was a further mysterious delay in publication, due to unspecified last-minute "legal difficulties", it finally appeared in January this year, the state of the binding indicating that some pages had been removed.

This incident is yet another example of the difficulty and frustration confronting anyone attempting to write critically about the largest all-male secret society in the world. As a librarian, I know that a predecessor of *The Brotherhood*, Walton Hannah's *Darkness Visible* (1952) which gives detailed examples of the absurd rituals and oaths leading to the various "Degrees", still keeps disappearing from the open shelves of public libraries. A similar fate will no doubt befall *The Brotherhood*, and, indeed, according to a report in *The Guardian* (23 February), the General Purposes Committee of Grand Lodge has already banned all Masons from reading, discussing or owning the book. Any member found to have done so will be disciplined by being barred from rising in rank.

Some Freemasons actually claim that the movement dates from the Garden of Eden. Thus, the Masonic calendar is based on the ludicrous calculations of Archbishop Ussher, who, in the 17th century, worked out from Old Testament chronology that the creation must have taken place in the year

4004 BC (on Tuesday, October 23 at 2 pm to be precise). Ignoring, for convenience, the four odd years, the Masonic calendar is 4000 years ahead of Anno Domini, so that this is now the year 5984.

However, most intelligent Masons now admit that Freemasonry originated in the associations of fellow craftsmen in stonemasons' guilds or trade unions during the Middle Ages. The secret signs employed by the itinerant masons were devised for the purpose of mutual recognition as experts in their craft. But Freemasonry, as practised today, probably dates from about the year 1600, when we have the first example of a non-stonemason, John Boswell, Laird of Auchinleck and ancestor of Johnson's biographer, joining the Edinburgh Lodge. Gradually the middle and upper classes infiltrated the movement, until the working-class operative masons became the minority and were eventually completely ousted.

The Grand Lodge of London was founded in 1717, that of Ireland in 1730, and of Scotland in 1736. The first noble Grand Master was the Duke of Montague, who was appointed in 1721, while the first royal Grand Master was the Duke of Cumberland (son of George II) who was installed in 1782. The present royal Grand Master is HRH the Duke of Kent, while the Queen, though a mere female, is the Grand Patroness. By the third decade of the 18th century, Freemasonry had spread to the nobility of France, Germany and Italy, and before 1750 had reached North America. Today each of the United States has its own Grand Lodge, and many Presidents, including Ronald Reagan, have been Masons.

A Matter of Degrees

Ostensibly, the ritual of Freemasonry consists of three "Degrees": Entered Apprentice, Fellow Craft Mason and Master Mason. It centres around the building of Solomon's Temple, at which it is claimed an immense number of masons were employed. The architect in charge is said to have been one Hiram Abiff, who was murdered for refusing to reveal the secrets of the craft, and during the third or Master Mason Degree, his murder and subsequent alleged resurrection are mimed. Each Degree has certain secret signs and passwords, such as Boaz, Jachin, Machaben and Tubal-Cain. The First Degree grip, made by pressing the thumb into the first joint of the forefinger where it meets the hand, is used by Masons to identify each other the world over. There are many others, including the Signs of Fidelity, Horror, Sympathy, the Penal sign and that of Grief and Death (see Hannah, *Darkness Visible*, p 82 for descriptions of how these are made).

The candidate for initiation is divested by the Tyler (or guard) in an ante-room of the Lodge of his coat, jacket, collar, tie and all articles of metal on his person. His shirt is opened to expose the left breast, and the right sleeve is rolled up above the elbow. His left trouser-leg is also rolled up above the knee, his right shoe is taken off and replaced by a mule-type slipper, and a noose of blue silk (called by Masons a cable-tow) is placed around his neck. Before being taken into the Lodge he is blindfolded.

There then follows the Degree ceremony, the full ridiculous details of which are reproduced by Hannah. Fearsome oaths must be sworn by the candidate not to reveal the secrets of the craft ". . . under no less a penalty than that of having my throat cut across, my tongue torn out by the root, and buried at a cable's length from the shore. . ." (Ceremony of Initiation); ". . . of having my left breast laid open, my heart torn therefrom and given to the ravenous birds of the air or devouring beasts of the field as prey. . ." (Second Degree); ". . . of being severed in two, my bowels burned to ashes. . ." (Third Degree); ". . . of having the top of my skull sliced off" (Holy Royal Arch Degree). It seems almost incredible that grown men should participate in these pantomimes but, alas, for a variety of motives, many do.

In addition to the three craft Degrees, there are no less than 30 more higher Degrees, culminating in that of Grand Inspector General, whose present British incumbent is the 87-year-old Sir Ralph Hone. According to Stephen Knight, the great majority of ordinary Masons know nothing of these higher Degrees (or, indeed, of Sir Ralph), members of which are all drawn from the British ruling class. Ironically, in Masonic terms, Sir Ralph is 11 Degrees above Grand Master, the Duke of Kent, and 32 Degrees above Entered Apprentice the Duke of Edinburgh (reluctantly forced to join when he became engaged to Princess Elizabeth by his future father-in-law, King George VI, a fervent Mason). Significantly, perhaps, most of the members of the exclusive 33rd Degree are high-ranking military officers.

Freemasons claim that no one is ever asked to become one of their number and that a man wishing to join must himself voluntarily seek out two sponsors from among the fraternity. In practice, however, this is just not true. My father, a businessman of great integrity, told me he was "propositioned" several times by Masons within his own profession who assured him he could greatly further his business interests by joining the brotherhood. (He never did.) The official qualifications for becoming a Mason are that the candidate must be male, at least 21 years of age and "in reputable circumstances". He must believe in some sort of Supreme Being (the "Great Architect of the Universe" in Masonic terminology) and undertake at all times to obey the law of the land and give due allegiance to the Sovereign or

head thereof. Freemasonry is thus a highly conservative pillar of the Establishment.

A substantial proportion of Masons occupy key positions in British society today, and there is no doubt that membership of the organisation helps one's chances of gaining promotion in various professions. It is particularly rife in the police, and here its baneful influence goes back to the last century. According to Knight, the murders of seven prostitutes in the East End of London in 1888 were not carried out, as is commonly supposed, by a solitary maniac nicknamed "Jack the Ripper", but by three Freemasons, one of whom was no less a personage than Sir William Gull, Physician-in-Ordinary to Queen Victoria. The prostitutes had to be silenced because they knew and might reveal that the unstable Prince Albert, Duke of Clarence, grandson of the Queen and Heir Presumptive to the throne, had secretly married one of their number (a Roman Catholic) who had had a child by him. Knight has studied the account of the injuries inflicted on the unfortunate girls reported in *The Times* of the day and in the official documents on the case to which he had access. He reveals that the mutilations exactly parallel those which Masonic ritual specifies are to be carried out on "traitors to the nation", which the fanatically patriotic Gull believed these women to be. The man responsible for the subsequent cover-up was Sir Charles Warren, Commissioner of the Metropolitan Police, and yet another eminent Freemason.

Influence in High Places

The situation has changed little in the intervening period, and today more than 60 per cent of all police chiefs in the UK are Masons. Knight states that in the London force it is very difficult for a non-Mason to rise above the rank of Superintendent in the uniformed branch and above that of Sergeant in the CID. The same is true in Birmingham. He goes on to show that the Masonic-inspired appointment of James Page as the Commissioner of the City of London Police in 1971 (he was given the post, by Masonic manipulation, in preference to the liberal John Alderson, who had far superior qualifications) led directly to the widespread police corruption and crime eventually exposed in 1977 by the famous "Operation Countryman" investigation. Knight also reveals that many of the members of the notorious "Obscene Publications" squad, who were jailed for extorting money from pornographers in return for freedom from prosecution, were active Freemasons, as were many of the porn merchants themselves! Clearly an independent enquiry into the whole question of Freemasonry and the police is long overdue.

Knight in his book gives examples of Masonic influence in many other fields, including building

(continued on page 61)

BOOKS

NINETEEN EIGHTY-FOUR in 1984, edited by Crispin Aubrey and Paul Chilton. Comedia Publishing Group, £3.95

This is a collection of 11 short essays dwelling on various themes found in Orwell's *1984*. It begins with a rather flat piece by Crispin Aubrey, who examines *1984* from the old biographical/intentionalist perspective. More interestingly, he reminds us of how anti-Socialist the book appeared to be to its early readers. The Marxist historian A. L. Morton is quoted, writing in 1952: "a pretence of philosophic discussion . . . as an intellectual attack on Marxism it is beneath contempt . . . [plays] upon the lowest fears and prejudices . . . no slander is too gross, no device too filthy . . . the last word to date in counter-revolutionary apologetics". Posthumous come-uppance with a vengeance!

The next piece, by David Widgery, is perhaps the weakest, and maunders on in aimless fashion. I especially dispute his point that modern radio and television are radical forces, "focuses for resistance rather than agencies of oppression". One doesn't have to have read Stuart Hall or the Glasgow Media Group to see that media presentations of the world are structured towards a narrow, white, middle-aged, middle-class, hetero-monogamous Christian ethic. Women reporters still talk about "three-man teams" yet to be appointed, the BBC still refuses to invite gay spokespersons onto *Question Time* and *Any Questions*.

"Desire is Thoughtcrime", by Jenny Taylor, is an excellent account of the relationship in *1984* between sexuality and political authority, the links being patriarchy and male violence. She then extrapolates an argument about today's regime which includes an impressive synopsis: "Thatcherism has taken the positive emotions of love of place, resolution in the face of adversity, desire for independence, self-respect, and linked them to destructive aggression, nationalism, to a Darwinian 'survival of the fittest' idea of social organisation; and above all, to ideological hostility to all forms of state intervention, combined with increasing actual state surveillance and control".

There are two good essays on communications. Paul Chilton shows how the media have developed an Institutional Voice, which is "privileged" and which uses coded words to reinforce authority's assumptions. (It's only fair to say that everyone using language speaks "in code" in this sense; that is, they exploit verbal ambiguity and semantic resonances.) Florence Lewis and Peter Moss also deal with language, showing for example how military euphemisms—"controlled response", "second strike"

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—hide the hideous truth of warfare. Acronyms provide a further example: "ERA, IRA, SAM, AIDS? These cute-sounding names make injustice, revolution, missiles and disease seem innocuous".

The way computers may affect the future is the theme of Chris Roper's piece. He argues that the new information technology will not necessarily lead to greater threats to civil liberties because political control of computers is much easier than control of manual records, which are "extraordinarily inaccessible to anyone but the immediate bureaucracy which created them". And he puts in a timely corrective about the effects of freedom of information, if we ever get it: "It is a dangerous illusion of the British Left . . . that if only the British people were told the facts, Jerusalem would be right round the corner". Precisely. When the great British public are alerted to public misdemeanour (official sanctions-busting in Rhodesia, Government misinformation in the Falklands war) they hardly react. Disapprobation is channelled away from carnage and corruption towards the diversions of sexual nonconformity. The Parkinsons and the Tatchells fall from grace in a blaze of publicity as the real villains sneak off scot free.

Mike Cooley and Mike Johnson stress the gap between the futuristic promise of the new technology (wealth, leisure) and the reality. They also have interesting things to say about how machines de-humanise work instead of rendering it more congenial. However, it is surely rather tasteless to describe the "computocrats" as "these industrial Eichmanns".

Paul Lashmar's contribution compares *1984* to the present state of national surveillance: phone tapping, computers and M15 files. Philip Corrigan offers a comparison between Orwell's world and today's society.

Colin Ward relates the theme of environmental decay in the novel to present realities, and Patrick Wright reminds us that history is not a set of objective facts but a series of shifting perspectives. He illustrates this by comparing different local attitudes to Stoke Newington (for the poor, an inner city wasteland; for the new "gentry", a nostalgic preservation area). And thus, "people live in different worlds even though they may share the same locality".

The book as a whole is uneven. Although engaging in parts, it breaks little new ground and perhaps only communications specialists will find purchasing it worthwhile.

MARK LILLY

REVIEWS

LONDONERS, by Maureen Duffy. Methuen, £7.95

It is a cop-out to call anything "Joycean", but still it may give you an idea. *Londoners* (an echo of *Dubliners*), is a mini-*Ulysses*, the story of a writer in London going about his daily round, both private and professional (insofar as there is any distinction between the two for a writer), but dispensing with the flashy unity of time that *Ulysses* displays.

The texture of *Londoners* is a pleasure to unravel. The protagonist, Al, lives in a very modern, very localised London: it seems to be Earls Court in the Spring of 1983. There are many references to Tube stations, landmarks and areas of London. The story is firmly nailed down in time by references to politics and current events. Making a pleasing counterpoint to the emphatic here-and-now of Al's life, we also have references to the future in the form of speculation about political, literary, and economic developments; to Al's early life in the working-class East End, wartime privations, his shabby grammar school and poor-but-decent parents, his university days at "Queen's" in London; to the poetry and life of the medieval French poet François Villon, whose work Al is translating; to various periods of English history and literature and to the literature and mythology of antiquity, as befits a scholarly and literary writer like Al.

Besides this theme of time past, present and future, there are also themes of law and criminality (Villon had frequent run-ins with the law, and Al, although entirely respectable, observes a number of lawless activities) and of urban life, in which Al's cosmopolitan London and the seamy Paris of Villon are compared. The various sets of themes are joined by Villon's biography and especially his famous line, "Where are the snows of yesteryear?" which is quoted and alluded to and parodied in a recurring refrain; indeed, snow itself becomes a recurring theme.

Minor themes, tributary themes, enrich the main river. The idea of theft is echoed in Al's life when a film director decides to use Al's idea for a film of Villon's life without giving him any credit—or money—for it. Al travels a precise route from Earls Court to Piccadilly, via the Tube, well-known street names, the facades of famous buildings—in order to consult books at the London Library concerning the topography of Villon's travels.

Another strong theme in *Londoners* is that of homosexuality: one of Al's local pubs is gay, various minor characters are gay, Al himself may be bisexual, a young friend of Al's is arrested for

demonstrating a little homophilic affection on the street, Al goes to lunch with an elderly, distinguished, somewhat camp, writer who discusses his own discreet living arrangements, and the impossible film director suggests making Villon homosexual for the sake of sensationalism. There seem to be two reasons for this emphasis: sometimes the gay theme reinforces the seedy, seamy, *demi-monde* theme and sometimes it is used to emphasise the idea of London as a great cosmopolitan home of every variation of humanity. The connection with Villon's low-life in the big city of Paris is tied up neatly by the film director's idea to show Villon as a homosexual.

If all this sounds difficult and overly contrived, it is not. You could read this novel as a straightforward narrative of a writer's life in present-day bohemian London and be scarcely aware of the interplay of themes, just as you might look at Holbein's picture of the two French ambassadors and enjoy it simply as the portrait of two ambitious and well-placed young men.

Jesting puns and the more serious ones of richly ambiguous double-duty words crop up everywhere, exactly as you would expect from Maureen Duffy and from Al, who is always mulling over versions of Villon in English and observing his surroundings in the manner of one who constantly has "words, words, words" on his mind. (Language, in fact, is yet another thread in this tapestry; the theme of language, especially English, is cleverly worked into the pattern.)

The loose and episodic plot, the rich, punning language, and the strong thematic structure all mark *Londoners* as a poetic novel rather than a traditional novel. D. M. Thomas has said that, as epics on the grand scale are no longer being written, the only long form available for a poet is the novel. Any repetition seems to be pleasing to the human mind, whether it is musical phrases, an arcade, or a running gag in a farce. The subtle and imaginative repetitions in a poetic novel are pleasing in apparently the same way. You do not have to stop and catalogue all the repetitions and thematic variations; you just recognise them, perhaps subliminally, perhaps with the *aha!* of the lepidopterist netting a new species, and appreciate the pattern they make.

SARAH LAWSON

ATHEISM, FREETHOUGHT, POLITICS, HISTORY

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26:24). The two brethren in Am-Semen would be the brothers James and John who in Matthew's gospel are, with Peter, the only disciples allowed to enter Gethsemane with Jesus. As "everlasting judges" they may foreshadow the promise made to the disciples in Matthew 19:28.

Thus far Massey, but it may be possible to go further. Am-Semen, like Gethsemane, is a garden—the earth blossoms there. And the two divine brethren may even be named. Kesthi is also called Amset, which is very close to James. It might be objected that the name is Jacob in the Greek gospels, but it is still a remarkable resemblance for Jacob and James have been interchangeable for ages. Hapi is the ape-god of Egypt, for whom another name is Aan or John. Amset and Aan, the brethren with the Lord in Am-Semen, equal James and John the brethren with the Lord in Gethsemane.

Another detail in Gethsemane may be matched from chapter 134 in *The Book of the Dead*, where the fiends of Set "fall down upon their faces" when they see Horus. In John 18:5-6 the arresting party led by Satan (in Judas) "went backward and fell to the ground" when they saw Jesus.

Gethsemane is said to be on the Mount of Olives, or Olivet, the scene of the Ascension of the risen Jesus. Bakhu in Egyptian signifies both olive and sunrise. Mount Bakhu, a name for the eastern horizon, is equally the Mount of Sunrise and the Mount of Olives. The olive has always been associated with the sun. In ancient times the olive oil lamp, like the sun, was a source of light and heat. Olive oil is still used to confer the solar divinity on royalty, the coronation anointing symbolically making them shine like the sun. Jerusalem has its own Mount of Sunrise, for Olivet is the city's eastern horizon.

The earliest historical notice of Jerusalem is in one of the Tell-el-Amarna letters, dating from about 1400 BC. The city with its surrounding countryside was then a vassal state of Egypt. The letter is from King Abdikheba of Jerusalem to his Egyptian master, appealing for military aid to withstand a siege by the Habiri or Hebrews, intent no doubt upon taking possession of their "promised land". It is probable that the Egyptian religion was established in Jerusalem, in which case Olivet would have been a localised Mount Bakhu.

The traditional site of the Ascension of Jesus is marked by a chapel on Olivet exactly due east of the Jewish Temple. Long before the chapel was built its position was noted by Ezekiel as the direction from which the "glory of the Lord"—sunshine—entered the Temple via its east gate (11:23 and 43:1-5).

Jesus, the Sun on the Mount (Matthew 17:1-2), may yet be seen at Jerusalem ascending from Olivet.

Easter is an astronomical feast, the Resurrection of Jesus being celebrated on the Sunday after the full moon following the vernal equinox. Bakhu is also the Mount of the Equinox from which the sun, as Ra or Horus, crosses the equatorial plane—its crucifixion—and gradually rises above it, the only "Lord" who ever survived the cross and ascended into heaven.

Freethinker Fund

There has been an excellent response to the appeal for financial backing and we hope that this level of support will be maintained throughout 1984. *The Freethinker* is the oldest regular outlet for the secularist-humanist viewpoint, and its continued existence is vital at a time when civil liberties and social reforms are under constant attack. Appreciation is expressed to the latest contributors who are listed below.

B. Able, £2; Anonymous, £38; A. M. Ashton, £1.40; N. G. Baguley, £3.40; C. R. Bailey, \$5.80; P. Barbour, £10; K. M. Barralet, £5; R. G. Baxter, £1.40; R. D. Birrell, £1.40; C. A. Brierley, £20; P. Brown, £2; G. A. Bull, £1.40; D. M. Carter, £1; R. C. Cheesman, £1.40; H. L. Clements, £1.40; J. D. Davenport, £2.40; W. Donovan, £6.40; B. S. Eagle, £1.40; F. B. Edwards, £1.40; B. Everest, £3; W. T. Ford, £1.40; P. George, £3; V. Gibson, £1.40; J. D. Groom, £1.40; F. C. G. Hagger, £1.40; W. C. Hall, £1.40; H. C. Harding, £1.40; S. P. Harvey, £2.80; V. Harvey, £1.40; E. Henderson, £2.90; J. G. Hillhouse, £6.40; E. C. Hughes, £5.50; R. Humphries, £4.40; F. W. Jones, £6.40; J. Joseph, £6.40; H. Lalor, £1.40; E. W. Lambert, £1.40; D. Lemon, £2.40; L. Lewis, £1; E. Litten, £1.40; J. J. Madden, £1.40; H. Madoc-Jones, £1.40; A. V. Montagu, £2; B. Morgan, £2; T. Morrison, £2.40; A. M. Nicholls, £1.40; M. O'Brien, £1.40; K. Pariente, £20; M. Perkins, £1.40; R. G. Peterson, \$10.80; M. V. Ramammurty, £8.60; J. C. Rapley, £1.40; D. Redhead, £1; G. Reece, £1.40; B. J. Reid, £1.40; W. Shannon, £6.40; N. Stevenson, £1.40; G. B. Stowell, £4.40; Sutton Humanist Group, £10; D. C. Taylor, £3; K. M. Tolfree, £1.40; R. J. Tolhurst, £5; N. Toon, £1.40; J. Walsh, £1.40; J. Warren, £10; F. White, £1.40; I. A. Williams, £6.40.

Total for the period 3 February until 5 March: £261 and \$16.60.

Addressing a meeting sponsored by the Pontifical Academy of Science, Pope John Paul II said that nuclear war means the Apocalypse. He has inaugurated the construction of a huge nuclear-bomb proof bunker in Vatican City. It will contain over a million books, ancient documents and valuable works of art.

The Menace of Freemasonry

construction (the jailed architect, John Poulson blatantly used his Freemasonry as a means of obtaining contracts), banking, the nationalised industries and our courts of law. The latter is particularly disturbing, because accused persons can (and do) use Masonic words and signs to indicate to judges and juries that they are members of the Brotherhood and thus attempt to sway the verdicts in their favour. And being a Mason is undoubtedly an advantage to those in the legal profession aspiring to become QCs and judges. The Law Society is brimming over with Masons and outside of London it is not easy for non-Masonic solicitors to attract clients. Conversely, non-Masonic clients may find themselves losing thousands of pounds if the Masonic solicitor they have unwittingly engaged, turns out to be incompetent or corrupt, because of the support the latter will receive from the Law Society and his fellow solicitors in the Brotherhood.

Walton Hannah, who was then a Church of England clergyman, wrote *Darkness Visible* specifically to prove that Christianity and Freemasonry are totally incompatible. Whether or not he established his thesis (and to freethinkers this question will be largely academic, since they will regard both cults as equally deplorable) this question has certainly been the cause of much heart-searching over the years among Masons who consider themselves Christians. A feeble reply to *Darkness Visible* was written by a Christian Freemason under the pseudonym of "Vindex", and the then Archbishop of Canterbury, Geoffrey Fisher, a staunch Freemason, ordered that Hannah's *exposé* must not be stocked by any of the bookshops run by the Society for the Propagation of Christian Knowledge, of which he was chairman.

Hannah later converted to Catholicism and traditionally the Roman Catholic Church has always been violently opposed to Freemasonry. But Knight shows that since Vatican II this hostility has been significantly toned down, and that on Christmas Day 1975 the Cardinal Primate of Brazil actually celebrated Mass to commemorate the 40th anniversary of the foundation of the Lodge Liberty. However, on 26 November 1983, the Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, possibly alarmed at such developments, issued a Declaration stating that "... the Church's negative judgment in regard to Masonic associations remains unchanged since their principles have always been considered irreconcilable with the doctrine of the Church and therefore membership of them remains forbidden. The faithful who enrol in Masonic associations are in a state of grave sin, and may not receive Communion".

It is, of course, hypocritical of the Roman Catholic Church to condemn Freemasonry, since many of the Vatican's activities are themselves highly secretive

(particularly with regard to the source of its finances) and in the "Knights of Columbus" it has its own all-male, semi-clandestine society. Moreover, in spite of their apparent mutual hostility, the Masons and the Vatican have lately formed an unholy alliance in the incredibly complicated affair of Italy's Banco Ambrosiano and the Vatican bank, the Institute for Religious Works, or IOR. In June 1982, the chairman of the former, Roberto Calvi, was found hanging by the neck from scaffolding under Blackfriars Bridge in London. Calvi had fled from Rome a week previously, after the Bank of Italy had demanded information on, and an explanation for, the huge debts incurred by the Banco Ambrosiano in Panama as a result of loans to five companies owned by the Vatican bank. Calvi was banker to, and a member of, the Mafia-like "P2" (Propaganda Due) Freemasons lodge in Italy (which was exposed and dissolved in 1981), and his escape to England had been engineered by fellow P2 member Flavio Carboni. When he arrived in London, Calvi went to ground in the Chelsea flat of a London Freemason, Michael Morris. Though the coroner's verdict at the inquest into Calvi's death was suicide, Knight claims that it bears all the hallmarks of a Masonic ritual murder. The pockets of his suit were stuffed with chunks of masonry, the rope around his neck was of the Masonic "cable-tow" type, and in Italy the logo of the Brotherhood is the figure of a blackfriar, hence the choice of location.

However bizarre this may seem, it has never been explained why Calvi should have travelled four miles at dead of night to kill himself in such an elaborate manner when he could just as easily have done so in the Chelsea flat or, indeed, while he was still in Italy. What is not in doubt is that Calvi was a friend and business associate of the Vatican bank's manager, Chicago-born Archbishop Paul Marcinkus, to whom he had been introduced by the Sicilian financier, Michele Sindona, a former Vatican banker who is now serving a 25-year-sentence for fraud in Springfield, Missouri. When Sindona fled from Italy to escape arrest there, Calvi succeeded him as the Vatican's banker and installed Marcinkus as the director of a subsidiary of the Banco Ambrosiano in the Bahamas. We have clearly not yet heard the last of this tangled web of corruption, intrigue and murder, in which both Freemasonry and the Roman Catholic church have been so heavily involved.

There have been several attempts by Members of Parliament throughout the years to get a Royal Commission set up which would enquire into the influence of Freemasonry in Britain, but all have so far failed. It is to be hoped that following the Calvi case and the fresh revelations in Knight's book, the Government will authorise an official investigation into this sinister organisation without delay. Certainly all freethinkers and those who cherish a fair and open society should be demanding it.

OBITUARY

Mrs D. Cassidy

Dorothy Cassidy, who has died at the age of 86, was a teacher for 40 years. In her younger days she was an active member of the National Union of Teachers and of the Liberal Party.

Mrs Cassidy held no religious beliefs. There was a secular committal ceremony at Chichester Crematorium.

Mrs B. Hope

Betty Hope died last month after a long and courageous struggle against illness. She was 81.

Mrs Hope held deeply to socialist and secularist principles, being known to friends in the National Secular Society's northern branches during the 1930s. She believed strongly in the cause of animals' rights and put this into practice as a committed vegetarian. She worked at the Vega Restaurant, Leicester Square, London, and later ran the restaurant at the London Nature Cure Clinic.

There was a secular committal ceremony when cremation took place at Norwich.

Mr P. Rotha

Paul Rotha, the film director and historian, died at his home in Wallingford, Oxfordshire, last month.

A Londoner by birth, Rotha studied at the Slade School of Art, winning his first international award for costume design at the age of 18. He later worked for *The Connoisseur*, writing art criticism and designing page lay-out.

He became a film writer, editor and director during the 1930s. He also wrote several books including *Celluloid*, *Documentary Film*, *The Film Till Now* and a much admired short work, *The Technique of an Art Director*. After the war he made such films as *Land of Promise*, *The World is Rich*, *World Without End* and *The Life of Adolf Hitler*.

Paul Rotha's place in British film-making history is assured. Peter Cotes, in a *Guardian* tribute, wrote: "It is doubtful whether his name will be missed by the general public, but his death severs a link in the chain inside the film world itself — one which binds us to the fighting days of social reform inside the documentary cinema. . . In spite of straitened circumstances during his last years, he retained an almost ruthless determination to settle for nothing but the best. His integrity remained to the end".

Paul Rotha was a firm atheist and one of many distinguished personalities who sent greetings to the National Secular Society on the occasion of its centenary (1966).

He was cremated without ceremony. A memorial meeting is being arranged.

LETTERS

INDIVIDUALISM OR SOCIAL CONSCIENCE

Antony Milne and S. E. Parker seem to want to have it both ways. They write an article chock-full of political views and conclude with a plea for "The Freethinker" to adopt the more politically detached discussions of the recent past, and for a distancing of the movement from other radical groups ("The Freethinker"—Quoting From the Left?", February).

I wonder whether the key to understanding them lies in their identification with freethinkers and secularists who lean far more to individualism as a social philosophy. But individualism amounts to a form of propaganda. The existing order in Britain (and other Western-oriented countries) understands this. It discourages people from joining together to alter things.

"Look after number one", has become the attitude of so many, as if pursuing that policy did not soon lead to trampling on others. The Conservative Government attacks trades unions in a variety of ways—and at GCHQ the price of betrayal is a mere £1,000.

The Conservatives call on people to look after themselves with private enterprise health and private enterprise education. Abandon the collective method for individualism.

Having identified the wrongs in the world, how do we start changing them? Do we stay loftily in isolation, expecting everyone else to come to the same intellectual understanding—or do we as responsible citizens collectively try and change things?

Our founders did not distance themselves from debate, but allied themselves to the progressive political forces of the day, who were trying to put things right. In "The Freethinker" (21 July 1912) G. W. Foote wrote about another of our pioneers: "Bradlaugh was not only a statesman; he was a fighter. While wrongs have to be righted and freedom is trampled on, the fighter is necessary".

Despite what Messrs Milne and Parker try to persuade us, the battles for freethought—and, I would add, many other freedoms—in Britain and America have by no means been won. We need the various radical groups and their organs of publicity that your correspondents mention, and we need "The Freethinker" to carry on the struggle in a tough world.

CHRISTOPHER BRUNEL

ISRAEL: THE HISTORIC AND BIBLICAL LAND

Antony Milne and S. E. Parker (February) chronicle recent policies of Left-wing political propaganda making increasingly frequent appearance in "The Freethinker". They also allude to attacks on Israel. In this respect they are partly wrong. "Freethinker" assaults on Israel are not recent but are longstanding and appear to be a matter of policy. It is not only the obscene 1982 (unsigned) editorial comparing Israelis to Nazis; it is the automatic rage generated whenever Israel reacts to Arab terrorists and tormentors and defeats them militarily. I am old enough to remember furious "Freethinker" comments (plus numerous letters to the editor) when Israel beat Egypt plus Syria in six days in 1967. I recall too how in 1973 Egypt and Syria attacked Israel, mauling her severely, and "The Freethinker" had nothing to say.

Freethinkers, like Christians, can tolerate individual Jews, but not a Jewish national liberation struggle, not a nation of Jews in their historic and biblical land. This opposition to Jewish nationhood and statehood is always coupled with support of diverse Arab forces determined to annihilate Israel.

B. GOSHEN

WILLIAM MORRIS

I congratulate Ray Watkinson on his excellent summary of William Morris's life and work ("Writer, Artist, Socialist—150th Anniversary of William Morris", March).

It seems, therefore, churlish to make one small correction: the Social Democratic Federation was formed, as the Democratic Federation, in 1881, not 1883. It changed its name in 1884, a few months after Morris and his friends seceded to form the Socialist League. And I would also add the year of Morris's death—1896.

R. J. M. TOLHURST

LIFE IN ALBANIA

Ted Goodman is wrong when he states that Christmas was never celebrated in Albania (Letters, February). Although before the complete abolition of religion in 1967, Albania was predominantly a Muslim country, over a quarter of the population were Christians (17.1 per cent belonging to the Orthodox Church and 10.1 per cent to the Roman Catholic) and they, of course, observed the Christmas festival.

I spent a fascinating holiday in Albania four years ago and while greatly impressed by the social and economic achievements of the Stalinist regime (no inflation, unemployment or taxation, near equality of income and so on), I was appalled by the total lack of political, civil and religious freedom, whereby even the mildest criticism of Marxism-Leninism is punishable by imprisonment or even death.

JOHN L. BROOM

NO SOLUTION

I am astonished that G. N. Deodhekar should contemplate population reduction becoming "necessary" in the West as a reaction to unemployment ("Chinese Population Puzzle", February).

It is quite absurd to think that if mechanisation enables fewer people to provide for society's physical needs an appropriate reaction is to get rid of people from countries which are far from being overpopulated. The effort that would have to go into persuading people not to have the children they want should be expended in the political struggle for a sensible distribution of resources to enable the unemployed to work and produce desperately needed housing, medical and educational services.

Of course if population were reduced it would only lead to further unemployment as fewer people would need fewer goods and services; and women not occupied bringing up children would want jobs.

MARGARET McILROY

CHURCH SCHOOLS THEN AND NOW

Looking through copies of the "Strand Magazine" for 1891, in search of Sherlock Holmes, I was interested to come across an interview with the formidable Cardinal Manning, in which he objected to the new "undenominational" School Board system. His first objection, in his own words, was: "... they make us pay education rates to maintain their schools, which we cannot conscientiously use, leaving us, at the same time, to maintain our own".

How ironic it is that this objection to dual maintenance, having been quietly dropped by the religious lobby, is now the major economic argument of secularists against the continued existence of denominational schools! The reason for this switch, of course, is that, during the intervening 90 years, subsidised education has become almost universal and

EVENTS

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

Brighton and Hove Humanist Group. Queen's Head, Queen's Road (entrance in Junction Road, opposite Brighton Station). Sunday, 6 May, 7 pm. Ivan Tyrrell: The Survival Option—a Guide to Living Through a Nuclear War.

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

Humanist Holidays. Scarborough (25 August for one or two weeks) and Poole (Christmas). Details from Betty Beer, 58 Weir Road, London SW12, telephone 01-673 6234.

Leeds and District Humanist Group. The Swarthmore Institute, 4 Woodhouse Square, Leeds. Tuesday, 8 May, 7.45 pm. Edward Royle: Charles Bradlaugh, Champion of Liberty, 1833-1891.

Lewisham Humanist Group. Unitarian Meeting House, 41 Bromley Road, London, SE6. Thursday, 26 April, 7.45 pm. Terry Liddle: The Illuminati—Political and Religious Conspiracies.

South Place Ethical Society. Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London WC1. Thursday, 3 May, 7 pm. The 1984 Conway Memorial Lecture. Sir Alan Cotterell: The Physical World and Human Experience.

Sutton Humanist Group. Friends House, Cedar Road, Sutton. Wednesday, 9 May, 8 pm. Ralph King: Why Public Enquiries Have False Teeth.

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

West Glamorgan Humanist Group. Friends Meeting House, Page Street, Swansea. Friday, 11 May, 7.30 pm. Annual General Meeting. Friday, 25 May, 7.30 pm. Public meeting. Speaker: Peter Cadogan.

Worthing Humanist Group. Trades Club, 15 Broadwater Road, Worthing. Sunday, 29 April, 5.30 pm. Open discussion.

church schools have gradually succeeded in squeezing 100 per cent maintenance out of the public purse whilst retaining their traditional autonomy, both in pupil selection and educational bias. So it is now the ratepayer and taxpayer who have to maintain a dual system of schools (in practice, more than dual, since the denominational schools comprise C of E, RC and immigrant religions), and, especially at the present time of falling school rolls, this is a heavy and unnecessary burden on restricted educational resources.

While the social costs of church schools are perhaps more important than the economic costs, the latter may well prove the more effective argument politically.

Come back, Manning: all is forgiven!

BARBARA SMOKER

they learn to be trustworthy. From contributing effectively they learn self-confidence. They learn to plan and make decisions. They learn to escape from egocentricity into social involvement. They learn, that is, to be whole, self-confident human beings. This purpose is sometimes described as the hidden curriculum. It is time that education in humanity ceased to be hidden and that we all become quite specific about what we expect from the community life of the school. It should offer a civilised and civilising experience. That is principle number one for a modern education.

"Next on our agenda for an education geared to the future must come a thorough treatment of an extended range of basic skills. First come communication skills. Face-to-face communication is turning out to be a key skill in friendship, family life, and work. Reading and writing come a close second as life skills and, with them, numeracy capable of dealing with the ordinary demands of living. The additional basic skills we have to take account of are practical skills and social skills.

"A common error of the past has been to offer the basic skills as rather dreary routines with lots of failure built in to them. Instead, we need basic skills learnt through meaningful activities: reporting, recording, measuring, writing and acting plays, role playing, poetry reading, exhibitions of written poetry, inter-communicating with schools overseas and all the other good ideas generated by lively schools. . .

"A third strand of a modern curriculum should, clearly, be education for understanding. Young people need to know where they are, and what the problems are that now face mankind. Such orientation includes the historical, geographical, scientific, social and global dimensions of understanding. The value of looking at things in terms of developing understanding rather than teaching subjects permits teaching to be more contemporary, relevant, exciting, and coherent.

"A fourth element should be a generous allotment of time specifically for creative and expressive activities. These can be both individual and group and provide valuable opportunities for working together, planning, judging, selecting, evaluating and other social skills.

"Another allotment of time has, obviously, to be given to personal education, including Health Education, the development of moral insight, and the acquisition of a world-view—or 'life-stance'—which can bring meaning, direction and significance to personal life. Such a philosophy of life may be theistic or naturalistic. The important thing is that it should be convincing enough to the individual to induce a sense of commitment. The vast panorama of evolution and the concept of mankind's responsibility for the future of life on Earth carry weight

with many young people today for whom formal religion is unacceptable.

"Lastly, we have to provide time for following up specific personal interests and aptitudes to the limit of ability. Natural physicists do not have to be dragooned into a close study of physics; they are insatiable. The same goes for every other inherent potentiality. School is for discovering and nourishing these individual aptitudes. . .

"Specialist interest studies can be treated as independent modules, and evaluated by any recognised test that is available. Throughout, real competence should be the aim. It is hard to say what exactly an examination is supposed to be doing when it has a pass mark of 45 per cent or so. A 45 per cent efficient surgeon or motor mechanic is not a reassuring prospect. . .

"It is, of course, assumed that, throughout, students, will participate in planning their own education and, where appropriate, in evaluating their own attainments. Education should be a joint enterprise so profoundly involving the student that schooling will be seen as the start of a continuing process of learning, achieving and becoming, and not as something imposed from outside which is to be got out of the way as soon as possible and then forgotten".

Children Sent to the Battlefield

Thousands of young men and children have been killed in the Gulf war; believing religious leaders' promises that martyrdom in battle would guarantee immediate entry into heaven. In Iran, the recruitment of children, usually to clear minefields, has been intensified.

Ayatollah Khomeini issued a decree last year declaring that the recruitment of children "is not conditional on the parents' consent". At that time it was announced by the head of the Isfahan city's education department that 1,457 pupils and 138 teachers from the area had been killed.

An Iranian daily newspaper published a picture of an almost empty classroom at the high school in Karaj, 25 miles from Tehran. It was captioned: "From this barrack of love and affection 45 God-seekers wore the robe of martyrdom".

It is officially claimed that the children are volunteers. But there is considerable evidence that they are pressurised by the education authorities and even their families to go to the front. Patriotic propaganda talks are a regular feature of school life.

Many of the children and soldiers go to their deaths wearing plastic keys around their necks. These are supposed to symbolise the opening of the gate to heaven.