

The Freethinker

secular humanist monthly

founded 1881

Vol. 104, No. 7

JULY 1984

30p

SCHOOL RELIGION UNDER FIRE AT HEAD TEACHERS' CONFERENCE

The annual conference of the National Association of Head Teachers in Brighton last month accepted a report from its Working Party on religion in schools. The Working Party was set up at the 1983 conference following a debate on a motion urging the Government to "repeal that part of the 1944 Education Act which makes a religious assembly and religious education compulsory in schools". It received evidence from a wide range of organisations and individuals. The Conservative, Labour and Liberal parties made submissions, and the humanist view was put by John White, chairman of the British Humanist Association Education Committee.

The Rev John Sutcliffe, chairman of the Christian Education Movement, was among those who gave oral evidence. He said that religious education "is a key to social and international understanding". The experience of Scottish and Ulster schools, where religion plays a far more significant role than elsewhere in the United Kingdom, contradicts that assertion.

Difficulty in implementing the religious clauses of an Act passed 40 years ago was referred to by several speakers, including the CEM spokesman, who conceded that the law is difficult to observe. He confessed that he could not argue the case for a daily act of worship. When the act of worship was held in the classroom "it must be assumed that there will be bystanders and one cannot assume the commitment of pupils". And he said that it was not necessary that RE teachers should have any religious commitment.

John Rankin, chairman of the SHAP Working Party on World Religions in Education, was even more explicit; he said that some atheists are good RE teachers. He claimed that the legislation of 1944 was never valid. "The stance it took was not true

then and it is not true now", he said.

Mr Rankin pointed out that it is only schools—apart from the House of Commons and some religious communities—that start the day with an act of worship. The practice does not fit in with educational notions. Morning assemblies are often meaningless rituals or hypocrisy. It is believed that they are actually damaging to religion.

Mr Rankin referred to attempts at a common assembly that will offend no one. They are usually a modification of Christianity and do not work. He reminded the Working Party that the 1944 Act calls for worship, and it doesn't matter how hard one tries to extend the meaning of the word it means an act of worship. Every faith is in competition, and attempts to fudge the issue will result in pressure for more emphatic Christian worship.

John White said that religious and non-religious beliefs are part of the education of the whole child. He was opposed to conventional Christian worship which often results in head teachers threatening children for not singing hymns. Collective worship should be voluntary and carried out in people's own time. The narrow concept of religion laid down in the 1944 Act stands in the way of "really effective social, personal, religious and moral life-stance education in schools".

Written evidence to the NAHT Working Party revealed a noticeable shift of religious opinion on the question of morning assembly. There is a clear indication that some churches would prefer far fewer acts of worship in the classrooms. The General Synod of the Church of England admitted: "The most contentious part of the Education Act 1944 regarding school worship is that which requires the act of worship be held on every school day. The

(continued on 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

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 Neil & Co., Dorking, Surrey.

NEWS

ROMAN SCANDAL

Vatican reaction to David Yallop's new book, in which he advances the proposition that Pope John Paul I was murdered, has been one of pained indignation and injured innocence. Our own gutter Press, which has endeavoured to launder the present reactionary occupant of the chair of Peter, made its contribution to the outpouring of scorn and abuse of *In God's Name*.

Speaking at a Press conference to launch the book, David Yallop agreed that his evidence for the murder by poison of John Paul I is circumstantial. But he added that many people have suffered the death penalty on circumstantial evidence alone.

David Yallop is not the first person to query the manner in which the last pope died. This is hardly surprising. Contradictory reports of how the pope's body was discovered, the behaviour of high Vatican officials (particularly that of Cardinal Villot, Secretary of State), the autopsy held in secret (if at all) and surprisingly lax security arrangements have all contributed to a growing suspicion of foul play.

It was widely believed that John Paul I would be a reforming pope — in more ways than one. He was not so hidebound as his predecessors on matters of sexual ethics, particularly birth control. The idea of change in Church teachings on such questions horrified the fiercely traditionalist Cardinal Villot and many others.

The impression that John Paul I was an unworldly innocent who became pontiff almost in a fit of absent mindedness was quite mistaken. As Patriarch of Venice he was very familiar with the dubious financial practices of the scandal-ridden Vatican Bank and its president, Archbishop Paul Marcinkus. He knew Marcinkus's partner, Roberto Calvi, who later fled to Britain and was found hanging under a London bridge. Marcinkus's previous partner, Michele Sindona, was on trial for corruption in the United States.

At the centre of a network of fraud and corruption was Licio Gilli, fascist boss of the notorious P2 masonic lodge. He had much to lose if his puppets were demoted or dismissed. Louis Jebb, writing in the *Catholic Herald*, stated: "If, as seems likely, the pope was set on removing Marcinkus . . . then, as Mr Yallop establishes, there was nothing in the character of Gelli or the operating methods of P2 to prevent the attempted murder of a pope".

David Yallop is a respected author and experienced researcher. He cannot be shrugged off as a paranoiac

AND NOTES

Paisleyite. He may not have actually proved that the last pope's death was not due to natural causes. But he has turned the spotlight on a corrupt and dangerous clique in the highest circles of the Roman Catholic Church.

• "In God's Name" will be reviewed in a future issue of "The Freethinker".

A VERSATILE LADY

Even seasoned performers like Billy Graham and Luis Palau would have a hard act to follow should they decide to proclaim the good news in Tunbridge Wells, Kent. For Doreen Irvine, a former queen of the black witches no less, has been regaling the faithful at St Peter's Church with accounts of her career which included prostitution, drink and drugs. Warning her fellow-Christians against the snares of Satan, she advised them not to participate in satanic festivals like Hallowe'en.

Ex-Queen Doreen's more spectacular exploits as a black witch included walking through a bonfire and emerging unscathed. There was also an occasion when she made herself invisible in order to avoid meeting a clergyman and newspaper reporters. And who can blame her?

However, all this was before she went to an evangelical meeting and turned to the Lord. There was a heavy price to pay for dabbling in the occult. After her abdication Doreen underwent exorcism sessions during which no fewer than 47 demons were cast out. But worse was to follow — she now preaches evangelical sermons in Tunbridge Wells.

Repentance would not have saved Doreen Irvine in ages of Christian domination. The bonfires that engulfed thousands of "witches", victims of Christian superstition and fanaticism, did not leave them unscathed.

An ultra-orthodox school in London is to challenge Sir Keith Joseph, Secretary of State for Education, in the High Court over his claim that it is "inefficient and unsuitable". The aim of the school, which has 300 pupils, is to provide teaching in the culture, tradition and beliefs of the Hasidic Jewish community. Teaching is in the Yiddish, Hebrew and Aramaic languages. Inspectors claim that the school provides less than 15 hours of secular education each week.

The British Pregnancy Advisory Service has extracted an apology from the monthly journal, *Christian Women*, over statements it published last year.

The May 1983 issue of this rather fundamentalist publication carried an article informing readers how, in the New Testament, "Jesus shows his love for us all and especially children. . . He also cared greatly for handicapped people, curing those who came to Him, comforting them and giving them hope. He did not send them away because they were different, or because He could not bear to look at them. . .

"A person may spend five or 75 years of his or her life handicapped, but in Heaven will be made whole and will spend eternity free of their handicap".

From such fantasies it was but a short step to: "There is much of the devil's work in the abortion mentality. Those who are involved in crimes of vice and selling contraceptives to under-age children are also deeply involved in the abortion scene, which is a huge money-making business".

This was followed by an assertion that BPAS, a registered charity, makes over £2½ million annually. "They claim to be non-profit-making, but this only means that there are no shareholders involved and the proceeds are shared out between doctors and other staff", according to *Christian Woman*. It also accused BPAS of pressurising women into having abortions and of not providing after-care service for patients.

On 12 January, Diane Munday, BPAS press officer, wrote to Gail Lawther, editor of *Christian Woman*, regarding "untrue and defamatory statements" about the organisation. She added: "The paragraphs in question have recently been brought to my attention by a BPAS administrator who, in turn, was shown them by an anxious patient".

Diane Munday listed six statements in the article which were "not only untrue but are of such a nature as to be damaging to the reputation and good name of this long established and reputable charity. . . Whilst accepting the rights of writers and publishers to express strong opinions on subjects such as abortion, there is no right for anybody to publish untrue and harmful statements about individuals or organisations that hold different opinions. The fact that a patient was seen to be distressed and over-anxious about BPAS' ethics and medical standards is clear evidence of the damaging effect of you having published these statements".

In her reply, Gail Lawther claimed that "apart from one tiny technicality, nothing in our research suggests that the editorial items you list are inaccurate". This is hardly surprising in view of the fact that the sources of information included LIFE and

"PARANORMAL PARANONSENSE"

SPUC, two Catholic-backed, vituperative opponents of agencies like the British Pregnancy Advisory Service. She suggested that the word "income" would be more accurate than "profit" in relation to BPAS' work, and graciously offered to insert a correction. "However", the editor of *Christian World* concluded, "in view of the time lapse since the original publication and the technicality of the point, we wonder if this would now be of any value".

Diane Munday entertained no such reservations. She replied: "It is surprising to learn that you consider organisations such as LIFE and SPUC, along with selected out-of-context, ancient quotes from various journals, to be more accurate sources of information about BPAS than my letter which told you that what you wrote was untrue and gave precise examples of the libellous statements.

"In view of your reliance on such sources it is even more surprising that you suggest there is no value in now publishing corrections—less than a year after initial publication. Without such corrections it is quite likely that at some future date your journal will be quoted by an irresponsible editor as the source of her inaccuracies—thus further perpetuating these untruths.

"BPAS is not prepared to accept your offer of change of the word 'profit' to 'income' but requires correction of all the matters detailed in my letter of 12 January 1984.

"If the corrections are not forthcoming I will have no option but to refer the matter to BPAS' lawyers".

Here is the text of a statement which was published in last month's *Christian Woman*.

"On 16th May 1983 we published a feature about abortion which included certain statements about British Pregnancy Advisory Service. We now unreservedly withdraw any suggestion that British Pregnancy Advisory Service makes a profit. We accept that BPAS is a non-profit making charity and that those who work for it are paid on set scales according to the work that they do. We also accept that BPAS uses its own abortion clinics which are part of the same non-profit making charitable body as its Pregnancy Advisory Branches, and British Pregnancy Advisory Service advises us that follow up is routinely arranged for all patients having their treatment. We apologise to BPAS and to anyone who may have been caused distress".

Another tearful story, this time from Chicago where a parish priest reports that a statue of "our lady" has had the sniffles since 29 May. Father Raymond Janinski claims that the tears started after 4 pm mass on that date. The statue wept again in the evening and on each of the next three days. "It is difficult to explain in a natural way", said Father Janinski. No doubt that is why a bishop, not a stonemason, has been asked to investigate.

Rationalists "down under" are chortling over the latest exposé of paranormal freaks by a group known as The Australian Sceptics. It was formed by three wags whose first project was organising a tour by James Randi (The Amazing Randi). It was at the hands of Randi, a professional magician and escapologist, that Uri Geller met his Waterloo. Little has been heard of Geller since the publication of Randi's book about the Israeli spoon-bender.

In 1980 the Sceptics offered a huge cash prize to anyone who could demonstrate any psychic ability under simple test conditions. First of all came those of the water-divining fraternity. They did their stuff under rules which were willingly accepted by the diviners. One of the Sceptics, journalist Philip Adams, relates: "Although the experiment couldn't have been made easier for those waving willow twigs and wire, they failed utterly and miserably. Just as they failed to detect which of five cardboard boxes contained a thumping great gold ingot.

"It was the same with a variety of telepathists, spoon-benders and such like. With the amiable Randi keeping a fatherly eye on them, they all failed".

When Randi duplicated—and sometimes improved on—Uri Geller's tricks, members of the audience would shout: "You are a psychic!" They insisted that he was a genuine psychic pretending to be a magician.

That was four years ago. But the sceptical leg-pullers, "concerned by the escalating interest in paranormal paranonsense", recently decided it was time to arrange a second tour—with a difference. This time they imported a pseudo-psychic. Their aim to "dramatise the insatiable silliness of a public which will accept anything without analysis, without evidence", was more than fulfilled.

Through Adams's newspaper column the Australian public learned that Steve Terbot — the fishiness of the name should have rung warning bells — was arriving in their midst. Adams wrote a spoof attack on the wonder worker and the Sceptics circulated a phoney dossier among the believers. Claims about his powers were inflated, for as Adams put it, "the sillier the psychic claims, the more ardent the response".

When Terbot arrived his luggage included all the props for performing telepathic tricks. He had also acquired an endorsement by a fictitious academic, rightly suspecting that enthusiastic believers would not check his credentials.

His tour was highly successful, receiving wide Press coverage and attracting large and enthusiastic audiences. At one theatre, about a third of the audience raised their hands for a private reading with the "psychic" at 25 dollars a throw. Levitating the wallets of the gullible does not require supernatural

gifts.

Steve Terbot could still be on tour, but it was arranged that the hoax would be revealed on a popular television programme. It transpired that the great "psychic" was an American named Bob Steiner, an associate of the Committee for the Scientific Investigation of Claims of the Paranormal.

Phillip Adams commented: "Yet again we've demonstrated that the tawdriest, silliest and most banal conjuring tricks can convince too many people a mediocre magician is a magus or even a messiah. This results in the most sinister form of psychic surgery, where people allow themselves to be lobotomised of logic. . .

"Remember how Jim Jones used tawdry conjuring tricks to convince his congregation that he was the Saviour, leading them into the Garden of Eden that became their graveyard".

It is unlikely that the hoax will disillusion those who want to believe in the paranormal. For again to quote Phillip Adams: "In the deep waters of psychic belief, the fish will bite at anything. Moreover, they form queues to climb on the hook".

BLOODY RELIGION

Religious people constantly claim that they are the best custodians of morality, that their religion teaches them to love God and therefore all his human children. They are going to find it awkward to explain the tragic results of devotion to religion in Punjab.

Let us recapitulate some facts. The Sikh extremists led by Sant (Saint) Jarnailsingh Bhindranwale, in pursuit of their religious and political aims, fortified the Golden Temple complex at Amritsar and organised a campaign of violence and murder. Victims included scores of innocent Hindu men, women and children, legislators, journalists, Sikh communists and even Sikhs belonging to other sects or political groups. If the moderate Sikhs wished to save the Golden Temple they should have ejected the extremists right at the beginning or called on the Government to take action. This they failed to do.

Finally the Government sent in the army, led by a Sikh commander and including a force of Sikh soldiers. It was they who saved the central shrine within the tank by holding their fire even though it was manned by a small band of extremists who eventually saw sense and laid down their arms. It was again the army that tried to minimise damage to the Sikh throne, where the extremists were well entrenched, by refusing adequate fire power to its commandos. Many soldiers' lives were sacrificed in this attempt.

It must be obvious to any rational observer that a situation was engineered by the extremists — and that the moderates acquiesced in it — in which the

Government would be forced to use the army. No doubt this plain truth will dawn on many Sikhs as time goes by. The damaged buildings will be repaired, but the innocent who were killed by the misguided will not be restored to life. And the wounds inflicted on society by the religious will take a long time to heal.

It is hoped that the people and the various governments all over India will learn a lesson from the disastrous Golden Temple episode. Religion should be driven from public life into the purely personal sphere. The safety and welfare of all citizens is more important than the sensitivity of religious zealots.

RSPCA TO CAMPAIGN AGAINST RITUAL SLAUGHTER

The Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals is to launch a campaign against ritual slaughter of animals for people who observe Jewish and Muslim dietary laws. The decision was taken by members attending the Society's annual general meeting in London last month. They want a change in the law which allows animals to have their throats cut and bled to death without pre-stunning.

RSPCA experts who have studied Halal and Kosher methods of killing claim that animals suffer unnecessarily. They say that if this method of slaughter were banned it would not make religious life impossible for the groups concerned. This claim is backed by reference to Switzerland, Sweden and Norway where ritual slaughter is not allowed.

Over 32 million animals are slaughtered in Britain every year. There are no records of how many are killed without pre-stunning, but the figure runs into many thousands.

RSPCA members also decided to launch a campaign against the international fur trade. Fox and mink farms will be among their targets.

Freethinker Fund

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Total for the period 4 May until 6 June: £127.80.

In Memoriam: The Spanish Inquisition

R. J. CONDON

Although the history of the Spanish Inquisition is well documented the exact number of victims will never be known. It ended 150 years ago this month, but had many defenders well into the present century.

A hundred and fifty years ago, on 15 July 1834, a rare upsurge of liberal opinion finally ended the Spanish Inquisition. It had been suspended in 1820 but was restored three years later. As late as 1826 a Jew was burned and a Quaker hanged for heresy.

The Inquisition was established in 1232 by Pope Gregory IX and operated mainly in Germany, Italy, Spain and southern France. It was often resisted by the civil rulers and the common people, and there were constant disputes as to the exact limits of its authority. Spain, however, was an exception. In that country the Inquisition was cherished as the special expression of the national religion, the burning of Jews and heretics being both a religious ceremony and a public amusement congenial to the Spanish taste.

Events of this kind were almost always held on Sundays or feast days, when the entire population of the area could attend as spectators, and they were regularly part of the entertainment at royal weddings. Typical was that put on to celebrate the marriage of Charles II of Spain in 1680. The king and his bride, together with the court and clergy of Madrid, witnessed the burning of a number of Jews and Jewesses. Bishop Valderes, the Inquisitor-General, presided over the scene. One victim, a girl of 16, passed the newly-made queen on her way to the stake and cried out to her for mercy. The queen turned her eyes away.

The historian Juan Llorente was at one time secretary of the Spanish Inquisition and had access to its archives. He tells us that more than a third of a million were executed. An enormously larger number were tortured, imprisoned or beggared.

In the second half of the 15th century a schism developed between the Papacy and the Spanish Church. The latter wanted full control of the Spanish Inquisition without Roman encroachment. The motive was greed, for all possessions of convicted heretics were forfeited. According to the Catholic historian Hans Kühner at least half the cases of the Spanish Inquisition were purely for self-enrichment—it preferred to try the Marranos, prosperous Jews who had thought it prudent to profess Christianity. In retaliation the Popes made large sums of money releasing convicted Spanish heretics from their penances. Spain refused to acknowledge these

pardons, and the wretched victims had to make double payment, in Spain and at Rome.

Even after the Inquisition was abolished it was dangerous to express non-Catholic religious opinions in Spain. In 1883 the newspaper *La Bandera Catholica* reported a burning of Protestant books by Barcelona customs officers. This, it said, was in accordance with "one of the most glorious traditions of the Catholic religion". What was now wanted was the goodwill and united efforts of pure and true Catholics, in order to take advantage of this new turn of affairs, since the Government seemed disposed to carry out their desires.

"Onwards then, good and sincere Catholics! The re-establishment of the Holy Tribunal of the Inquisition must soon take place. Its reign will be more glorious and fruitful in results than in the past, and the number of those who will be called to suffer under it will exceed the number of the past. Our Catholic heart overflows with faith and enthusiasm, and the immense joy which we experience as we begin to reap the fruit of our present campaign exceeds all imagination. What a day of pleasure will that be for us when we see Freemasons, Spiritualists, Freethinkers and Anti-clericals writhing in the flames of the Inquisition".

The paper estimated that some 35,500 persons were burnt alive "under the ministry of 45 holy Inquisitors-General", Torquemada and three others accounting for more than half the victims. One of these latter, Adrian de Florencia, established the Inquisition in America, as a reward for which he was made Pope Adrian VI. "But so did he love his former ministry that he did not transfer it to another until the second year of his pontificate. He burnt during this time 324 persons". This ferocious Vicar of Christ did not live to see a third year.

The Church's right to persecute has been reaffirmed in the present century. One of a number of clerics who might be quoted is Professor (later Cardinal) Lepicier, who wrote in 1910: "Who dares to say that the Church has erred in a matter so grave as this? The moment any man professes heresy he can justly be slain".

In 1917 the Canon Law of the Catholic Church was re-edited, retaining only penalties of a non-temporal character. All punishments not explicitly prescribed were repealed, and it was laid down that no one should be forced to embrace the Catholic faith. Yet we have Monsignor Ronald Knox writing in 1927 that it is not certain that a Catholic government would have no right to deport or imprison those who teach new doctrines. "A Catholic state".

he says, "will not shrink even from repressive measures in order to perpetuate the secure dominance of Catholic principles" (*The Beliefs of Catholics*). At this time the Church's political influence in Germany was working towards the establishment of the Nazi regime, under which more Jews were tortured to death than in 600 years of the Spanish Inquisition.

In recent years the arrogance of the Catholic Church has noticeably abated, and the cause is not hard to find. According to the *Methodist Recorder* for 5 January 1984 the overall picture of religious apathy and decline over the past 30 years has been

dramatic, not only for the Free Churches but also the Anglican and Roman Catholic. Monsignor George Leonard, aide to Cardinal Hume, agrees: "Fewer people than ever before go to church on Sunday: fewer believe in Christ and the Gospel, the influence of the Church has noticeably declined" (*Yours*, January 1984).

These are comparatively hard times for Catholic Christianity. Even so, no final word on persecution has been said, or indeed can be said so long as the Church continues to exist. The door is open for the return of the Inquisition with all its terrors, should conditions again become favourable for it.

Suicide: a Humanist Viewpoint

JOHN BELOFF

Although suicide was decriminalised over 30 years ago it is still regarded by many to be wrong. Dr Beloff, Senior Lecturer in Psychology at the University of Edinburgh, examines some of the objections.

There are, it seems to me, two basic questions which each of us is called upon to answer. First, are we ever justified in taking our own life and, if so, in what circumstances? Secondly, are we ever justified in helping another person to take his or her own life and, again, in what circumstances? It is this second question which specially concerns those who are dedicated to changing the law which now forbids us to take such action whatever the circumstances. But, before we discuss this second question let us consider the less controversial of the two.

No one, so far as I know, is seeking to repeal the Suicide Act of 1961 so as to make suicide once again illegal. But there is, of course, a world of difference between tolerating certain behaviour and giving it one's approval. Suicide, as Bernard Levin has recently reminded us, is condemned by virtually all the great religions and by many societies on purely secular grounds. He himself condemns it primarily because it is an expression of ultimate despair and he believes that we ought never to abandon all hope no matter how great our adversity. However, secular objections such as this scarcely amount to much more than an attitude of sentiment whereas the religious objections purport to follow from certain deeply held assumptions about the world and about the nature of life.

For, if life is, indeed, a gift from God then, surely, only God has the right to relieve us of it; to take matters into our own hands therefore constitutes a kind of blasphemy. It is true that David Hume, in his well known essay on suicide, attempted to rebut this argument by pointing out that, after

all, preserving life was as much an usurpation of the divine prerogative as destroying life! However, a believer could rightly protect that in striving to preserve life we are doing God's will whereas in destroying life we are flouting it. Nevertheless, I would be surprised if, given the latitude which most believers allow themselves in interpreting God's will, or, at any rate, those who subscribe to one of the less dogmatic creeds, suicide could not, at a pinch, be reconciled with a devout belief in God.

But, obviously, if you do not believe in God, if you believe, as I do, that man is, in the last resort answerable only to his own conscience, then all such theological objections to suicide can have no force at all. If we still reject suicide it can be only on rational grounds.

What rational grounds are there for rejecting suicide in principle? I can think of only two that carry any weight, though there may be others that I have overlooked. The first is that, in taking our own life, we hurt our family and friends. The second is that our example may be catching. Others may be encouraged to do the same but in circumstances which we would not regard as adequate justification. After all, we are social creatures and nothing that we do of any significance is likely to be devoid of social consequences. To plead that a suicide is nobody else's business except that of the person involved is to display a superficial and selfish outlook. Let us now examine each of these arguments.

One reason why suicide so often causes distress to others is that society has contrived to make it as difficult as possible to accomplish. Consequently most suicides at the present time tend to be clumsy and brutal affairs that cannot but offend our sensibilities no matter how much we may sympathise with the motives that caused it. Once the law was changed

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Diderot: "The Mind and the Heart of the Eighteenth Century"

H. J. BLACKHAM

Denis Diderot, the 200th anniversary of whose death falls on 15 July, is generally regarded as the greatest of the Encyclopaedists. Educated by the Jesuits, he became a sceptic and his second book was burned by the public hangman in 1746. Three years later he was imprisoned for atheism. He then embarked on the monumental "Encyclopédie", which was written and printed under licence and in the face of harassment and censorship.

Diderot is generally identified with *L'Encyclopédie*, regarded as the supreme exemplar of the Enlightenment, a unique enterprise that ran to 17 volumes of text (there were as many of plates) and some 20 million words. For the first seven volumes, he was editor with D'Alembert, whose error of judgement in the seventh volume alarmed the authorities, so that further publication was banned. Diderot carried on alone underground, to bring out the last ten volumes together in 1765-6, the consummation of 25 years Herculean labour that was not a literary chore but a guerilla operation, dangerous and daunting, and subject to cruel vicissitudes. The circumstances of its production, said John Morley, "mark Diderot for one of the true heroes of literature". The work was printed under licence, and three censors (theologians) were appointed by the authorities, with instructions that one of them initial each page as approved. In spite of this crippling handicap, it was Diderot's intention that the innumerable articles should be so written that the whole work would have the property "of changing the general way of thinking". Charles Burney said that it "was intended not only as a magazine of every species of human knowledge, but as an engine to subvert all established opinions". The royal decree which banned further publication in 1759 said: "The advantages to be derived from a work of this sort in respect to progress in the arts and sciences can never compensate for the irreparable damage that results from it in regard to morality and religion".

The "Enlightenment" meant freedom of inquiry and of information, and a reform of education that would enable everyone to gain for himself a footing of independence. Taking their cue from Francis Bacon, acknowledged in the preliminary discourse by D'Alembert as their master, the editors set out to modernise the thinking of a generation, by providing the latest information on all the arts, sciences and trades, and in the course of this provision to insinuate articles which would unsettle

established beliefs in Church and State, and advocate civil liberties, tolerance and a sceptical reserve. Some of the articles read as if written for *The Freethinker*, even under the eye of the censor. A short one (by Diderot) on "Damnation" is an ironical statement of the doctrine in extremest form and why it should be believed, a way of ensuring that it refutes itself. Negro slavery is condemned in the strongest uncompromising terms. Goethe recalls that as a young man he and his fellow students were overwhelmed by the colossal work, and on opening a volume felt they had entered a great factory, with whirling machinery, a confusion of noise and busyness that was tremendously impressive, without one's being able to understand what was going on. It was the stunning impact of this global undertaking that provided cover for the special messages the editors and their colleagues tried to make sure would get through.

The enterprise started out as the work of a team, some of the choice and brightest spirits of the time, who included Voltaire, Condillac, Helvétius, Turgot and d'Holbach, at whose house they would meet. The party was broken up when the work was suppressed, but Diderot, working alone and behind locked doors, had still to find contributors to maintain the standard of the last ten volumes. No doubt, not in the hands of the censors, he could slip in more than a broad hint of his own thinking. Under "Spinosiste", he mentions modern Spinosistes who conclude from the evidence of organic growth that there is only matter and that it sufficed to account for everything. In *Entretien* with D'Alembert, he has a passage which begins: "*Voyez-vous cet oeuf? c'est avec cela qu'on renverse toutes les écoles de théologie et tous les temples de la terre*".

It is a fair judgement to say that his was the seminal mind among the *philosophes*, the name for the French 18th-century intellectuals whose faith was in nature and reason—and humanity. They owed a great part of their mental and moral formation to Bacon and Locke and the English Deists, that is, to the British empirical tradition. In turn, the 19th-century Utilitarians and Philosophical Radicals, followers of Bentham and the Mills, regarded themselves as heirs of the *philosophes*.

Diderot's restless intelligence teemed with ideas, and so far as he reached a settled position on the major questions that occupied the thinkers of that time, he was an atheist, a materialist and a determinist. At the same time, unlike some of the others, such as Helvétius and d'Holbach, he was not a reductionist, not a crude and simplistic thinker. The multiplicity and complexity of phenomena transformed materialism and determinism into the world

of possibilities we experience.

A seminal thinker is fertile and versatile. Diderot inaugurated the genre of art criticism in France with his *Salons*, reviews of the exhibitions organised from 1667 by the French Academy of Painting and Sculpture. He wrote accounts of nine of the exhibitions, between 1759-81, from a literary point of view. He was not himself an amateur in the field, but, *faute de mieux*, had written the article on the principles of composition in painting in *L'Encyclopédie*. He learned to improve his *Salons* by talking to the artists and by making comparisons.

When he turned his attention to the theatre and the novel, he was on firmer ground. As a boy, he had dreams and thoughts of being an actor. He wrote two plays that have been produced and far more discussed, *Le Fils naturel* (1757) and *Le Père de famille* (1758). More important and influential were his ideas on the theatre and the line of development it should take, expounded explicitly at this time in several publications. He wanted an intermediate drama, more realistic than classical tragedy and comedy, and concerned with domestic and social life as it was, and with human nature in its more universal aspects, rid of class stereotypes and prejudices. Lessing, who was the leading authority in Europe on the theatre and dramatic criticism, acknowledged Diderot's plea for "*le genre sérieux*" in drama, translated his plays, and went so far as to say that Diderot's application of a philosophic mind to the drama was the most impressive since Aristotle.

Dr Johnson, in an issue of the *Rambler* (1750), remarks on a new form of fiction coming into favour "such as exhibits life in its true state", and therefore with application to the reader's life and self, which the usual tales of fanciful invention had lacked. In this era of experimental fiction, Diderot produced three experimental novels, one pornographic, *Les Bijoux indiscrets* (1748), which contained also serious criticism of French drama, one anti-religious, *La Religieuse* (written in 1760, published in 1796), based on a true story of a girl forced by her parents to be a nun, and her treatment and experiences; and *Jacques le fataliste*, published posthumously, in German in 1792, in France in 1796, written in first draft by 1773. Diderot could not publish either of these last two novels. He died in 1784.

With one exception, *Jacques le fataliste* is the most interesting and important of his books. It was inspired in its indirection by *Tristram Shandy* of which Sterne had sent him a copy. But Diderot multiplied and diversified the techniques by which he broke the narrative line, by interventions of the author, by cinematic flashbacks and montage, and the like. The result is that technically and in the theory of the novel it excites more interest today than ever it has. It is a prototype of the anti-novel, in which

the author breaks the illusion to bring in and address the reader and prompt a response. Philosophically, it shows the complications that allow personal autonomy in some measure to a determinist.

With his teeming brain, Diderot was hardly likely to have the detachment and discipline to compose a masterpiece concentrated in form. However, his inventiveness, his mastery of dialogue, his temperament, his restless oscillations of thought combined to achieve it in an extraordinary production, also published posthumously, *Le neveu de Rameau*. This work drew the admiration of Goethe, of Hegel, and of Marx; and it is today probably Diderot's most admired achievement, the *Encyclopédie* apart.

Formally, it is a record of interrupted but continued casual conversations between MOI (me) and LUI (him), the author and the disreputable nephew of the great French musician and composer Rameau. Diderot packs into this racy informal talk on the part of LUI a store of related confessions and provocative ideas, raising the performance to a level which justifies the judgement that it is "probably the most lively and engrossing specimen of a conversation with an unforgettable character ever put on paper". LUI is a dropout from respectable society, but haunts it as a sponger, and is in a position to make shrewd and penetrating comments that piece together a representation of the decadence of high society in France before the Revolution; and at the same time by representing his own self-interested behaviour in doing as well for himself as his disadvantaged position allows, raises questions of personal morality and permanent standards which are not fully answered. Both interlocutors show marginal influence on one another as the conversations go on to an inconclusive conclusion. But the brilliance of LUI's talk and the etching of his personality remain to justify the applause the performance has received.

What has so far been said about Diderot as an 18th-century intellectual, a *philosophe*, leaves out what most distinguished him as a human being, his passionate and generous temperament, which fuelled his enthusiasms and infatuations. His head teemed with ideas, his heart with impulses and sensibilities. His letters to Sophie Volland have been described as "resplendent beyond all literature and writing with directness of the spoken word, the luminous warmth of communication, the living presence of a man". These letters, some 500, of which 189 are extant, are, as he said himself, a more or less faithful history of his life during the period from 1759-62, and less consecutively till 1774. This is the man's own record of himself and his doings over a socially active period of his life. Like Samuel Johnson, Diderot had an inner story of experiences, disillusionment, and sufferings, which served to detach and change

(continued on page 111)

BOOKS

THE LAST DINOSAURS: A NEW LOOK AT THE EXTINCTION OF DINOSAURS, by L. R. Croft. Elmwood Books, £4.95 and £2.95

It would appear that no sooner does one fantastic theory of dinosaur extinction shift from the limelight than like the hacked Hydra's head in Greek mythology, two more spring in its place. Admittedly no one conclusive answer has been found but among the many theories proposed there are several with a great deal of scientific credence.

Croft's book reviews some of the more recent of these theories, in terminology and style that makes it suitable for the general reader. However, the *pièce de résistance* is his own theory for the extinction of dinosaurs.

Following the historical background of dinosaurs and a brief account of dinosaur biology, Croft outlines the Supernova theory "with enormous amounts of radiation flung out in all directions", and a second theory that in recent years caused a great deal of discussion and controversy—"that an asteroid struck earth about 65 million years ago, causing the catastrophe that killed all the dinosaurs". This theory originated with Professor Luis Alvarez. At this point one has the uneasy feeling that Croft is showing us the more whimsical theories in order that his may appear more convincing. For the much more "respectable" version of Alvarez's theory by J. Smit and A. Klaver is dismissed by Croft in a short paragraph, on grounds that spherules from the impacting asteroids "show an isotope dating of 44 million years, 21 million years short of the Cretaceous boundary". However, according to their paper in *Nature* (vol 285, 1980), Smit and Hertogen analysed samples and found anomalously high amounts of iridium and osmium at the Cretaceous boundary.

Croft suggests that experiments done by Colbert, Contes and Bogert showing that alligators (modern archosaurian relatives of dinosaurs) prefer shade to sunlight is proof that dinosaurs would have spent much of their time in the shade. This conveniently takes no account of the fact that alligators are largely aquatic and their biology is very different from many of the land dinosaurs.

The author shows his preference for the theory that there was an increase in temperature during the Cretaceous period due to an increase in atmospheric carbon (caused by reduced amounts of phytoplankton) creating what is now familiarly known as "the run-away greenhouse effect". The very widely held theory, with substantial scientific backing, that there was a reduction in temperature and consequent change in plant biota is relegated to the realms of make-believe and Arthur Conan Doyle fiction.

Croft's own theory on dinosaur extinction must

FREETHINKER

rank along with the more scientifically absurd ideas. In short, after much ramblings on cataracts and solar radiation, he suggests that because dinosaurs did not have gamma crystallin in their eyes, they were more vulnerable to the stronger solar radiation. Even more astonishing is his idea that many of the strange horned structures on dinosaurs were for the purpose of shielding the eyes from the sun's rays. One can only assume that Croft has a very poor understanding of dinosaur anatomy. The eyes in many of these dinosaurs are invariably situated towards the sides of the head. The horns and domed structures faced forward in most cases—hardly effective in shielding eyes situated towards the side. Even more absurd is the suggestion that the backward pointed crest in the hadrosaurs served this same purpose—protecting the eyes.

He concludes by going from the sublime to the infinitely ridiculous—of dinosaurs blindly stumbling to precipitous edges and then plummeting to their deaths. This is his "solution" for the famous dinosaur graves at Bernissart in Belgium.

Croft, of course, does not account for the extinction of aquatic reptiles which would presumably have been protected from the solar radiation by the water. In the serious heady world of theories on dinosaur extinction one can only regard this book as comic light relief. It can only be hoped that the author intended it as such!

T. SOLIAR

DOOMSDAY: BRITAIN AFTER NUCLEAR ATTACK, by Stan Openshaw, Philip Steadman and Owen Greene. Basil Blackwell, £4.95

This book claims with justice to provide, for the first time in open literature, a detailed and comprehensive account of the probable effects of nuclear attack on Britain, both nationally and locally. If its subject were not one of unprecedented seriousness not only for the British but for all mankind, the reader would be chiefly impressed by the sheer volume of well substantiated and clearly presented information in its ten chapters and 296 pages, with no fewer than 64 figures and 31 tables, all most intelligible and usefully complementary to the text. There are copious notes and references and six appendices, Appendix 1 being an exhaustive list of targets in Britain with the kind and size of weapon they are likely to receive in any given scale of attack. Appendix 5 contains corresponding lists of numbers of probable casualties. Apart from its message, the book is outstanding value for money.

REVIEWS

It is written by three academics of repute in their relevant fields and based on intensive study over the last three years or so, some of their findings having been published previously. Their results and their methods have been approved either tacitly or more or less explicitly by British authorities, though their findings are radically at odds with official Home Office predictions. These more optimistic, or less hopeless, predictions may now, on official admission, have to be revised. The authors' conclusions have been accepted in particular by the British Medical Association in its own valuable and critical report (*The Medical Effects of Nuclear War*, 1983), which itself should become a milestone in the public appreciation of these dreadful hazards. The authors worked out their own computer programs with methods and basic data taken chiefly from the US Department of Defense and Office of Technology Assessment, though essential information came also from published Soviet sources.

The book presents a close but concise study of the contrasting nuclear strategies of the two superpowers and NATO. Both sides now base their strategies on counterforce rather than Mutually Assured Destruction, but the results are much the same. The United States and NATO envisage a flexible or graduated response which should make a limited nuclear war theoretically possible, and the first use of tactical nuclear weapons is not excluded; indeed it seems essential in this strategy. Published Soviet views appear contradictory to the outside observer: on the one hand they repeatedly state that nuclear war cannot be used as a rational instrument of policy, being tantamount to suicide; on the other hand, limited nuclear war has no place in Soviet planning, their emphasis evidently resting on surprise and a massive blow, amounting virtually to a Launch on Warning policy, though not including a deliberate first strike.

The various kinds and sizes of nuclear weapons, particularly Soviet ones, are described, and an account is given of the likely effects of 11 different patterns of attack of differing magnitude and varying feasibility, including a last, retaliatory strike by the Soviet Union after most of its weapons had been destroyed. To take a summarising quotation, "even a moderate, realistic level of attack would be likely to result in at least four-fifths of the country's population being killed and injured by the direct effects, 65 per cent of all buildings in the country being seriously damaged, set on fire or demolished, and 75 per cent of the inhabited land area of Britain being subjected to levels of radiation from fallout which would be fatal to any person (and most

animals) in the open". The wider ecological effects are also considered, including dangers to life from damage to the earth's ozone layer and the serious results of photochemical smog.

There is no discussion of nuclear disarmament or of methods by which this might be achieved, but these careful findings could not speak more eloquently for the urgency of such an aim. There is, however, a chillingly objective assessment of British civil defence plans, forcing the same conclusion as the BMA report reaches about medical planning for such an event: that existing plans, and probably any conceivable plans, are virtually useless.

The best summary is given in another quotation. "The survey . . . which was compiled into the Domesday Book did not provide a complete count of their (the English people's) numbers in 1086; but on the partial evidence which the book gives, the total population at that date has been estimated at around 1½ million. It is quite conceivable that a nuclear attack of the magnitude we face today would leave, at the end of the following year, say, only a comparable number surviving, under conditions which would make the daily life of the eleventh century seem like a paradise by contrast".

WILLIAM WALKER

Bookshelf

Felicitations and thanks to Penguin Books who have republished an American Library edition of Ambrose Bierce's *The Enlarged Devil's Dictionary*. Bierce took to journalism after the American Civil War, and when he joined the *San Francisco News Letter* it was open season all the year around for picking off politicians, evangelical preachers and revered institutions. He became known among the pompous and the pious as "the laughing devil". Satirist, cynic and something of a mystery—he crossed the border into revolutionary Mexico in 1913 and disappeared forever—Bierce has always had his admirers and this volume will add substantially to their number. Here are a few definitions from his *Dictionary*.

Air. A nutritious substance supplied by a bountiful Providence for the fattening of the poor.

Baptism. A sacred rite of such efficacy that he who finds himself in heaven without having undergone it will be unhappy forever.

Christian. One who believes that the New Testament is a divinely inspired book admirably suited to the needs of his neighbour.

Clairvoyant. A person, commonly a woman, who has the power of seeing that which is invisible to her patron—namely, that he is a blockhead.

Evangelist. A bearer of good tidings, particularly (in a religious sense) such as assure us of our own salvation and the damnation of our neighbours.

Faith. Belief without evidence in what is told by one who speaks without knowledge of things without parallel.

Freethinker. A miscreant who wickedly refuses to look out of a priest's eyes, and persists in looking into them with too searching a glance.

Genuflection. The act of bending the knee to Him who so made it that the posture is unnatural and fatiguing.

Heathen. A benighted creature who has the folly to worship something he can see and feel.

Infidel. In New York, one who does not believe in the Christian religion; in Constantinople, one who does.

Ocean. A body of water occupying about two-thirds of a world made for man—who has no gills.

Religion. A daughter of Hope and Fear, explaining to Ignorance the nature of the Unknowable.

Saint. A dead sinner revised and edited.

The Enlarged Devil's Dictionary is obtainable at most bookshops, price £3.50.

In *The Battle for Bermondsey* Peter Tatchell chronicles one of the most unpleasant episodes in modern political history. As a parliamentary candidate he was vilified, threatened and betrayed, but endured the ordeal with great courage and dignity. His political opponents and the squalid Mellish-O'Grady political machine, with more than a little help from the Press, were at their nastiest. Michael Foot didn't emerge from the affair with clean hands either. Price £2.95. *Heretic Books, PO Box 247, London N15 6RW.*

Kit Mouat, a former *Freethinker* editor, is the author of *Fighting for our Lives—an Introduction to Living With Cancer*. Ten patients' stories are included in the book and there is a preface by Sheila Hancock. Price £2.50. *Heretic Books.*

Norman Iles, whose treatment of the Christmas carols is familiar to *Freethinker* readers, is the author of *Who Killed Cock Robin?* As one newspaper commented, it's enough to make Dr Bowdler, the 19th century expurgator who weeded the saucy bits out of Shakespeare, turn in his grave. Mr Iles analyses a number of seemingly innocent nursery rhymes. *Goosey, Goosey Gander*, for instance, becomes a tale of sexual frustration, and *High diddle diddle* a celebration of you-know-what. Nanny Whitehouse will be very cross with naughty Norman. Price £3.35, including postage. *Norman Iles, 381 Marine Road, Morcambe, Lancashire.*

Video firms are protesting against a ruling under the Video Recordings Bill that all "U" films will have to be resubmitted to the British Board of Film Censors for certification. It will cost between £400 and £600 to have a film certified. Films caught in the censorship net include Donald Duck cartoons.

Garden Centre Closed

Because it received one complaint, Lewes District Council in Sussex has been compelled to end the Sunday opening of Chubb's Gardening Centre at Cooksbridge. David Hamer, the council's Environmental Officer, said he was unhappy about the decision. But as the law stands, the council has no choice in the matter.

Mr Hamer confirmed that the closure resulted from one complaint. He added: "This is not an example of local bureaucracy from the local authority. Rather it is an example of an Act of Parliament that needs amending".

Mr John Chubb, owner of the Garden Centre, said that he had opened on Sunday for the past 20 years. It was the best day for business and he now stands to lose a third of his turnover. "It will be quite a blow," he commented.

A regular customer described the closure as "a folly and a nonsense". He added: "Trips to garden centres on Sundays have become almost a national pastime and it would seem to be the height of folly to deprive people of this pleasure while discouraging what is perhaps the most popular and creative of all activities".

• The current issue of the misnamed "Joy and Light", published by that esteemed body, the Lord's Day Observance Society, gleefully reports that many firms have been fined for Sunday trading. DIY stores and gardening centres in Basingstoke, Northampton, Sheffield, Chester, Manchester, Colchester and Blackburn, have been forced to cease Sunday trading. "Freethinker" readers are urged to write to their MPs calling for an amendment to the Shops Act.

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Nostalgic Memories

JOHN ROWLAND

The writer of this article was a regular contributor to freethought and rationalist journals in pre-war days. Afterwards he went to Manchester College, Oxford, and trained as a Unitarian minister. Now nearing his 77th birthday, he is still a "Freethinker" reader and an active journalist, editing the monthly magazine, "The Unitarian".

There can be few writers or journalists still around who can recall the days before 1939 when Chapman Cohen was editing this journal and Charles A. Watts the Rationalist Press Association's *Literary Guide*. I am one of those few. Indeed, I was long a regular contributor to *The Freethinker* and served for several years on the editorial staff of the *Literary Guide*. I used to stay at Bayard Simmons's home in Croydon and read the proofs of books by Herbert Cutner and Frank Ridley. Reading Jim Herrick's *Vision and Realism: a Hundred Years of The Freethinker*, I found many familiar names.

Among recent biographies of literary folk of the period from 1925 until 1945 I have found books on people I know in bygone days. I recall, for instance, having tea with H. G. Wells at his home in Regent's Park, and being introduced by him to his son, Anthony West, whose recent book about his father has made something of a sensation.

I had a series of interviews with eminent people which were published in the *Literary Guide*. One of them who has always stuck in my mind was Fryn Jesse, novelist and criminologist, a biography of whom was reviewed by Peter Cotes in the May *Freethinker*. I also interviewed Bernard Shaw, Cyril Joad, Julian Huxley, J. B. S. Haldane, Ivor Brown and other writers who were well known in the 1930s.

Perhaps it may seem that I am doing a fair amount of name dropping. But as I glance along my bookshelves I can see quite a number of lesser names which strike me as being worth recalling.

There is that witty Irishman, Charles Duff, who wrote *A Handbook of Hanging*, probably the first really outstanding book against capital punishment. I was able to persuade the RPA to include his other work, *This Human Nature*, in The Thinker's Library series. There is E. S. P. Haynes, a literary lawyer who managed to be a freethinker and yet a friend of Hilaire Belloc and other Catholic writers of the time. I remember dining with Haynes in a Chancery Lane restaurant where he kept his own bottle of wine and thus was able to give his guests a glass of first-rate hock in a restaurant that had no licence. And there is Hyman Levy, of the Imperial College of

Science, whose writings provided forthright answers to Sir James Jeans and Sir Arthur Eddington. I recall Professor Levy coming to my office in Johnson's Court where we went through the proofs of his book, *The Universe of Science*.

I attended meetings of writers, and was a member of the Authors' Club in Whitehall Court. There I met many literary people who gathered under the auspices of Sir Charles Petrie, the historian. On one occasion I proposed a vote of thanks to E. M. Forster who had addressed the members.

There was an international conference of free-thinkers in London which included a slap-up dinner at the Trocadero when the main speakers were Chapman Cohen and H. G. Wells. This was between the Munich conference and the outbreak of war in 1939. There was much worry and much doubt in the minds of all thoughtful people at that time, just as there is now over the threat of nuclear warfare.

Those far-off times of freethought and rationalism brought many happy days to me, though, when I reached the middle forties, my attitude in some degree changed. I felt as I looked at the world of ideas that I might aim at a place which would give me a chance to play a part in the religious sphere. This, naturally, did not mean a part in any kind of orthodox church. I could never be a Roman Catholic or an Anglican, since the ideas of the mainstream churches had a line of thought that I could never have accepted.

But I soon found that the Unitarian churches, the ministers of which took a view that could vary from Left-wing Christianity to some forms of humanism, appealed to me. Indeed, some groups of humanists meet in Unitarian Churches—i.e. Golders Green and Lewisham. Eventually I served the Unitarian churches in Brighton, Ditchling, Tenterden, Northiam and Trowbridge, and preached in many churches up and down the country. In spite of this my attitude to freethought has not come to be all that different from what it was in days gone by.

There are probably few readers of *The Freethinker* in 1984 who can recall me as a regular contributor in the time of Chapman Cohen. But I hope that what I have written here may be of interest, and that it may especially appeal to those who read Jim Herrick's book which I enjoyed enormously.

Newspaper reports are always required by "The Freethinker". The source and date should be clearly marked and the clippings sent to the Editor at 32 Over Street, Brighton, Sussex.

and everyone had access to a suitably lethal pill this would ensure a decent and humane death.

But this attempt to meet our first objection merely exacerbates the force of our second objection. For, if suicide were made too easy, there would be a standing temptation to take this way out whenever our personal problems got on top of us with the result that many worth while lives would be wasted that might otherwise have been saved. At the present time probably most suicides are committed by those who are suffering from severe clinical depression.

One solution to this dilemma is to restrict access to the wherewithal to the medical profession who would dispense it only when this was thought to be medically justified. But, while this would no doubt be a safeguard against abuse, the trouble here is twofold. First, it has already become abundantly clear that the medical profession does not want to be saddled with such awesome responsibilities. Secondly, by no means all those who have a right to commit suicide are necessarily patients; the bereaved fall into this latter category. Some people do not want to go on living once they are without their partners in life. We thus see that even when we confine our attention to suicide by one's own hand, there are difficult moral problems that confront us.

When we consider assisted suicide, the stock objection is that whether this is done under medical auspices or by private initiative, all such voluntary euthanasia would soon become involuntary. Ageing and ailing members of the family would soon be subjected to subtle pressures to avail themselves of this option by their impatient relatives even if in their heart of hearts they would prefer to go on living. It is, I am sure, this fear more than anything else which explains society's refusal to legitimise assisted suicide which, so far as I know, is not fully legal as yet in any country. Supporters of voluntary euthanasia cannot afford to disregard such misgivings. What argument, then, can we present for our position?

We should reflect, first, that there has probably never been a law or, indeed, a social institution that has not at some time and in some way been abused by some people. The art of legislation is precisely to minimise such abuse. Our case must be that human dignity demands nothing less. As things are now the victim of an accident who is paralysed from the neck down has no choice about his future but is compelled to drag on an intolerable existence. Likewise, an old person, faced with the prospect of senility or an incurable and incapacitating illness but too feeble to act alone is, as things are, condemned to a cruel mockery of a life.

No law which perpetuates this state of affairs could possibly be just.

LETTERS

CLASSIFICATION/CENSORING

Can a freethinker be guilty of jumbled irrational thoughts? "The New Censors" (June) contains three distinct, but separate, viewpoints, yet they are juxtaposed like the infamous phrase ". . . secularists, homosexuals and perverts".

First issue; striking enough to stand alone for condemnation is Muslim fanaticism using sackcloth to keep womenfolk enslaved.

Second issue. Debi Brett, top model (approved of) bears no formal title following the norm today for men and women in popular journalism and TV.

Yet, Valerie Wise (disapproved of) bears the woman's burden of classified titles—(Wot? No Lady!)—not a snick-a-snee but a sledge-hammer attack on her, which brings out the writer's bile of prejudice on another, yet separate, feminist issue: the desire in public matters to keep equal anonymity by a Mr/MS syndrome.

Third issue: Valerie Wise may have a point about the influence on male gut feelings of feminine "bits and pieces" publicly displayed merely to promote sales; could a virile male honestly deny this?

For women, the normal wearers of bras and stockings, sales promotion in popular magazines is sufficient to ensure good sales.

Honest nudity rather than "titillation" advertising—can a preference for the former categorise one as a "censorious dowdy"?

BEATRICE CLARKE

OFFENSIVE AND OPPRESSIVE

It is unfortunate that the "News and Notes" piece (June) mocking feminist censors gives the impression that "The Freethinker" is anti-feminist. I sympathise entirely with women who find much advertising offensive and oppressive towards women. I personally find much advertising offensive, for many reasons, and oppressive towards many groups. But what is at issue is whether censorship is the best way to change attitudes, improve the position of women in society, and reduce sexual exploitation and harassment of women. I think there are differences of opinion about that in the woman's movement — as you would expect in any thinking movement.

"The Freethinker" is right to be critical of calls for censorship from fascists, marxists, or feminists, but should remain committed to freedom, social justice, and women's rights.

JIM HERRICK

RELIGIOUS MUTILATION

The case recently reported in the Press of the terrible injury inflicted upon an unfortunate little boy during a Moslem circumcision ceremony prompts me to ask how it is that in a civilised and, we would like to think, caring society we tolerate this barbaric rite and do not, as I do, regard it as a cruel and outrageous assault upon a defenceless child. Parents have been punished for less.

It would appear that, as with other practices (such as ritual slaughter), any inhumanity, even the mutilation of a child's body, is regarded as permissible if perpetrated in the name of religion.

ALASTAIR CHAMBRE

him and influenced his opinions and views. What he gained was the wisdom of self-knowledge.

Compared with Voltaire, the other outstanding figure among the *philosophes*, Diderot was unquestionably the more subtle and abler thinker philosophically; and a more attractive man. They were not on close terms, and not drawn to one another, as Diderot and David Hume were, from the first. If one tries to think of any parallel in our own time and place, there is the Thinker's Library that also tried to propagate a scientific and rationalist outlook, in a more restricted field. And Shaw and Wells might be compared with Voltaire and Diderot. The parallel is as much to show the difference as the resemblance, both in personalities and the times.

**1713 — 1784
DENIS DIDEROT
COMMEMORATION
MEETING**

**H. J. BLACKHAM
NICOLAS WALTER
BARBARA SMOKER**

Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London WC1

Monday, 16th July, 7 pm

National Secular Society, 702 Holloway Road,
London N19 (telephone 01-272 1266)

A public execution, the first under revived Islamic Sharis Law in Sudan, took place last month before 7,000 spectators. A man convicted of armed robbery was hanged, but the second part of the sentence was not carried out as there was no post high enough on which his body could be crucified. One of his accomplices had a leg and a hand amputated. President Numeiry introduced the strict religious law last year. Shortly afterwards he visited Britain and was received by the Prime Minister at 10 Downing Street.

**ATHEISM, FREETHOUGHT,
POLITICS, HISTORY**

Books, pamphlets, and back issues of
"The Freethinker".

For full list write to:

G. W. Foote & Co, 702, Holloway Road,
London N19 3NL.

EVENTS

Brighton and Hove Humanist Group. Summer programme from Joan Wimble, Flat 5, 67 St Aubyns, Hove, Sussex, telephone Brighton 733215.

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.

National Secular Society. Annual outing (Surrey and Berkshire), Sunday, 16 September. Details from the General Secretary, 702 Holloway Road, London N19, telephone 01-272 1266.

The Progressive League. Summer Holiday Conference at Beatrice Webb House, Holmbury St Mary, Dorking, Surrey, 18-25 August. Details from Joan Miller, 50 South Hill Park, London NW3, telephone 01-794 5271.

Sutton Humanist Group. Summer programme from George Mepham, 29 Fairview Road, Sutton, Surrey, telephone 01-642 8796.

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

Church Schools Ditch Daily Assembly

Fewer than half of the church schools in Gloucestershire hold a full religious assembly every day, according to a survey carried out by the Culham College Institute. The survey was conducted in order to ascertain how the partnership between Church and State is working 40 years after the 1944 Education Act made religion the only legally compulsory subject in the curriculum. A total of 267 schools took part.

It is revealed that 73 per cent of fourth year pupils in county schools have less than an hour of religious education a week. The figure for C of E controlled schools is 85 per cent and for C of E aided schools 42 per cent. Daily assembly takes place in only a quarter of the county schools, a third of Anglican controlled and a half of Anglican aided schools.

Only the Roman Catholic schools affirm that the purpose of the assembly is to be explicitly Christian.

Hymn singing and prayers remain the central part of school worship, but fewer than half of the pupils in county schools say the Lord's Prayer at least twice a week. Bible reading aloud is rare, except in Catholic schools. According to the report: "Only one in ten county schools and one in five C of E aided schools exposes its pupils to the Bible at least twice a week in assemblies".

daily act of worship is a stricter requirement than most Christian Churches lay upon their committed adult believers".

The Baptist Union declared that "our membership would suggest that opportunities for assembly should remain but legislation requiring them to be held at the beginning of each day be removed". It quotes one Baptist minister who "would prefer to see less frequent acts of worship", and suggests they be held "at the beginning and end of term, on or near important days in religious calendars, mostly Christian, but not ignoring other faiths, whether we live in a racially mixed area or not".

The Union of Welsh Independents said that assembly must not be seen as a reluctant attendance at church parade. "To achieve this kind of end it would be wise to hold such assemblies weekly rather than daily. We are uneasy about the legal requirements for school worship, mainly because practice in schools has already moved away from daily acts of worship, and because an 'act of worship' is too circumscribed a description of what can occur in a secularised (or multi-cultural) school assembly".

The Board of Deputies of British Jews urged a limit on occasions when withdrawal of Jewish children from assembly should be necessary. While recognising the value to the school community of a collective gathering at the beginning of the day, the Board declared that "so long as this assembly is an act of worship, there is no means whereby a compromise can be reached to incorporate all Jewish children. Schools should consider carefully the manner whereby their collective school assembly, designed to encourage a sense of unified identity on the part of all school pupils, actually serves to divide pupils in many instances".

But the Methodists were not prepared to see Christianity deprived of its captive audience so easily. The Methodist Church Division of Education and Youth complained that in many schools collective worship is mixed up with "announcements of administration matters to do with running the school". They declare: "Assembly, as an act of worship, is . . . vital, and there should be a positive programme for re-instituting the practice in our schools. The assembly as collective worship should remain a compulsory activity".

The Moravian Church is either naive or contemptuous of pupils and teachers who are unbelievers. The Moravians said: "Though not all pupils and staff may be able to share fully in the act of worship, they could, surely, without loss of integrity, take part in it as a sharing of other people's experience and an attempt to understand".

The National Association of Head Teachers is not noted for its radicalism and the Working Party's recommendations are quite modest. The 1944 Act

requires that "the school day in every county school and in every voluntary school shall begin with collective worship on the part of all pupils in attendance at the school and the arrangements made therefore shall provide for a single act of worship attended by all such pupils". The Working Party recommends the following wording: "Subject to the provisions of this section, in every county and in every voluntary school, all the pupils, or all the pupils in large groups, shall be assembled together at least once a week. It shall be the responsibility of the Governors in consultation with the Head of each school to determine the nature and frequency of acts of worship". (It is regrettable that at no stage of its discussion nor in its recommendations does the Working Party consider the views of pupils.)

It is also suggested that "whenever the phrase 'religious instruction' appears in the Act, the words 'religious education' shall be substituted". In practice, however, this has already happened.

In an article in the *Guardian*, the Rev Peter Mullin attacked the NAHT report. He challenged multi-faith assemblies, describing them as "the bland leading the bland".

Harry Stopes-Roe, chairman of the BHA, in a letter subsequently published in the *Guardian*, wrote: "Contrary to what Mr Mullin says there is value in themes—'life', 'joy', 'love', etc—which all can share. This is so, even if each may under-pin them differently in terms of ultimate values. . . There are many views on ultimate reality. The liberal holds, not that all are equal; but that we do not have sufficient basis for requiring everyone to adopt one view, to the exclusion of others".

Mr Mullin parodied a favourite humanist epithet by Protagoras that "man is the measure of all things" and wrote that "religion will always be the measure of man's deepest response to his experience". Dr Stopes-Roe countered that Mr Mullin is quite entitled to this view, "but that is not something that can be assumed in a state school, in which all have equal rights. His claim may be true; but it may be that there is no 'God'. It may be that the depth and truth of fulfilment is found in the naturalistic world of human and other beings".

The report will encourage humanists and unbelievers generally, inside the school and outside, to keep chipping away at the religious clauses of the 1944 Education Act. Considerable progress has been made over the last 20 years, but there is still much to be done.

● In London a new agreed syllabus for religious education is to include the study of six major religions. However, a Press release from the Muslim Educational Trust calls for changes in the 1944 Act to ensure that the Islamic section of the syllabus is taught only by a practising Muslim teacher.