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EMBRYO RESEARCH: NO JUSTIFICATION FOR 14-DAY LIMIT

Research on human embryos is fully justified and should not be prevented, says the British Humanist Association in its response to the Warnock Report. The BHA's conclusion is in complete contrast to the stand taken by churches and religious organisations which have been conducting a campaign against the Warnock Committee's recommendations. The BHA argues that there must be very strong justification for banning actions which can prevent suffering but which do not themselves cause it. It declares: "The religious view that a fully human person exists from the moment of conception has no place in the rational world".

Diana Rookledge, chairman, explained the BHA position. She said: "No organism can experience anything until there is sufficient development of the nervous system. The human embryo does not reach such a stage within the time it is possible to keep it alive *in vitro*. It is therefore nonsense to think of the embryo suffering in any way.

"The facts of nature and current technology effectively prevent the growth of the embryo beyond a very rudimentary stage, and therefore legislators and religious busybodies should not hamper vital research by setting arbitrary time limits. If, in some years' time, there are great leaps in *in vitro* technology, that will be the time to re-assess society's response.

"We therefore support the Warnock Committee's recommendation that *in vitro* research on live embryos should be permitted, but see no justification for setting a time limit of 14 days".

Embryo research can show how to prevent serious diseases and relieve much human suffering. But the research itself causes no suffering whatever.

A viable embryo has normally implanted in the wall of the mother's uterus by 14 days. In fact over

half of all embryos fail to implant, and are lost in the woman's next period, without her being aware that fertilisation took place.

Without implantation, the possibilities for further development are very limited. This is because, beyond that stage, the embryo depends upon the development of the placenta. The technical problems of creating an artificial placenta so as to support a fetus *in vitro* are enormous, and it is generally agreed that medical science will not approach this in the foreseeable future.

During the period in which *in vitro* life is possible, the neural development of the embryo is very rudimentary. It is so rudimentary throughout this period — and for some time beyond — that, scientifically, there is no basis whatever for ascribing to the embryo the capacity for "experience", "feeling", "suffering", "enjoyment" and so on. The Warnock Committee's suggestion of the completion of implantation and the development of the so-called "primitive streak" as a "cut-off point" for experimentation, has no connection with neural development or the capacity for experience or "personality".

The BHA is described in a press release as "the national charity representing Humanism. Humanism is the outlook of reason and good will, for those who see no use for 'God' or a 'Divine Plan' . . . if human problems are to be solved at all, they will only be solved by human beings".

Attacks on the Warnock Committee's recommendations have come from a number of churches.

The Free Presbyterian Church of Scotland says that many of the processes used to alleviate infertility should be declared illegal. The church also calls for the 1967 Abortion Act to be repealed.

Enoch Powell, MP, is leading the crusade against Warnock at Westminster.

The Freethinker

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Editor: WILLIAM McILROY

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NEWS

RELIGION AND LIFE

The Christian obsession with the "sanctity of Life" is yet another manifestation of religious humbug, double standards and irrational attitudes. When Christian zealots at Westminster are not attacking the 1967 Abortion Act they are clamouring for restoration of the death penalty. Anti-abortion campaigners in the United States have resorted to planting bombs and other acts of terrorism against legally established clinics and their patients.

Churches and religious pressure groups in Britain are determined to prevent law reform that would permit voluntary euthanasia. As with other issues they attempt to camouflage their motives with a spurious concern for human worth. But their objection to a person's right to die when life has become insupportable is basically religious.

The *Sunday Times* recently recalled that in 1976 Baroness Wootton introduced into the House of Lords a bill "which would have brought a modicum of good sense and regulation to the subject of euthanasia. But it was not supported. As a result, uncounted numbers of people, kept alive by medical science, often die without dignity unless a sympathetic doctor, moved by private pleas, helps them".

One of the uncounted numbers who was not allowed to die with dignity at the time of her own choosing was Anita Harding. She had every reason to wish for a release from living. Her story is summarised in the current issue of the Voluntary Euthanasia Society *Newsletter*.

Anita Harding was born in 1900. She lost both parents when she was six years old and, having no other relatives, was brought up in a charitable boarding school. After leaving school she worked in a library, interested herself in travel, public affairs, painting and the arts, and was known for her beautiful needlework, some of which was shown at an exhibition at Hever Castle. During the war, she went into the Civil Service, where she remained until her retirement.

By 1983, Anita Harding had good grounds for wishing to bring her life to a close. Her age was 84, and her physical condition was very poor. She was arthritic, with chronic back pain. She had difficulty in breathing. She was almost blind and would soon have become totally blind; and she was very deaf. She had no family; her few friends had died before her and she was dependent on the kindness of voluntary helpers whenever she needed to leave her

S AND NOTES

one-room flat. Always somewhat withdrawn, she suffered from bitter loneliness, and when she found that her hearing was rapidly deteriorating still further, she realised that her isolation would soon be complete. Her life had become an intolerable burden.

At such an age and in such circumstances, surely she had the moral right to choose to die. She also had the legal right. But she was uncertain whether she would be able to claim her right alone, and begged for the comfort of a friend to hold her hand as she lost consciousness for the last time, and to make sure that she did not return to the same intolerable life made worse by the brain or liver damage that might result from the attempt.

When Mrs Charlotte Hough, a voluntary helper who had become a friend, promised that she would not allow Miss Harding to regain consciousness—so enabling her to die with an easy mind—she thought she would only have to sit beside her as she died. But the drugs Mrs Harding had taken, though leading to rapid unconsciousness, did not result in a speedy death. So Mrs Hough, faced with the dilemma of breaking her promise or breaking the law, placed a plastic bag over Miss Harding's head while she was in a coma. Because of the uncertainty as to whether the death was caused by the bag or by the barbituates Miss Harding had taken, the original charge of murder was reduced to attempted murder, to which Mrs Hough pleaded guilty. She was sentenced to nine months' imprisonment and her appeal was refused.

At the other end of the age spectrum there is the case of a young man who, for religious reasons, sacrificed his life. Gary Llewellyn was involved in a motorcycle crash and taken to the Norwich and Norfolk Hospital. It seemed likely that a leg would have to be amputated, but he was a Jehovah's Witness and refused to accept blood. His parents were called to the operating theatre door but would not consent for blood to be given.

Mr John Watson-Farrar, a senior consultant orthopaedic surgeon, told the Norwich coroner: "I can be sure from my 32 years' experience, and I am 99.9 per cent certain that he would have survived if blood had been given".

In a desperate attempt to save the young man's life Mr Watson-Farrar telephoned the coroner just before midnight on Christmas Eve. But he could not intervene.

Gary Llewellyn, aged 20, died from a haemorrhage and religious indoctrination.

CHURCH NEWS

We hold no brief for vandals or thieves, but the reaction of the clergy to recent break-ins at St James's Church, Friern Barnet and St Pancras Old Church, London, was a bit daft.

About thirty communion wafers were stolen at St Pancras. The parish priest, the Rev Philip Dyson, is "absolutely convinced" that Satanists were responsible. He said: "Tonight is, in the old calendar, the feast of Christmas. It is also the full moon. It is the exact time for a Black Mass, for which consecrated hosts are essential".

The Bishop of Edmonton held a special service at Friern Barnet and the church is to be reconsecrated. The Rev Victor Stock, Vicar of St James's, also believes that his church was broken into by devil worshippers.

Barbara Smoker, president of the National Secular Society, questioned the Satanist theory. Might it not just as easily have been the work of fundamentalist Christians, demonstrating against such High Churchery, she asked in a letter published in the London *Standard*.

Miss Smoker added: "Whilst we, as rationalists and atheists, stand aside from such hostilities, whether perpetrated by 'devil-worshippers' or Low Churchmen, and we certainly do not condone the smashing of other people's toys, we had to laugh at the idea that as a result the church needed to be reconsecrated by a bishop".

Satanists were certainly not responsible for odd happenings in other churches during the festival of the Prince of Peace. Members of the Rev Ian Paisley's Free Presbyterian church heckled during a Christmas Mass. And about fifty monks from the Greek Orthodox and Armenian churches belaboured each other with brooms when, as in 1983, a fight broke out over who should clean up Bethlehem's Church of the Nativity. Peace was restored by the Israeli civil governor!

A large brown bear is kept at the shrine of St Romedios at Valle di Non, in Italy, to symbolise the legend of how he soothed with holy words a wild bear that had killed his horse. Father Guillianio Birti was cleaning the animal's compound on Christmas Eve when it cornered him. Father Birti might have gone the way of Romedios's horse but for the presence of mind of another Franciscan priest who did not, on this occasion, rely on the efficacy of holy, soothing words. Instead he gently pushed an open bottle of brandy towards the bear. The animal drank the brandy and sat down with a contented expression on its face. Christmas was spent at Valle di Non by a badly shaken Father Birti—and a bear with a sore head.

THE "CARING" CHURCH

The Church Commissioners have caused a storm of protest in the Paddington area of London over the sale of Holy Trinity Church. The building has been used as a youth club and community centre since 1971 and local organisations, backed by Westminster City Council and Paddington Churches Housing Association, wanted to acquire it. They offered £900,000 for the site where they planned to build sheltered housing for the elderly and a new community centre. But the Commissioners sold out to developers for well over a million pounds. It is expected that expensive luxury flats will now be erected.

The Rev Norman Grigg, a Methodist and chairman of Paddington Christian Council, is highly critical of the deal. He commented: "The Church authorities argue out of one side of their mouths that local authorities should do more for the homeless, and from the other say, 'Damn the consequences, get the best price you can'. . . Holy Trinity is not an isolated example; it is happening all over the country. Private developers are getting the redundant church sites and building luxury flats that homeless families cannot afford".

The Church Commissioners have refused to comment on the affair. A representative of Paddington Community Consortium said: "Nobody in the Church will break ranks. They are leakproof". That is more than can be said for the slums in which hundreds of Paddington families live.

● A printer's error must have reminded the Archbishop of Canterbury of his position as chairman of the Church Commissioners. When he attended a gathering of American church people in Paris recently, the prayer leaflet read: "the love of gold . . . be with us all, evermore".

WHAT NEXT ?

Although it is Labour councils in the main which have been conned or browbeaten into squandering vast sums of ratepayers' money on "women's committees" and "women's issues", the dottiest proposal to date has come from a Conservative councillor for Dudley, in the West Midlands. Councillor Rose Dangerfield's call for all men to be banned from the streets after dark has been adopted as official policy by the Women's Forum, a group which has the backing of West Midlands County Council.

Councillor Dangerfield and her (mainly Labour) supporters assert that a night curfew on men would stop kerb-crawlers annoying women. Why do they not go the whole hog and ban men from the streets in the daytime when the unpleasant kerb-crawlers are also active? And after that set up yet another "women's committee" to work out a Final Solution

to the men question.

Fortunately there are those who are prepared to take a stand against men-haters. Councillor Margaret Stoneman (Conservative) criticised the council for spending upwards of £20,000 a year on "women's issues". Most of the money was for councillors' attendance allowance when they attended meetings of the women's sub-committee. But all that the committee had done was criticise girly calendars and campaign against the use of the word "chairman".

Councillor Winnie Lakin (Labour) announced that she had resigned in disgust from the Women's Forum, and Councillor Dorothy Dalton (Labour) said that she did not believe in separate committees on women's issues.

Advocates of the night ban on men have not worked out how it could be implemented. And it is highly unlikely that they care about the intolerant and hateful attitude their proposal reflects.

The antics of the men-hating minority would be quite amusing if they did not provide useful ammunition for the opponents of equal rights and opportunities.

MUSLIM EDUCATION

A Muslim school for girls, opened two years ago, has been severely criticised by HM Inspectors.

The Muslim Girls High School, Dewsbury, has "a lack of adequate resources" and its accommodation is "unsuitable", the Inspectors say in their report. It occupies a terraced building and there is overcrowding. The environment is described as "uninviting", with unpainted ceilings, bare light bulbs and a small yard at the rear.

There is a steep staircase without a handrail and guards on gas fires are inadequate. The Inspectors say it is a matter of "grave concern" that fire officers' recommendations made in 1982 have been largely ignored.

Thirty girls, aged between twelve and fifteen, attend the school. They kneel at long, narrow benches. There are no facilities for practical work in art and craft, home economics or physical education. There are insufficient books and no proper library.

The present headmistress, in her first year of teaching, is the fourth since the school was opened.

The Vatican has threatened with expulsion from their orders a group of nuns, priests and brothers who sponsored an advertisement in the New York Times advocating freedom to choose abortion. If they do not retract, the Congregation for Religious and Secular Institutes "would proceed with the adoption of measures called for by Canon Law, not excluding expulsion in the case of obstinate disobedience".

DECLINE

Free Church membership in Britain has fallen below a million for the first time this century, according to the Free Church Federal Council. There has been a drop of 41,000 over the year, and in the past ten years membership has decreased by 250,000. An even greater worry for the Free Churches is a dramatic decline in the number of young people associated with church organisations. The figure has almost halved since 1974.

The Church of England has experienced a similar decline, with church attendances dropping by 14 per cent. There has also been a notable decline in numbers attending mass in Roman Catholic churches.

The Church of England is launching a recruiting drive to attract more men into the priesthood. This move follows a slump in the number offering themselves for full-time ministry. Last year the number selected for training fell to 303, an all-time low.

Freethinker Fund

The final list of donations for 1984 is given below. They are much appreciated.

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Readers have responded magnificently to appeals for financial support during the past year. Donations—some of them substantial—amounted during 1984 to a grand total of £2,139.41 and \$42.80. Over a hundred new postal subscribers were registered during the same period.

The Freethinker has always counselled against unfounded optimism and unrealistic aims. But 1984 was a good year for the paper, thanks to its loyal and generous readership, writers who give their services free, and supporters who promote its circulation.

What of the future? Constantly rising costs are a problem for journals like *The Freethinker*—except for those which have given up the struggle and gone

under. And the outlook is all the gloomier with the prospect of Value Added Tax being imposed on books and publications. It has been asserted that those who have been warning against this danger are being unnecessarily pessimistic. But a Government which imposed VAT on take-away fish and chips is capable of anything.

Donations, legacies and, above all, determination to increase the paper's circulation are more necessary than ever before. We are confident that *Freethinker* readers will rally around to secure its future as they have done for over a hundred years.

RELIGIOUS MURDER

Four members of the Republican Brotherhood, a liberal Islamic group in Sudan, were forced to watch the execution of their 76-year-old leader last month. President Nimeiry ordered the hanging of Mahmoud Mohammed Taha in Khartoum's Kober Prison. The others were given three days to recant or they too would have been executed. Their "crime" was publishing a leaflet alleging that strict observance of Islamic law "humiliated the people and deformed the image of Islam".

The Brotherhood was formed in the early 1940s to oppose British rule. In recent times it has been campaigning to liberalise Islamic law.

President Nimeiry launched an Islamicization drive in September 1983. Human rights are virtually non-existent in Sudan. Thousands have been arrested, while executions and mutilations for breaches of religious laws, including consumption of alcoholic drinks, are commonplace.

The days of Sudan's religious dictatorship may be numbered. The Sudanese people are outraged by this latest atrocity which has also embarrassed Nimeiry's chief allies, Egypt and the United States.

Antrim Borough Council in Northern Ireland is described by *Joy and Light*, quarterly journal of the Lord's Day Observance Society, as "notoriously anti-Sabbatarian". The council has granted a licence to permit Sunday dancing in a railway station cafe. Such frivolity is not only displeasing to *The One Above* but evidence that "those who have no respect for God's law generally have little respect for the laws of the land". But there are happier tidings from Craigavon for those who battle for "Our Lord and His Day". The Borough Council has rejected a recommendation from its Recreation Committee to organise Sunday boat trips on the River Bann. The decision was taken after a representative of the LDOS addressed the council, reminding councillors "of the biblical basis of Sabbath observance and the blessings such observance brings".

Christ's Contingency Plan: Benjamin Creme

JIM HERRICK

Having recently received a letter signed "Jesus" in an envelope postmarked Tampa, USA, I have now discovered that he is currently living in the Brick Lane area of the East End of London. He is clearly benefiting from modern methods of travel. Benjamin Creme, who has informed the world of Christ's current whereabouts, is no stay-at-home himself. In his task of persuading the world's media to give international prime time to Christ for a Day of Declaration on which he will inaugurate the Aquarian age, Benjamin Creme claims to have talked on over 40 radio and TV shows on a recent American tour.

Benjamin Creme's recent lecture at the Friends' Meeting House, London, was advertised with the announcement, "Maitreya the Christ is in London and Awaits Recognition". At the meeting all was made clear. It all started in 1959 when Benjamin Creme (his initials are presumably an esoteric indication of his role as herald of Christ's next manifestation) was approached by his Master and told that his role was to prepare the world for Christ's message. The Masters, in theosophic tradition, are part of a hierarchy or brotherhood of higher spiritual beings who have, through innumerable incarnations, reached a purer state than most of us. They usually live in deserts or on mountains, far away from the hustle of urban life, where they can . . . well, be Masters. Benjamin Creme's Master lives in Tibet.

At first Creme said "No thanks" to his role as Christ's announcer, but after a bit of cosmic prodding he agreed to his Master's request. The decision by the Christ Maitreya to re-appear on earth was taken in 1944. According to Buddhist teaching the Maitreya is the next and fifth Buddha. You understand that the highest teachers, the Buddhas, the Christs, the Krishnas, manifest themselves on earth from time to time in order to advance our evolution. Christ has been here again in Brick Lane since 1977. He will remain unchanged on earth throughout the 2,500 years of the coming Aquarian age and will initiate a new world religion. The Aquarian age, as is well known, follows the Piscean period, and is according to Creme "an astronomical fact, not an astrological prediction", which occurs every time the sun completes its course around the zodiac and enters a new alignment.

So quietly, anonymously, the new Christ awaits the invitation to make his message known. Early in 1983 he intimated to Creme that he was about to reveal himself. Creme organised a large-scale world press conference in Los Angeles. Instead of the anticipated screen-space for the new Christ, in Creme's words "the silence of the reaction was deafening". The

Maitreya Christ was not too perturbed and told Creme that they would have to fall back on a contingency plan. "What is the contingency plan?" asked Creme. "You", replied the Maitreya.

Thus it is that Benjamin Creme continues to lecture with his message for the new age. The meeting which I attended began with a tape of Creme under the influence of the new Christ, by which means the Christ's messages have been transmitted (and published in a series of 30p booklets). The message was intoned in a portentous andante, so slow that the sense was hard to follow:

I am the custodian of the plan of God

I am the new direction

I am the way for all men

I hold secrets of old.

And so on for twenty minutes, with the occasional unethereal cough or footstep taped in the background.

Creme then lectured for an hour and twenty minutes. His teaching is essentially that of Alice Bailey, herself an offshoot of the Theosophical movement. He is a plausible lecturer, with curly white hair, a winning smile and a Scottish lilt to his voice. He sipped from a glass of liquid the colour of whisky, honey and water, and became more animated as the meeting progressed. Far from being pompous or guru-like, he was more like a genial, garrulous, well-intentioned imbibor in the corner of a bar with solution to the problems of the world in his pocket (or his glass). At times I found myself wondering if he really took his own message seriously, if he were not internally laughing at us all listening so solemnly to his tall story. But, of course, I have no means of knowing this.

The lecturer claimed that he was not starting a new religion or cult but simply passing on factual information. He was an educator to enable us to transform all aspects of our life and planet. He pointed to the dangerous world tension in the arms race between East and West and the division between affluent and hungry in the North and South. The key to solving these divisions is SHARING and realising that we are all part of each other. Fortunately the Masters gave earth a spiritual push in the spring last year, and as a consequence talks between East and West are now reducing tension and the conscience of the western world has been awakened by the plight of the starving Ethiopians.

However, not until the new Christ makes his TV debut will the world's divisions really begin to heal. The message will be understood by telepathy and will be an appeal for man to purify and heal himself and to live peacefully together by accepting the principle of sharing. I asked why the new Christ could not

communicate to the world telepathically without waiting for the sceptical and cynical media men to be persuaded of the importance of his message. Creme replied that this was the only way that all eyes could see him at once, and that it was to avoid the millions of heart attacks which would occur if his message were delivered to a surprised world without realising who it came from.

The meeting ended with five minutes silence as we were supposed to feel the shadow of Christ passing

over us. It is, I think, something of a cosmic miracle that people will sit so patiently through such taradiddle. The genial Creme will no doubt continue to spread the message of the new Christ. But in case the Christ of Brick Lane should continue to prove tardy in delivering his message in person, I suggest another contingency plan—that the human race tries to speed up disarmament talks and take practical steps to grow more food and distribute it more fairly without spiritual assistance.

The Opium of the People

KARL HEATH

Apologists for Christianity usually claim or imply that atheists are the enemies of religious freedom. But one lesson of history is that Christians have been the most notorious perpetrators of religious persecution.

It is the fate of controversial writers to be misquoted, or quoted out of context, by opponents who, generally, have never read the works from which they presume to quote. Few have suffered more than Karl Marx. Some time, if your editor will let me, I would like to unravel the web of distortion which has been woven around "the dictatorship of the proletariat" and "from each according to his ability; to each according to his needs".

For the present let us examine the famous statement: "Religion is the opium of the people". As it stands it appears to be a rude and pre-emptory assertion. Yet its context is a sympathetic and rather beautiful passage from a short article entitled "Introduction to a Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Law (or Right)". Here is the passage:

Man makes religion; religion does not make man. Religion is indeed man's self-consciousness and self-awareness so long as he has not found himself again. But man is not an abstract being, squatting outside the world. Man is the human world, the state, society. This state, this society, produce religion which is an inverted world of consciousness, because they are an inverted world. Religion is the general theory of this world, its encyclopaedic compendium, its logic in popular form, its spiritual "point d'honneur", its enthusiasm, its moral sanction, its solemn complement, its general basis of consolation and justification. It is the fantastic realisation of the human being inasmuch as the human being possesses no true reality. The struggle against religion is, therefore, indirectly a struggle against that world whose spiritual aroma is religion.

Religious suffering is at the same time an expression of real suffering and a protest against real suffering. Religion is the sigh of the oppressed creature, the sentiment of a heartless world, and the soul of soulless conditions. It is the opium of the people.

Ludwig Feuerbach had argued that religion was the cause of man's alienation, in that man transferred his own best qualities to God, giving Him the credit for them (while, of course, man remains responsible for his own defects). In this way man renders him-

self less than human; he becomes alienated from himself. Marx, on the other hand, believed that religion was not the cause of man's alienation but an expression of it. The real cause of alienation was society, if that society made men slaves or serfs, or, under capitalism, subordinated man to economic forces. If property and profit are more important than people, if market forces prevail over human need, if commodities acquire a life of their own, then human beings are degraded.

While we reflect upon the gentle and scholarly passage which contains "opium of the people" it is worthwhile to remember that, throughout history, the most vicious attacks upon religion have come, not from atheists and agnostics, but from religious people, attacking not only other religions, but, with even greater ferocity, other sects within their own faith. The most devastating Crusade, amounting to genocide, was not against the Saracens but against the Christian Albigenses in southern France. In the early 13th century Pope Innocent III (what a travesty of a name!) unleashed a murderous campaign against these peaceful Christian heretics who had never sought to impose their beliefs upon others, and who were the most prosperous and cultured people in the whole of France, and probably the whole of Europe at that time. After the capture of Carcassonne a systematic slaughter followed, organised by the Inquisition which came into being at this time for that specific purpose. During the Thirty Years War (1618-1648), Protestants and Catholics succeeded in reducing the population of Germany from fifteen million to nine million.

And so to today. Pope John Paul II, in his 1984 Christmas message, had the effrontery to link the nuclear danger with atheism. It was the Christian United States which dropped the two atom bombs on non-Christian Japan. It is white Christian bigots who persecute blacks in South Africa. It is religion which fuels the violence in Iran, Lebanon and Northern Ireland. It is the crazed Moral Majority of born-again Christians, led by such as the Rev Jerry Falwell, with their sinister and dangerous influence upon President Reagan, who anticipate with ghoulish relish a nuclear Armageddon from which they, the

Restoration Atheists—

Publishers who made atheistical works available to the lower orders were persecuted and harassed by Church and State. But atheism was the subject of "select conversation" among wealthy and privileged sceptics even in the 17th century. Ironically, critics of atheism did much to diffuse it through their books and sermons.

Chosen Few, will be "raptured" into Heaven, heedless of the fate of everyone else.

The Moral Majority still believes in hell. In 2,000 years of Christianity a latent ferocity has lurked behind the façade of "gentle Jesus, meek and mild". St Augustine said that unbaptised babies would roast in hell, because we are all born in sin, and there is nothing we can do about it no matter how hard we try to be good. Only salvation through God's grace can save us, and this depends upon His arbitrary whim. Nine centuries later St Thomas Aquinas wrote: "That the saints may enjoy their beatitude more richly, a perfect sight is granted to them of the punishment of the damned". In the 19th century the Reverend Father Furness wrote what he called "a book for Children and Young Persons". Its title was *A Sight of Hell*, and I cannot bring myself to quote from it since it is no less than the ravings of a madman. Suffice it to say that, among other delights it describes the baking of a baby in an oven.

I realise that I may have laid myself open to the very charge of misquotation of which I complained at the outset. Let me, therefore, end with a longer quotation from someone who snatched the opium from the people who needed it most. No one doubts the emotional force of Christianity, particularly among the oppressed. As Negro spirituals testify, faith in a better world in which injustice would cease gave some meaning to the wretched life of slaves in the southern states of the USA. They were allowed to attend church, but not at the same time as their white masters. A Bishop Meade of the Episcopal Church in Virginia wrote a book of sermons which he recommended to white ministers preaching to segregated slave congregations. It contained the following choice passage:

Having thus shown you the chief duties you owe to your great Master in heaven, I now come to lay before you the duties you owe to your masters and mistresses here upon earth. And for this you have one general rule, that you ought always to carry in your minds; and that is to do all service for them as if you did it for God Himself.

Poor creatures! You little consider, when you are idle or neglectful of your master's business, when you steal and waste, when you are saucy and impudent, when you are telling them lies and deceiving them, or when you prove stubborn and sullen and will not do the work you are set about without stripes and vexation—you do not consider, I say, that what faults you are guilty of towards your masters and mistresses are faults done against God Himself, who hath set your masters and mistresses over you in His own stead, and expects that you would do for them as you would do for Him. I tell you that your masters and mistresses are God's overseers and that if you are faulty towards them, God will punish you severely for it in the next world.

In my lifetime I have read extensively, but never anything to descend to such depths of cruelty, snatching away their only solace and consolation. I commend it to Mary Whitehouse and other experts in obscenity.

Before the first openly atheistic book was issued in Britain, in 1782, atheism was confined to "the private study and select conversation". Yet it would be wrong to suppose that 1782 saw the culmination of a steady growth of spoken atheism. Thus Baron D'Holbach reported on a visit to England in 1765: although "the deists are innumerable; there are almost no atheists". The great phase of conversational atheism occurred a century earlier, during the reign of Charles II, "when *Atheism* so loudly batters us on all sides"—as Charles Wolsely pathetically complained in 1669. It is from the Restoration period that we have evidence of atheism from self-professed, former atheists. Consider the following recollection by Lord Rochester of an incident which he took to be a premonition of his future conversion:

. . . One day, at an Atheistical Meeting, . . . I undertook to manage the Cause, and was the principal disputant against God and Piety, and . . . received the applause of the whole company; upon which my mind was terribly struck, and I immediately reply'd thus to myself: Good God! that a man . . . that sees the wonderful works of God, and has the use of his senses and reason, should use them to the defying of his Creator!

This was recorded by Robert Parsons, the chaplain of Rochester's mother, in his *Sermon preached at the funeral of Rochester* (1680). Earlier, we have the sensational *Recantation* of Daniel Scargill *publickly made before the University of Cambridge* (1669), in which Scargill "expressly affirmed that I gloried to be an *Hobbist* and an *Atheist*".

There can be little doubt that—despite his protests—Hobbes provided the main theoretical basis for Restoration atheism. This is not to say, however, that Hobbes was himself an atheist, or even that his writings were directly used by the Restoration wits. In *The Character of a Gallant* (1675) we read:

His religion (for now and then he will be prattling of that too) is pretently Hobbian, and he swears "The Leviathan" may supply all the lost leaves of Solomon, yet he never saw it in his life. . . However, the rattle of it at coffee-houses has taught him to laugh at spirits, and maintain that there are no angels but those in petticoats.

Even the more serious atheists took much of their Hobbesian atheism from the books written *against* Hobbes. Thus Scargill drew his Hobbism not from Hobbes's scarce and expensive books, according to

"Only Talk" DAVID BERMAN

James Axtell, but from the extensive anti-Hobbes literature, particularly from Archbishop Tenison's *Creed of Hobbes* (1670)¹.

Critics such as Tenison and Ralph Cudworth saved the wits the trouble of finding the atheistic passages and meaning in Hobbes's books. Although this may seem odd, there are comparable cases. For example, Reginald Scot's *Discoverie of Witchcraft* (1584), which was designed to expose the folly of witchcraft persecutions, became almost a text book on witchcraft, popularising the very beliefs it aimed to explode. A more recent analogue may be found in some books written against pornography which reprint the most lascivious passages in order to show how offensive the allegedly pornographic works are. But in doing so they can assist those people who relish pornography. Rather than buying the books in which there are occasional pornographic passages, the relishers of pornography need only buy the anti-pornographic work. Similarly the Restoration atheists did not have to write atheistic books, since they were, in a sense, written for them by men like Tenison and Cudworth.

Apparently Cudworth so resented the suggestion that he had helped to engender atheism by his *True intellectual system* (1678) that he would not publish a second part of that already vast work. It was certainly felt by some that Cudworth had powerfully stated the case for atheism. So Dryden remarked that Cudworth "has raised such objections against the being of a God and Providence, that many think he has not answered them". Lord Shaftesbury also noted that Cudworth "was accused of giving the upper hand to the Atheists. . .". Here the suggestion is that Cudworth not only presented the atheistic side of the argument fairly, but actually favoured it, despite his clear statements to the contrary.

This suggestion can hardly be taken very seriously. But a similar technique was used later by the freethinkers, who sometimes reprinted extracts from freethinking works with introductions in which the freethinking ideas were attacked in an obviously weak way; such subterfuge enabled them to achieve their ends with less risk of legal prosecution. One such work was a compendium of D'Holbach's *System of Nature* which was first printed at Glasgow in 1799. In his Publisher's Preface to the second edition (circa 1825), Richard Carlile pointed out that the Editor of the previous edition "found it necessary to prefix and affix a few pages of abuse on his own work, by way of cheating the persecuting Christians. The present publisher has no fears or scruples to put forth such a work in its pure and naked form. . .". An earlier and slightly more disguised attempt to cheat the persecuting Christians

was *A Summary Account of the Deist's Religion* (1745). In order to have "the *Necessity and Advantage* of a Revelation *still more fully prov'd*", its anonymous Editor reprints "the most *formidable* piece that *ever yet* appeared against . . . the Christian religion . . . yet [he reassures us] I am not a jot *shaken* by it in my *Christian* principles. . .".

We are dealing with a sort of duck/rabbit phenomenon. Looked at in one way Tenison's *Creed of Hobbes* would show the foolishness of Hobbes and atheism. Looked at in another way—by those who were, like the younger Scargill and Rochester, sympathetic to Hobbes and atheism—and this book could be an inspiring text. Hence it was, to use a phrase William Warburton applied to Cudworth, dangerous "to strip *Atheism* of all its Disguises", since atheism was thereby unveiled in print; and to some the naked form was a thing of beauty and not something ugly. Possibly Hobbes wanted critics to uncover his disguises so that his veiled message could be discerned more clearly.

Yet even when the stripping was done by freethinkers, the result could be perceived as a religious duck rather than as an irreligious rabbit. Thus when Charles Blount published his daring broadsheet, *The Last Sayings, or Dying Legacy of Mr Hobbes* (1680), some readers believed that Blount's purpose was "to weaken and expose *Hobbes's doctrine*".²

Notes

1. See Axtell's 'The mechanics of opposition, restoration Cambridge vs Daniel Scargill', in *Bulletin of the Institute of historical research*, vol 38 (1965), 108-9.
2. See Anthony Wood's *Athenae Oxonienses* (1691), vol 2, 481. The quoted portions of my title and first sentence are taken from a 1692 letter of Richard Bentley, reprinted in J. M. Robertson's *Dynamics of Religion* (1926) 72.

VOLUME 104, 1984

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BOOK

RED SHELLEY, by Paul Foot. Bookmarks, 265 Seven Sisters Road, London N4, £4.50 (by post £5.25)

The title of this book gives a clear enough indication of the line that is to be taken by the author, but if any reader is still unaware of what is in front of him, the opening pages leave no room for doubt. The first line of the Introduction contains the arresting statement that Paul Foot shared with Shelley a rotten education at University College, Oxford, and the first chapter begins with the assertion that "in the twelve years of Shelley's adult life (1810-22), Britain had its worst Government ever". No book about Shelley could neglect his poetry, but Paul Foot's purpose is to show that many previous books about Shelley, while concentrating on his poetry (very narrowly conceived), and declaring, or at least suggesting, that "poetry" (rarely defined, by the way) could exist in a vacuum, have ignored other important aspects of the writer's life, his thought and opinions. For anyone who thinks that a writer's opinions can be entirely ignored in the assessment of his "literary" qualities, *Red Shelley* will provide a valuable corrective.

Foot's survey of Shelley's opinions on matters of controversy is always closely related to what he actually wrote and said. Thus, while it is fairly common to read that Shelley was both republican and atheist, it is comparatively rare to find this supported by specific quotation. Thus, tersely, Shelley declares that "monarchy is only the string which ties the robber's bundle", and while his atheism is never in question — it was this for which he was sent down from Oxford, that centre of any learning that did not cast doubt on the creeds and observances favoured by the ruling classes of the day — he was careful to point out that "Christ was crucified because he attempted to supersede the ritual of Moses with regulations more moral and humane". Shelley objected, of course, as would be expected from a man of his intelligence and insight, to the mumbo-jumbo supernatural side of religion. But what perhaps appalled him most of all was the fact that established religion had always been allied to political tyranny and oppression. It has been a very convenient tool for those in authority to suppress any attempt at rebellion in the present by promising benefits which were certain in a far-off future in the after-life.

It may not be such a surprise to the general reader to learn of Shelley's republicanism, his atheism and his egalitarian sentiments in the social and political fields. Not all readers, however, will know of his feminism, at a time when, even among the otherwise enlightened, it was still unusual to treat one half of the human race as the spiritual and intellectual

FREETHINKER

equals of the other.

Even such an apostle of freedom as Rousseau believed that it was the destiny of woman simply to please and serve men. Shelley looked for a free association of free beings. Marriage was, to him, but one more device for the establishment and continuation of property rights and the subordination of those who did not enjoy the protection of authority to those that did. Shelley's views here appear to be those of the enlightened thinkers of the 20th century rather than of the 19th. He thought that "with the abolition of marriage, the fit and natural arrangement of sexual connection would result". By this he did not mean that he favoured promiscuity, but that the removal of artificial bonds imposed from without and the consequent freedom of choice and change in sexual partnerships would lead, of necessity, to full and more rewarding relationships. Insistence on this line of thought led him to ideas that, even among the more liberated thinkers of today will still cause a slight thrill of horror when his name is mentioned; the defence of incest is, of course, the outstanding example of Shelley's readiness to allow his objection to sexual taboos to take him further than anyone else.

It cannot be denied, and Paul Foot does not try to hide this, that Shelley's nobility of thought and opinion did not always lead to success or happiness in practice. While he pursued his ideas with logic and, as is clear from the sexual examples quoted, did not shrink from the conclusions to which he was drawn, he did find himself sometimes in difficult inconsistencies. Thus, in his celebrated poem, *The Mask of Anarchy*, which one writer has called "the greatest poem of political protest ever written in English", he appears to conclude a most powerfully expressed condemnation of the oppression of the ruling classes with an appeal to the downtrodden masses to let the tyrants do what they wished.

In other places, Shelley has no faith in the force of moral resistance and feels that the violence of the possessing and ruling classes will have to be met with force, deplorable as that may be. Paul Foot points out, also, the shortcomings, to the eyes of a present-day revolutionary, in Shelley's attitude to the reform of the suffrage. In this, he was very much of a conservative not thinking that the time was yet ripe for extension of the right to vote to women as well as to men. In addition, Shelley seems to be uncertain about the relative values that he gave to his poetry and his political ideas, if a division can be drawn.

In the final chapter, Paul Foot looks at the variations and fluctuations in Shelley's reputation. At

REVIEW

times there were periods of "cultured Shelley-worship", almost invariably based on the picture of Shelley as the supreme lyricist. Some modern critics come in for censure here. Paul Foot has particular scorn for the redoubtable F. R. Leavis. He claims that the interest of Leavis in "reform" in general was as nothing concerned with his regard for the "rights of the cultured few".

Rather surprisingly, Paul Foot hardly considers an even more important literary anti-Shelleyite than Dr Leavis. Leavis had great influence on succeeding generations of writers and teachers who passed through his hands at Cambridge (and, of course, by no means all of the effects of that influence were harmful) but he never held the position in the world of literature and culture that was occupied for about half a century by T. S. Eliot. In the chapter on Shelley and Keats in his important and influential book, *The Use of Poetry and the Use of Criticism* (1933), Eliot was honest. He found Shelley's ideas "repellent" and the man himself "humourless, pedantic, self-centred, and sometimes almost a black-guard". In a passage of argument, which some would call cogent and subtle, while others would dismiss it as specious and casuistic, Eliot was able to persuade himself that, while, in general, it was possible to appreciate the gifts of a poet without accepting his opinions, this was not possible with Shelley, and he was fair-minded enough to admit that he reached this conclusion because he found Shelley's beliefs fundamentally untenable and abhorrent.

The wheel turns full circle. Some who like what they call Shelley's poetry declare that it is possible to separate this from his beliefs. Eliot found this impossible and so the poetry went out of the window with the revolutionary views. The truth seems to be that, whatever the lovers of the "traditional" may think, there are two traditions in English life. The first is that of the established order, a regular system of belief and actions and, based on that, the readiness to know one's place and to act, or not to act, accordingly. Eliot was a leading, perhaps the outstanding, example of this tradition in the 20th century. He certainly did not keep his poetry and his opinions on politics and religion in separate compartments and some of those opinions were undoubtedly repellent to many who could value his skill as a writer and the grace and sensitivity of his poetry.

Yet, there is the other tradition. This is the tradition of the revolutionary, the tradition of freedom of thought, the tradition of the wind that "bloweth where it listeth" and the continuing challenge to blind acceptance of what is established simply

because it is established. Shelley was pre-eminently in this tradition, and Paul Foot's book will remind anyone of the strength and value of his contribution. It will inspire and create enthusiasm where sometimes the course of events can dampen the brightest spirits.

For all his disappointments from time to time, Shelley looked forward to a better future. This note rings through his best remembered verses, those which the respectable and traditional are gracious enough to commend, as well as in the revolutionary utterances. Paul Foot in an excellent analysis of the *Ode to the West Wind* shows that Shelley's revolutionary voice sounds as loudly here as does his appreciation of nature (always a safe line for a poet to adopt). It is much more than a sense of the changing seasons or of rhythmical weather forecast that animates the poem and its closing lines:

Scatter, as from an unextinguished hearth
Ashes and sparks, my words among mankind!
Be through my lips to unawakened earth
The trumpet of a prophecy. O, Wind
If Winter comes, can Spring be far behind?

T. F. EVANS

The latest issue of *New Humanist*, quarterly journal of the Rationalist Press Association, is a substantial offering of articles, reviews and comment. It is edited by Jim Herrick whose final question in an interview with Gerald Priestland was ". . . when do you think the BBC is likely to present the case against God by atheists rather than Christians?" Priestland replied: ". . . Somebody once said to me, 'when are we going to have atheist thoughts for the day?' and I replied 'we have them several times a day and they are called news bulletins' ". Gerald Priestland told the interviewer: "If I had a Damascus Road it was Fitzjohn Avenue where my psychiatrist lives". Contributors to the current *New Humanist* include Iris Murdoch, Roger Manvell and David Berman. Nicolas Walter has written his *Rationally Speaking* column, "after losing several weeks of my life and several feet of my intestines in hospital, and while struggling along the slow and painful path to recovery". *New Humanist* is well worth £1 and is obtainable from the RPA, 88 Islington High Street, London N1 8EL.

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LETTERS

UNDERSTANDING ORWELL

Antony Milne's assertion (Letter, January) that I maintain 1984 to be a satire on capitalist society—assuming he includes me in "socialist intellectuals"—is so wide of what I actually wrote that he cannot have read the article at all closely.

I did not "coin" Newspeak; Orwell did. I do not dismiss the Western alliance as defensive, I condemn it because it is not, as I object to this Government's submission to the dangerously inflammatory policies of Reagan before, more recently, he began to listen to more moderate voices. I did not mention the nuclear threat from the Soviet bloc simply because I was writing about development here. A glaring example of failure to read closely is his oversight of the word "could" in the second paragraph.

Mr Milne must live in a very private world. I do not expect him to read anything else I have written—e.g. my praise of Solzhenitsyn (a notable critic of Russian communism) in the columns of *The Freethinker*—but he can hardly fail to have noticed that the condemnation of this Government's anti-democratic policies comes not only from Socialists but from Liberals and, indeed, from many notable Tories, not least Lord Stockton. It comes not only from the National Council for Civil Liberties but from the Association of Municipal Authorities which includes a majority of Tory councils.

Perhaps Mr Milne would regard the *Guardian* as red, but does he not read *The Times* or the *Telegraph* even occasionally? Does he never listen to the debates or the reports of Select Committees of the House of Commons? Is anyone who casts doubt on the virginal innocence of Mrs Thatcher's Government, or the Dock Green image of the police, or the selfless altruism of British big business, just a wicked subversive?

Perhaps Low, the famous cartoonist, should never have been published; perhaps we should not read *Punch*; perhaps Calman, Michael Frayn, Ronald Searle and Steve Bell should be sacked, along with an assorted bunch of the upper reaches of the Church of England? Perhaps Mr Milne could try reading Orwell's work in chronological order. He might then come across this statement by Orwell, written in his essay, *Why I Write* (1947): "Every line of serious work that I have written since 1936 has been written, directly or indirectly, against totalitarianism and for democratic socialism, as I understand it". He might then get some feeling of the thinking of that very complex man and his suspicion of all massive organisations.

MICHAEL DUANE

ORWELL AND TOTALITARIANISM

Antony Milne's letter (January) is but the latest attempt to depict Orwell as something he was most decidedly not—a cold warrior and an opponent of socialism in any form. True, he was against Stalinism—he had seen it at work in Spain—but he was also a member of the Independent Labour Party and a contributor to the Labour Left paper, *Tribune*.

When Gollancz refused to publish *Animal Farm*, Orwell refused to have it published by Right-wing publishers because it was, he said, a critique of communism from the Left. When the Duchess of Atholl tried to involve him in the League for European Freedom, he attacked her for criticising Soviet expansionism while ignoring British imperialism in India, and added: "I belong to the Left, and must work inside it, much as I hate Russian imperialism. . .".

1984 wasn't just directed against the Soviet Union but against any form of totalitarianism. Orwell wrote: "The scene of the book is laid in Britain to emphasize that . . . totalitarianism, if not fought against could triumph anywhere".

If Antony Milne imagines that totalitarianism is confined to the Left he should try reading the *Salisbury Review*. And if he wants an example of "doublethink", he need look no further than Reagan's naming of the MX missile "the peacemaker", or Thatcher's talk of rolling back the frontiers of the State while strengthening its coercive institutions. Does Mr Milne seriously think that Orwell, who was ruthless in his exposure of hypocrites of any stripe, would place himself in the same camp as these two?

Orwell's works circulate widely in the East, published by groups who see themselves as defending socialism against its Stalinist foes. The latest example is a translation of *Homage to Catalonia*, made by a Warsaw socialist group. Perhaps an exchange of ideas with such groups, some of which call themselves socialist-humanists, would be more fruitful than singing hymns of praise to the rulers of Oceania.

TERRY LIDDLE

CHRISTMAS AND THE PURITANS

Concerning Karl Heath's article, *Christian Christmas on Secular Holiday?* (December 1984), I would add that the English Puritans, when they had the power to do so, imposed restrictions on the celebration of Christmas similar to those already enforced by their co-religionists in the New England colonies in America, and by the Presbyterians in Scotland. In 1644 the Parliament forbade the celebration of Christmas, and ordered that 25 December be observed as a market day. The festivities then traditional were denounced as heathen practices. These prohibitions remained throughout the period of the Commonwealth, Christmas being reinstated on the Restoration in 1660.

English Nonconformity, however, continued in its refusal to observe Christmas, and, like the Scottish Presbyterians, returned only gradually during the second half of the 19th century to the holding of services on Christmas Day.

As to the emergence of Santa Claus, by most accounts his appearance in what is now the United States owed more to the Dutch settlers in 17th-century New Amsterdam—prior to its becoming the English Colony of New York—than to the 18th-century Moravian settlers in Pennsylvania. His name appears to derive from *Sinter Klaas*, the colloquial Dutch corruption of the name of Saint Nicholas, whose feast day, 6 December, has long been especially observed in Holland as the day of giving presents to children. Calvinist efforts to suppress the traditional "Popish" celebrations of that particular day had little success.

The English settlers transferred this observance to 25 December, and so the giving of presents to children was added to the exciting Christmas festivities. As was noted by Washington Irving, Santa Claus became a benevolent rather than a saintly old man. And in 1863 he was first depicted in the garb by which he has ever since been recognisable.

Thereafter, he crossed the Atlantic, and by the end of last century was known throughout the British Empire. During this century he has become well known—by various names—in many a foreign land.

Commercialism has, indeed, helped much to give him the world stature he now enjoys. And, undoubtedly, that of Jesus Christ on 25 December, has suffered accordingly.

Karl Heath has ably shown, Christmas is an essentially non-Christian celebration.

R. J. M. TOLHURST

A MEETING WITH STEWART HEADLAM

I have but recently seen Nigel H. Sinnott's article on Stewart Headlam which was published in the November 1984 issue of *The Freethinker*.

My mother and her sisters were among those London County Council schoolchildren who cherished his memory and in later years sat at his feet. I remember being told of a visit they paid with Headlam to the National Gallery. He stood before Titian's Bacchus and Ariadne and said, "Now remember, these are all yours" — a way of looking at national possessions sometimes forgotten nowadays.

Headlam's use of Blake's Jerusalem verses as heading to his paper, *The Church Reformer*, was the beginning of the popularity that they later attained.

In 1924 I was a small boy on holiday at Sheringham. One day on the promenade we saw a bath chair approaching, in it an elderly cleric. "It's Stewart Headlam", said my mother, and hastened to renew her acquaintance with him. We children were introduced and shook hands. In November he died.

It was a meeting I always remembered. Later I learned what I could about him, and that contributed something towards making me one of Mr Sinnott's chimeras, perhaps neither so mythical or rare as he supposes! But thank you for an excellent article.

R. L. HALE

CORRECTION

May I make a couple of tiny factual corrections to Margaret McLroy's extremely generous review of my book *Staying Power*? It was Cowper, not Southey, who wrote the lines:

I pity them [not thee] greatly, but I must be mum,
For how could we do without sugar and rum?

By the way, I do know the poem is satirical; but I didn't think readers needed this pointed out. Understatement, it seems, is no less dangerous a device than that notorious boomerang, irony!

PETER FRYER

OBITUARY

Ivor Montague

Ivor Montague, a leading figure in the British film industry, aged 80.

Christopher Brunel writes: Two of my early memories of Ivor Montague, were in the 1920s when he was a partner in a film editing business with my late father, Adrian Brunel. Montague, son of the banker Lord Swaythling, was both proud of his Jewish ancestry and critical of religion. A snobbish school teacher was lecturing on the origin of names and took the young Ivor's family name as an example, saying his name generations before would probably have been Muntague; Ivor instantly corrected him and said: "No, Sir, it was Samuel."

Ivor Montague one day came to my father and asked if he could borrow a dark-covered thriller. Family commitments required him against his will to attend synagogue, but he did not want to be bored by the service. Later, he put the seal on his atheism by becoming a member of the Communist Party. Like everything he did, he became a prominent member, and in 1932 the joint editorial staff of the Communist *Daily Worker*, specialising in foreign affairs.

He was equally prominent in international table tennis and the world peace movement. Diverse as these interests might seem, they both took him to near and distant parts of the world. With my father he imported the early silent classics of Soviet cinema. These were shown at the Film Society in London, often after battles with the then extremely narrow-minded British Board of Film Censors.

A short obituary can only outline the salient activities of Ivor Montague's very full life. He was a pioneer in so much that he did—and in everything he was persuasive and brimming over with humour.

Mr. H. H. Pearce

Nigel H. Sinnott writes: Harry Hastings Pearce, who has died at the age of 87, was a distinguished figure in Australian and New Zealand freethought circles for over 60 years. He was born at Ballarat, Victoria, and as a young man moved to Melbourne. There he met rationalists and started to collect freethought books and journals.

In 1923 he was transferred by his employers to Brisbane and joined the Queensland Rationalist Association. It was here he first bought a copy of *The Freethinker*, edited by Chapman Cohen. "I have never experienced Christian conversion", he wrote later, "but I feel sure that no Christian ever saw the light more so than I did then".

The following year he was transferred again by his employers — he was with the same company for 46 years — this time to New Zealand.

Harry joined the New Zealand Rationalist Association and became a committee member. His only surviving colleague from this period is James O. Hanlon of Auckland. Harry wrote articles for the Association's journal, the *Truth Seeker* (later the *N.Z. Rationalist*) and, in his own words, "kept up a continuous stream of letter writing to the local papers, taking on all comers, including a number of clergymen". To avoid embarrassment to his employers he adopted the *nom-de-plume* of Prophanum Vulgus (the common or irreverent crowd) to signify his identification with ordinary working people and democratic principles. On his travels he haunted second-hand bookshops, amassed a considerable library, and acquired the reputation of being the leading authority on New Zealand freethought history.

In 1938, at his request, the company transferred Harry Pearce back to Melbourne. He and his wife bought a house in the working-class western suburb

of Footscray which afforded space for the growth of Harry's library and archives. He joined the Victorian Branch of the Australian Society for the Study of Labour History and was a regular attender of meetings. In 1978 he helped found the short-lived Secular Society of Victoria and delivered a presidential address on "The Early Life of Thomas Paine in England". (Harry owned a copy of the rare first edition, 1794, of Paine's book, *The Age of Reason*.)

Harry Pearce's magnificent library of freethought and radical literature, together with manuscripts, drawings and press cuttings, forms a special collection at the National Library of Australia, Canberra. It comprises an estimated 15,000 titles and would perhaps be worth in the order of \$400,000 (Australian currency). It is a fitting monument to a largely self-educated bibliophile, historian, poet and champion of freethought.

Professor W. Walker

The death of Professor William Walker just before his 65th birthday has meant the loss of a distinguished physician and academic. He was a prominent figure in Scottish humanist circles and a firm supporter of *The Freethinker* to which he contributed several articles.

William Walker was born in Dundee and brought up in a strict Presbyterian discipline. This he rejected at the age of 15. He studied at St Andrew's University, specialising in languages and history. A captain in the Royal Scots, he was wounded at Dunkirk and invalided from the army. He returned to St Andrew's and completed his MA degree.

In 1946 William Walker embarked on a medical career. He held posts in medicine and pathology in Dundee and Newcastle. He was Lecturer in Therapeutics and Senior Registrar in Medicine (Dundee), Research Fellow in Haematology and Medicine (Boston, USA), Consultant Physician and later Reader in Medicine (Aberdeen). During his career his particular interests were clinical haematology, infectious diseases and drug treatment.

He served on various University, Faculty and Health Board Committees and was for a time vice-chairman of the Committee on Review of Medicines. He was a founder member of the Scottish Society of Physicians. Professor Walker was Colombo Plan adviser to the Burmese Government on establishing a school of Paramedical Sciences. He was visiting lecturer in McGill University, Montreal, and visiting lecturer in Kuwait. He was Regius Professor of *Materia Medica* at Aberdeen University, 1973-82, and founder of Aberdeen branch of the Medical Campaign Against Nuclear Weapons.

Professor Walker was a close friend of the late Margaret Knight and succeeded her as president of Edinburgh Humanist Group. He was described in

The Scotsman obituary notice as "a committed humanist" who "wrote thoughtfully on the subject of morals without religion; his own life was a worthy illustration of this theme. His warm, sensitive personality will live on as a lasting inspiration to his wife, his son and daughter and his wide circle of friends".

There was a secular committal ceremony at Aberdeen Crematorium and a memorial meeting at the University.

A Brief Lament

The decline of censorship and of censorious attitudes in the Sixties was part of the post-war social revolution that levelled classes, gave youth a share of the sunshine and accepted that life should be about quality, not just privilege, property and propriety. Full employment and affluence created tolerance, ideas and life styles outside the norm, and legislation followed. I never doubted that the new state of affairs, which everyone else instantly took for granted as if it had always been so, would go into reverse the minute economic growth came to an end, as I knew it must. Now as we move towards depression times that probably will be irreversible because human work and its rewards have been given to computers and robots — a trend that no-one can now stop — and the great mass of the world's population will increasingly be seen as a redundant nuisance best got rid of by war, pestilence and pollution (more direct methods may soon be advocated in some quarters, akin to Hitler's final solution), it is inevitable that governments everywhere, whether elected or not, will endeavour to find a way to bring the democratic era to an end.

New police powers, mind control through control of the Press and media, education for the needs of the state rather than the individual, with the indoctrination of an official view of the new norms prescribed by the state as official educational policy, is what we have to expect. Censorship in its many forms is returning everywhere and greeted by apathy, because we are too tired or too afraid to admit what is happening. I have spoken and written much in the past to help humane reforms and causes. All I can do now is give a little moan of despair at the waste of it all and hope that a new anger is growing somewhere in the bowels of those who have seen their heritage so easily stolen away from them. Not only is the ability to think independently and objectively disappearing from the world I observe about me, but those who try to convey the truth are rapidly losing their right and ability to do so.

O tempora, O mores!

JOHN CALDER

Teacher Fights Back

It has been said that a journey to Ireland is like a trip back through time to the Middle Ages. The victimisation of Eileen Flynn substantiates this contention.

Last year Miss Flynn was dismissed from her post as a secondary teacher at a convent school in New Ross on the grounds that her "life style was in conflict with the Catholic ethos of the school". She was pregnant, unmarried and "living in sin" with the baby's father.

She went to the Employment Appeals Tribunal and lodged an appeal against dismissal on the grounds that she had been sacked because of her pregnancy or related reasons, something which under even the unlightened Irish legal code is not illegal. Amazingly, the Tribunal found against her.

The next step was to take her case to the High Court. There the judge told her that the nuns who run the convent were perfectly in order in sacking her because her life style conflicted with their theological views. He added for good measure that Miss Flynn should consider herself lucky, because in some countries women were stoned for adultery, a punishment stipulated for women, although not for men, by the Bible.

Eileen Flynn decided to appeal against this blatantly biased judgment. A packed meeting in Dublin formed a committee to raise funds for the appeal and to publicise the issues involved. The committee, made up of members of three Irish teachers' unions and other public sector unions, has already got down to the job of raising £5,000. Miss Flynn was not a union member prior to her victimisation. She now realises this was a mistake and has joined.

If the appeal is lost then single parents, separated people, gays, atheists and indeed anyone whose life style the Church does not approve, will be at risk of victimisation by the religious "thought police". But if on this occasion the Church is defeated, it will perhaps think twice in future before dictating how people should lead their lives.

After being refused an account by a bank which was apprehensive about offending the nuns, the appeal organisers have now opened one to receive donations for the High Court appeal which will be heard this month. Donations may be sent to the Eileen Flynn Appeal, Account 6302339, Northern Bank, Finglass, Dublin 11, Republic of Ireland.

The Rev Sun Moon, head of the Unification Church (the Moonies) was described as "a prophet of our time" when he was awarded an honorary degree at the Roman Catholic University of La Plata, in Buenos Aires. The prophet of our time is serving a prison term in the United States for tax evasion.

EVENTS

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

Brighton and Hove Humanist Group. The Prince Albert, Trafalgar Street (adjacent to Brighton Station). Sunday, 3 March, 5.30 pm for 6 pm. Diana Rookledge: Humanist Housing Projects.

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

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

Havering and District Humanist Society. Harold Wood Social Centre, Gubbins Lane and Squirrels Heath Road, Harold Wood. Tuesday, 5 March, 8 pm. Debate: Experiments on Animals.

Humanist Holiday. Easter at Buxton, Derbyshire, 4-11 April. Details from Betty Beer, 58 Weir Road, London SW12, telephone 01-673 6234.

Lewisham Humanist Group. Unitarian Meeting House, 41 Bromley Road, London SE6. Tuesday, 28 February, 7.45 pm. Antony Milne: The Flood—Fact or Fiction.

Sutton Humanist Group. Friends House, Cedar Road, Sutton. Wednesday, 13 March, 7.30 pm for 8 pm. John Leeson: Humanism—the Counselling Dimension.

Voluntary Euthanasia Society. Golden Jubilee Celebration, London, 13-14 April. Details from the VES, 13 Prince of Wales Terrace, London W8, telephone 01-937 7770.

Warwickshire Humanist Group. Room F 107, Lanchester Polytechnic, Coventry. Wednesday, 13 March, 7.30 pm. Richard Hart (former Attorney General, Grenada): Reagan's Threat to World Peace in Central America and the Caribbean.

NATIONAL SECULAR SOCIETY ANNUAL DINNER

Speakers:
LORD WILLIS
BILL CRAIG
DIANA ROOKLEDGE
JIM HERRICK

Chair:
BARBARA SMOKER

Saturday, 23 March, 6.30 pm for 7 pm.

The Paviours Arms,
Page Street, Westminster, London SE1

Tickets £9 from the NSS, 702 Holloway Road,
London N19 3NL, telephone 01-272 1266

Newspaper reports are always required by "The Freethinker". The source and date should be clearly marked and the clippings sent to the Editor at 14 Coundon Road, Coventry, West Midlands CV1 4AW

Gillick: Christian Concern for Girls at Risk

A number of Christian organisations are worried about Victoria Gillick's success over the Department of Health in the Appeal Court which ruled that a circular advising doctors they could prescribe contraceptives for girls under sixteen without parental consent was unlawful.

Mrs Gillick, a Roman Catholic mother of ten, received unqualified backing from Christian pressure groups like the Responsible Society and Care Campaign (the old Nationwide Festival of Light). But even her own church's support has been guarded. The bishops regard her hard-line attitude as damaging to the traditional doctor-patient relationship.

A group of ministers of Unitarian and Free Christian Churches issued a statement declaring that while in agreement with the British Medical Association in opposing premature sexual activity, they recognised the impossibility of preventing it. They believe that the best safeguard "lies in the development of a mutually trusting relationship between parents and their children—that is boys as well as girls of course. But where this trust does not develop—and parents must bear their share of the blame for this—it would be foolish to undermine the trusting relationship which may exist between doctor and under-age patient. Youngsters who wish to have sexual relationships will not be prevented by Mrs Gillick's campaign . . . should it succeed, but they will run a much greater risk of unwanted pregnancy, and in many cases, no doubt, of consequent abortion".

The Church of England Children's Society and the Mothers' Union have also expressed reservations about the Court's decision. The Mothers' Union believes that it will lead to more unwanted pregnancies and abortions. Mrs Gillick's glib comment on this fear was: "There will not be a lot of unwanted pregnancies. The unwanted pregnancies occur when children are left to look after themselves".

One of the most thoughtful—and in the long term damaging—considerations of the Gillick campaign appeared in the *Catholic Herald*. Simon Lee examined Mrs Gillick's motives for bringing the case and possible consequences of the Appeal Court's decision.

Questioning Mrs Gillick's methods of stopping young girls from having sexual intercourse, the Lecturer in Law at King's College, London, said she could have launched a campaign to educate them about the dangers of under-age sex. Another option would be to take Chief Constables to court for not enforcing the law which prohibits sexual intercourse under the age of sixteen.

Instead she took a course of action which "cuts some girls off from all sensible advice and relies

instead on the threats of early motherhood or abortion to deter young girls from early sexual activity. We can talk of sensible advice because the vast majority of girls who consult a doctor are persuaded to discuss the matter with their parents.

"So hitherto doctors have generally worked in favour of parental involvement by overcoming some girls' initial reluctance to talk to their parents.

"The breach in traditional doctor-patient confidentiality sought by Mrs Gillick will make some girls frightened of approaching a doctor in the first place, so the doctor cannot persuade them to consult their parents.

"Some may be deterred from under-age sex . . . others will have sex without contraception. Some of these will become pregnant. They and their children will have to cope with early motherhood. Some will opt for abortions".

Mr Lee emphasises the Catholic bishops' view that a doctor can be right not to inform the parents of a girl under sixteen who seeks advice on contraception. There are parents who are irresponsible or incapable of helping their child.

Referring to the Christian obsession with parental rights, Simon Lee concludes: "Catholics will think long and hard about this aspect of Mrs Gillick's case. Is there an inconsistency between her insistence on parental rights over children and Catholic opposition to abortion, where the Church emphasises the rights of unborn children rather than the wishes of parents".

The Department of Health is appealing to the House of Lords against the ruling.

Police guarded the entrance to Westminster Conference Centre, London, when the annual general meeting of the Catholic Union was held there recently. There was a motion before the meeting which, if passed, would have amounted to a vote of no confidence in the Union's president, the Duke of Norfolk. Only four members voted for the motion which was proposed by a member of Opus Dei. They included Valerie Riches (of the Responsible Society) and Phyllis Bowman (of the Society for the Protection of Unborn Children). The Duke of Norfolk upset hard-line Catholics last year when he denounced the Church's teaching on birth control.

National Secular Society. Public Meeting, Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London WC1, Monday 22 April, 7 pm. Subject: Population and Famine. Full details in march issue of The Freethinker.