

# The Freethinker

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## BLASPHEMY TRIAL: CHURCH AND STATE PERSECUTE WEST GERMAN ATHEISTS

Four members of the Bunte Liste Freiberg in West Germany were put on trial last month for allegedly publishing and distributing blasphemous material. The defendants, three students and a lawyer, have been charged under Article 166 of the country's Criminal Code. The panel of three judges included two practising Catholics. By invoking an obsolete blasphemy law the authorities have accelerated the campaign against atheists. The trial was suspended because of a procedural technicality. A date for the resumption of proceedings was not immediately announced.

The current persecution of West German atheists began with the trial of Birgit Römermann in the summer of 1984. She was put on trial for describing the Church as one of the greatest criminal organisations in history. Her appeal against a heavy fine was dismissed.

The Bunte Liste Freiberg — the name means "Rainbow Group" — sponsored a week of anti-clerical activities, which consisted to a large extent of speeches and discussion concerning the influence of religion in public life. The publicity material included a poster showing a priest holding a glove puppet of God. Protruding from the priest's pocket is a copy of the 1933 Nazi-Vatican concordat.

The Catholic bishop of Freiberg's deputy requested the authorities to apprehend those responsible under an ancient blasphemy law. When the leader of the organisation and the person legally responsible for the poster were arrested, colleagues distributed a leaflet version of the illustration. They were also arrested, their homes searched and relatives harassed by the police.

According to the BLF, the fact that they were brought before a jurors' court was significant, "insofar as that court only tries cases that in all probability will lead to prison sentences of more

than one year, or are of more than average importance". The jury threw out the indictment. But the Public Prosecutor appealed and the jury's verdict was overruled.

The BLF described the trial as "part of a systematic campaign of persecution against Church opponents all over Germany. By a series of criminal proceedings, and investigations, by house searching and confiscating, prohibiting information and materials, West German police and justice are presently launching the attempt to criminalise the public display of anti-religious opinions, as well as to suspend the constitutional right of free opinion.

"Thus blasphemy proceedings have also been instituted in Göttingen, Aachen, Mainz, Tübingen, Münster, Heidelberg, München, Köln, Bonn and Düsseldorf.

"This massive campaign of persecution, however, is practically unknown to the public, for the West German media, with few exceptions, suppress all news of it. The Munich *Süddeutsche Zeitung* even refuses to print paid advertisements for our magazine on the legal persecution of Church opponents in the Federal Republic of Germany".

The Church and civil authorities were incensed by the reminder to the public of the concordat with the Vatican that enabled Hitler to achieve international respectability. This section of the poster was described as being "particularly offensive" to the Catholic Church. Undeniable historical facts cannot even be mentioned in West Germany as they may compromise the campaign for the restoration of ecclesiastical power.

On 22 October, the day the trial began, a deputation from the National Secular Society delivered a letter of protest to the West German Embassy in London. The NSS pointed out that the

(continued on back page)

# The Freethinker

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# NEWS A

## SYMBOL OF TERROR

Christian apologists are adept at rewriting history and whitewashing their appalling record. Thus the Rev Kate Compson, a minister in the United Reformed Church, recently made the *Church of England Newspaper* "Sayings of the Week" column with her statement: "By contrast with the swastika, the unarmed Christian cross has, to date, curiously avoided sending a shudder down the spines of most people".

The swastika — which, it should be remembered, was the emblem of a Christian State that signed a concordat with the largest Christian Church — terrorised Europe for about thirty years. The "unarmed Christian cross", on the other hand, was a symbol of terror, aggression and conquest for many centuries. "The prince of peace" and "the king of love" are two of the many flattering epithets Christians apply to their saviour. The cross is supposedly a symbol of unique love. Rather than love, it has been a precursor to war and the subjugation of millions.

Historically, Christians' attitude to non-Christians has been moulded by the hysterical vituperation that permeates both the Old and the New Testaments. While a minority, they composed eloquent pleas for religious toleration. But with "the Church triumphant" it was a different story. By the fourth century, the process of Christianising Roman society was far advanced. Two centuries later it was complete, and the Christian reign of terror that lasted a thousand years began in earnest.

Christian missionaries were active participants in wars of conquest and colonisation. During the crusades, the armies of the Lord plundered and pillaged the Near East. Inspired by exhortations of the popes, they were accompanied by hordes of priests and monks carrying the "unarmed Christian cross". Holy Mother Church blessed her murderous crusaders, made vast profits from the sale of relics and cornered the slave trade.

The "unarmed Christian cross" was carried by the armies of Christian nations in numerous colonial wars. The Church blessed their endeavours in return for the privilege of Christianising the conquered, often at sword point.

The "unarmed Christian cross" — like its close relation, the swastika — has sent shudders down Jewish spines. Throughout the New Testament the Jews are defamed and projected as the arch-enemy. The polemics of Christian leaders and teachers, many of them now numbered among the saints, fostered fierce hatred and provoked violent outrages

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# S AND NOTES

## WINNING BACKS A LOSER

The Second Vatican Council sent a chilly blast up the kilts of Scotland's conservative Catholics. There has been much dragging of feet and reluctance to implement the Council's decrees. Some priests resigned or retired rather than comply.

Since Vatican II it has been downhill all the way for the Church. Archbishop Winning, leader of Glasgow's 300,000 nominal Catholics, has revealed that less than half of his flock attend Mass on Sunday. In some churches the congregation is made up mainly of women, children and the elderly. According to a former managing editor of the *Scottish Catholic Observer*, "missals, candles, statues, holy pictures and even crucifixes disappeared from most Catholic homes, rosary beads became a rarity, and the once all-pervasive smell of incense all but disappeared from the churches".

Archbishop Winning has been endeavouring to promote a Pastoral Plan which he hopes will halt the decline. But after three years only a minority of parishes are involved. In the current issue of the archdiocese journal, the Archbishop states that he aims to make up for what many people see as twenty lost years.

Archbishop Winning's problem is a lost cause, rather than lost years. In his words: "The last decade has seen weekly Mass attendance plummet from fifty per cent to forty per cent right across the country. Given the secularism prevalent in our society . . . this downward slump in attendance is bound to accelerate in the years ahead.

"If so, by the end of the first quarter of the 21st century, there will be very few committed Catholics in Scotland".

Let us hope that he is right.

## VICTORIA'S WATERLOO

Last year the Appeal Court declared illegal the Department of Health's guidelines for doctors giving contraception advice to girls under sixteen without parental consent. The ruling was hailed by Roman Catholic and Protestant groups as a mighty victory. "All Christians should thank God for it", declared the late Raymond Johnston, of Care Trust (formerly the Nationwide Festival of Light).

"It is just too good to be true", trilled Mrs Victoria Gillick, the Roman Catholic mother of ten who had initiated the campaign against medical confidentiality. And so it turned out (from her point of view). The Department appealed to the House of Lords.

Although the Roman Catholic hierarchy — often more circumspect than the zealots — kept a low profile, religious pressure groups, ranging from the Salvation Army to the Muslims, conducted a vigorous

against the Jewish people. The 17th Council of Toledo (694) declared all Jews to be slaves, their property to be confiscated and their children taken away from them at the age of seven. The Fourth Lateran Council (1215) decreed that Jews must wear distinctive clothing, thus making them an easy target for hate-filled Christian fanatics.

Throughout history the "unarmed Christian cross" has been the standard of persecutors of opinion. Wherever it triumphed, the thinker went in fear of life and limb. Libraries and centres of learning were always prime targets for destruction by the clergy and missionaries who accompanied invading armies.

The same Lateran Council that ordered Jews to wear distinctive clothing instructed the bishops and their synods to root out heretics in the parishes. In 1232 Pope Gregory IX handed over control of the Inquisition to the Dominicans ("the hounds of the Lord") and one of their number, Thomas Aquinas, provided the theological justification for putting heretics to death.

Townsppeople and villagers had cause to shudder when the inquisitors arrived in their community. Parents had the duty to denounce their children, and *vice versa*. Suspects were tortured by instruments which were sprinkled with holy water from time to time. The followers of the swastika gassed their victims before burning them; those of the "unarmed Christian cross" burned them alive.

The Bible-inspired witch mania caused spines to shudder throughout Europe from the middle of the fifteenth century. The command "Thou shalt not suffer a witch to live" was regarded as a God-given instruction by Catholic bishop and Protestant reformer alike. It was responsible for thousands of deaths; women were the chief victims, but a large number of men and young children also perished. And as the flames engulfed the victims of religious superstition, the "unarmed Christian cross" was held aloft.

Christians are no longer able to slaughter their opponents and each other. But as the reverend lady's "saying of the week" shows, they still murder truth.

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**A group of Roman Catholics, headed by two priests, demonstrated outside a London cinema against the showing of Jean Luc Godard's controversial film, Hail Mary. A spokesman for the distributors said: "The audience knows that the demonstrators have refused to see the film, although they were invited to do so. It is hard to be persuaded by people who refuse to see what they are criticising".**

pro-Gillick drive. Mrs Gillick's cause was remembered at Mass and prayer appeals were published in the Catholic press. But the Almighty had apparently changed sides, and on 17 October a "bitter, shocked and angry" Mrs Gillick heard the Law Lords' verdict against her. Although winning early battles, she had lost the war against the sex educators, family planners and the perfidious Department of Health.

Victoria Gillick, who, legally speaking, has reached the end of the road, is not likely to accept defeat gracefully. The "ordinary housewife and mother" image projected by her supporters and the religious press is rather misleading. With allies in the House of Commons, she is a very political lady who has been involved with Right-wing groups. Most notable of these was Powellight, which attracted extremist elements in the Monday Club and the National Front. Her "morality" campaign is overtly political too.

Mrs Gillick and her husband published a letter in the *Eastern Daily Press* denouncing "the race relations industry, which is publicly financed". It would be interesting to know how much taxpayers' money, in the form of legal aid, has subsidised her current crusade.

## SABBATARIAN STRONGHOLD FALLS

Perish the thought that *The Freethinker* would gloat over the Lord's Day Observance Society in its hour of tribulation. So we will just mention in passing that Mark Bourne's recent *Guardian* article on the collapse of sabbatarianism in Wales made sorrowful reading for the champions of "our Lord and his day".

Mr Bourne reminded readers that less than thirty years ago buying a Sunday newspaper was a furtive and guilt-ridden affair in many parts of Wales. Where parks were open, children were denied the pleasure of the swing and the roundabout. The streets were empty and the public houses closed. Gardening and car-washing were regarded as devil-inspired desecrations of the Sabbath. Long sermons and long faces were the order of the Lord's day.

Came the Swinging Sixties and heretics in the valleys were actually talking about the prospect of Sunday football. But even then, as Mr Bourne recalled, soliciting support for the opening of public houses on Sunday "required the blind insensitivity of the Englishman". Indeed any murmur about liberalising Sunday was wrathfully denounced by chapel ministers ("gods they almost were . . . a chat on the pavement with them was one step off beatification").

But gradually the resistance to Sunday freedom crumbled. When given the choice, people voted for the right to visit a pub on Sunday; now only two of

the 37 Welsh districts are "dry" on the Sabbath. There are also Sunday markets and sport. Many chapels have closed, some of them demolished and others converted to secular purposes.

Mark Bourne summed it up: "A world has vanished without scarce a breath of protest . . . The great Welsh Sabbath might have been a Pre-Raphaelite dream".

## APE SHOWS ITS TEETH

The Association to Protect Evolution (APE) recently scored another victory over the creationists. The occasion was the annual public meeting in London of the worthy but misnamed Creation Science Movement. Even in such unfamiliar surroundings as Westminster Chapel, APE members and assorted freethinkers put the evolutionist case with considerable vigour.

At first, Alan Lewis of APE was denied the right to put questions and was requested by the chairman to leave the meeting. This did not go down too well with either the evolutionists or the first speaker, Michael Garten, who had not been informed of the "no questions" rule.

Mr Garten's address was about time, geology and the Flood. His attempts to explain the measurement of time with the aid of poles eight feet long were amusing if not enlightening. Mr Garten claimed to be a scientist seeking truth by scientific methods, but his argument that there is some connection between geological catastrophe and the suffering of Christ on the cross was not noticeably scientific. Not was his evidence that God created the earth about four thousand years ago.

Dr David Rosevar's talk was a scriptural *tour de force* with interesting diversions on the nature of Satan and other mythical beings. He helpfully advised the audience that tapes of his speech could be purchased. Another evolutionist also offered tapes of a talk on atheism. He had three takers.

A highlight of the meeting was a film entitled *The Origin of Species*, which had some interesting shots of Downe House, the home of Charles Darwin. The colour photography was superb, some of it rivalling Disney at his best. But the content left much to be desired; opinions attributed to Darwin were in fact those of Lamarck.

Subsequent questioning and discussion showed the creationists to be amazingly ignorant of languages (particularly Hebrew), the history of religion and comparative religion. Their main concern is maintaining blind reliance on their particular hobby-horse.

The creationists have had it their own way for too long. It is gratifying that evolutionists are taking the fight right into the enemy camp. APE is beginning to bite.

# Falling for Religious Confidence Tricks

"We in the National Secular Society are often told our work is done, our aims are accomplished", Barbara Smoker told members in her presidential address to the annual general meeting at Conway Hall, London, on 9 November. "But unfortunately", she said, "our Society is needed today as much as ever. No sooner is one enemy of reason and humanity in retreat than another seems to take its place".

Miss Smoker added that when the NSS was founded in 1866 its chief enemy was the established Church — the Church of England — not only for its Christian supernaturalism, but also for its class politics enshrined in the words of the hymn, "The rich man in his castle, The poor man at his gate, God made them, high or lowly, And ordered their estate".

"With the revival of Roman Catholicism in this country under Cardinal Manning, the Roman Church soon became as much an enemy as the established Church. And all the while, of course, Calvinism, especially in Scotland, continued to generate its own brand of fear and misery.

"Now they are all on the run. All the mainstream churches are in rapid decline, with church-going down to about six per cent in Britain. Yet, paradoxically, people's minds are more imbued with religious and other superstitions than at any time since the Middle Ages.

"Belief in sacred relics and apparitions of the Blessed Virgin is no longer confined to Catholics; belief in miraculous cures and other divine intervention is no longer confined to members of any religion at all. Every credulity is given space in the press and time on television. If disproved, that is non-news, and so the thing lingers on.

"The authenticity of the Turin shroud, the prophecies of Nostradamus, the mysteries of the Bermuda Triangle, the powers of Uri Geller, the promises of astrology, the claims of spiritualism — how often do they have to be exposed for the confidence tricks they are? And all fed by that larger confidence trick that lends intellectual respectability to the religious notion of some cosmic purpose, some reality behind reality, some divine power beyond question.

"In the past four years, the hallucinatory Madonna visions of a group of teenage peasants in Yugoslavia have attracted millions of Italian pilgrims — and, though the local bishop and the Vatican have tried to discourage this credulity, the influx of Italian lire has not been entirely unwelcome to an atheist government. Recently the story has permeated the British press and television — with their inevitable boast of 'an open mind' about such nonsense.

"And in the past four months, similar nonsense

has put the Irish village of Ballinspittle, County Cork, on the map, with hundreds of thousands of people flocking there to see a three-cwt concrete statue of the Blessed Virgin moving. It sways, they say, or it shuffles, or it leans forward, or breathes, or smiles. For some, it even turns into Christ. Since the Ballinspittle phenomena began in July, Madonna statues in no fewer than sixteen other Irish villages have been up to similar tricks, attracting pilgrims with money to spend. In vain does the Catholic hierarchy counsel 'caution'.

"For centuries the churches wooed the people with such wonders, while bribing them with heaven and threatening them with hell. Now modern theologians protest that it is all metaphorical. And they cannot understand why the people react either by forsaking organised religion altogether or by turning to brands that continue to offer miracles and a future life — the extreme evangelical sects, American 'prosperity theology', the house church groups, the clairvoyants, the mediums, the gurus and the faith-healers.

"Another alternative is physiological drug abuse — the enormous increase of which is probably not entirely dissociated from withdrawal of the sort of religion that Marx called 'the opiate of the people'. The law of this country still requires our schools to introduce children to religious doctrine and religious legends ('RI' or 'RE') and to religious practice (the 'daily act of worship'), and, though this generally seems to have no lasting effect, it can well set up a pattern of dependence on one sort of drug or another.

"Nowadays, a non-churchgoer whose acquaintance with theology stopped at the fourth form is more likely than a bishop is to believe in the doctrine of the virgin birth. In the Middle Ages, everyone believed, or at least pretended to believe, literally in the impregnation of the Blessed Virgin by the Holy Ghost in the form of a pigeon. Mainstream Christian theologians and prelates are now trying to do away with such myths, but their pigeons have come home to roost".

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# Bad Language

KARL HEATH

This is no more than a check-list, a limited vocabulary of bad language. A subsequent article will examine the deadly consequences of such misuse.

A few years ago a Sociology lecturer at Reading University was paid £3,000 out of public funds for a report on our eating habits. It included the statement that the daily norm consisted of "three structured food-events characterised by increasing desiccation and geometrification of form through the day". Those unfamiliar with the verbal excesses which have transformed sociology from what should have been a science into a pseudo-science may require a translation. In plain language most of us eat three meals a day, starting with wet and shapeless food such as porridge or cornflakes swimming in milk, progressing later in the day to dryer and more shapely items such as sausages and fish fingers.

One hundred and fifty years ago, August Comte, who invented the term, declared sociology to be the supreme science, although later he subordinated it to non-metaphysical religion, whatever that is. Nevertheless he believed that sociology should draw upon all the other sciences, and all human experience, historical, economic, political and cultural. Modern sociologists forget this and treat their subject in isolation. Mistakenly, they think that a study of human society can be reduced to concepts and mathematical measurement. Worse, they have invented a pseudo-scientific technical jargon. The physical sciences need new terms for new discoveries where existing language does not provide them. Modern sociologists devise strange mystifying terms for notions which, in plain language, are already well-known. Whom are they seeking to impress with this "scientific" vocabulary? I would advise sociology students to eschew **STRUCTURED, PRAXIS, SOCIETAL, COGNITIVE, EXPERIENTIAL** and **AMBIENT**. They should also consult dictionaries before using **PARAMETER** and **PARADIGM**. They might also ask themselves how far their thoughts could be expressed in the language of common sense.

In everyday speech there are noises which conceal absence of thought, or indicate dis-continuity of intellect. "YOU KNOW" is to the cerebral process as cholesterol is to the blood circulation. The irritation caused by "AS OF NOW", "THIS DAY AND AGE", "THIS MOMENT IN TIME", "THAT SAID", "HAVING SAID THAT", "ARGUABLY", "BASICALLY", "DEFINITELY". "IN THE LAST ANALYSIS", "AT THE END OF THE DAY", "IN DEPTH", "NITTY GRITTY", "GUT SITUATION", or "FACING UP TO" should be tempered by the thought that purists in the past may have been equally annoyed when such phrases as "by and large" and "when all is said and done" first emerged.

Nevertheless, one may deplore the suffix "-WISE" applied to nouns, and hope that those addicted to "HOPEFULLY" could learn a little grammar.

"Situation-wise we envision prioritisation as an on-going exercise to programme through-put channels in the decision-making process, bearing in mind the interface feedback". This nonsensical farrago is not untypical of the language of bureaucracy and big business.

The world of politics naturally breeds bad language. I will be accused of partiality because most of my examples come from the Right Wing. If readers can quote more examples from the Left, please help me to correct the imbalance. The bad language of the Left tends to consist of ideological jargon employed in internecine quarrels. On the Right the language is more personal. I know of no publication or politician on the Left descending to the journalistic depths of the *Sun*.

Let us imagine a politician of the Right. Not all of his bad language is conscious; some is almost Freudian. When he refers to an ethnic minority, or demonstrators or social claimants as "THESE PEOPLE", he reveals his hatred. He claims to be supported by a "SILENT MAJORITY", a contradiction in terms because he cannot have counted the number of people who hold views which they do not express. Apparently, they have not responded to his appeal "TO STAND UP AND BE COUNTED". He does not like demonstrators. With his public school-boy humour he calls them "RENT-A-MOB", although he has never met anyone paid to demonstrate. He calls the Conservative Conference well-organised, but demonstrations are "WELL ORCHESTRATED", implying a conspiratorial hidden hand. Communists are "SELF-CONFESSED", again implying criminality, no matter how proudly they may proclaim their beliefs, and, as in the final words of the Communist Manifesto, disdain to conceal them. If he were to be asked whether he was a self-confessed Conservative he would be puzzled.

He does not like the working class and yet sometimes pretends that classes do not exist. He therefore refers to the "WORK FORCE", or, meaninglessly, to "THE WORKING CLASSES". (Another of his affectations is to speak of "A NONSENSE" rather than nonsense.) For a politician he is strangely ambivalent about the word "politics", and sometimes pretends that he is not so engaged. Before the war the Tories often complained that the Labour Party had brought politics into local government. They themselves were "Citizens", "Rate-payers" or "Independents", even though their campaigns were run from local Conservative headquarters. Today he is prone to describe his opponents' activities as "POLITICALLY-MOTIVATED" (Har-

## Guy A. Aldred

ANDREW WHITEHEAD

Guy Aldred is perhaps the least forgotten of the subjects of this series. He died as recently as October 1963 in Glasgow, the city where he had lived for many years. Aldred was an ardent advocate of anarchism, or "anti-Parliamentary Communism" as he sometimes preferred to put it, and was the proprietor of the Bakunin Press. His early years in London, however, saw a remarkable transformation in the young Aldred—from Anglican and Tory, to atheist and syndicalist.

Guy Alfred Aldred was a precocious young man. The first of his three autobiographical writings appeared when he was just twenty-one, and bore the grand but not inaccurate title, *From Anglican Boy-Preacher to Anarchist Socialist Impossibilist*. The self-importance with which Aldred recorded his pubescent social and political endeavours embarrassed him in later life. "There was so much to tell", he recalled, "and life was passing quickly. I raised what money I could; sacrificed my dinners six days a week; saved coppers; and attempted to describe the evolution of my thought, from State Church allegiance to Anarchist Revolutionary Communism and Individualism in a caption. This desire was ridiculous, impetuous, schoolboyish". Yet it was also typical of Aldred's energy and enthusiasm, and after all the young Guy Aldred had quite a story to tell.

Aldred was born on Guy Fawkes day 1886, in a model dwelling on Farringdon Road in London. His parents had married a few weeks earlier, but never set up home together. Both later contracted bigamous marriages, which Guy Aldred said convinced him of the worthlessness of the institution and prompted his advocacy and practice of "free love".

The main influence on Guy's religious and political development was his maternal grandfather, Charles Holdsworth. He was a bookbinder who followed in the best traditions of artisan radicalism; he was an opponent of the Boer War and a fierce critic of Government policy in Ireland and India. It was his grandfather who, when Guy returned home once sickened by a dissenting minister's denunciation of atheism, took Guy into his room locking the door behind them, and gave the boy a pamphlet by Ingersoll and a small essay by Bradlaugh "and told me to 'thank God for Charles Bradlaugh'".

Aldred recalled that his first adventures in pro-

old Wilson also used this term to condemn the Seamen's strike.) If a local Police Committee seeks to fulfil its proper function it is accused of seeking "POLITICAL CONTROL" over the police, not, we may note, democratic control.

He favours "INCENTIVES" — but only for the rich. From the poor he requires "RESTRAINT" — "FOR THE GOOD OF THE NATION". It seems that the patriotism of the rich has its price, at least enough for expense-account lunches at "Hiron-delle". "PROFITS" are good for the nation, but wage-rises are "LIVING BEYOND OUR MEANS". Strikes "HOLD THE NATION TO RANSOM", but monopolies, multi-nationals, closures, redundancies and asset-stripping are harmless.

Note that politicians and journalists have different words for "say" and "speak". One's own representative may "claim", "declare", "maintain" or "suggest", while one's opponents "SHOUT", "CLAMOUR" or "COMPLAIN". They may be "MOANING MINNIES". At the level of the *Sun* they will "WHINE", "BLEAT", "SHRIEK" and "BRAY".

On the Left, Aneurin Bevan, many years ago, created some uproar by calling the Tories "VERMIN". Usually, however, the Left, especially the more ideological Left, prefers to debase language by the misuse of such terms as "REVISIONIST", "DEVIATIONIST", "OPPORTUNIST", "RENEGADE", "INFILTRATOR" or "CHAUVINIST".

There remains the international sphere. Is it not misuse of language to call the Common Market "EUROPE" when more than half of Europe is outside it? Does it increase understanding for the "WEST" to include Japan and Singapore, while the "EAST" includes Hungary, Cuba and Nicaragua? "THE FREE WORLD" includes vile regimes in South Korea, Turkey and Guatemala, and would still include South Africa but for the recent embarrassment.

Worst of all is the "MEGA-DEATH" language of modern war and nuclear weapons. Vietnam had its "BODY-COUNTS" and "KILL-RATIOS". "SEARCH AND DESTROY" and, obscenely, "PACIFY" meant shoot, bomb or "napalm" anything that moved. "LIMITED RESPONSE". "TACTICAL WEAPONS" and "THEATRE WEAPONS" transcend by far the limits of all previous warfare and would equal a hundred Hiroshimas. Perhaps the nastiest perversion of thought is the suggestion that an alliance with the United States without our own bomb would be "SHELTERING UNDER THE AMERICAN NUCLEAR UMBRELLA", a juxtaposition of ideas so appallingly contradictory that it is almost beyond belief that anyone could have devised it.

Naturally, what I consider here to be A VIGOROUS EXPRESSION OF OPINION may be to others A STRIDENT DIATRIBE OF BIAS.

paganda were on behalf of the Anti-Nicotine League, the Band of Hope and the Total Abstinence Movement. Unusually for such a youthful convert, he remained a convinced abstainer from both cigarettes and alcohol, though he was opposed to temperance, which he considered merely an excuse for moderate drinking, and also to prohibition, putting more store in personal example.

Guy was confirmed in the Church of England, and some of his relatives apparently harboured hopes that he would take holy orders. He was just fifteen, however, when — by his own account — the first seeds of doubt were implanted in his mind. An Indian Rajah attracted considerable publicity for bringing with him to Britain a travelling God. Guy slowly began to realise that Christianity held no monopoly of wisdom, and over the next five years, gradually but decidedly, Aldred moved from Church to atheism.

At the age of sixteen, Guy Aldred delivered his first sermon as a Boy Preacher at a Christian Social Mission in Holloway. Within a matter of days, he came across the Theist teachings of Charles Voysey, which exercised a considerable influence on him. Voysey was one of those peculiar figures who was for decades on the fringes of the secularist movement yet was never a part of it. Thirty years earlier he had helped, in part unwittingly, to mould Annie Besant into a freethinker. In December 1902, Guy was granted an interview with Voysey — then in his seventies — at his home in Hampstead. Exactly how Voysey, once an Anglican vicar, had responded to receiving out of the blue forty-eight closely written pages of foolscap from a boy of sixteen criticising his theistic ideas, one can only guess. But that first interview went well, and Aldred suggests that it was Voysey's influence which finally turned him away from Christianity, though Aldred's own association with theism was brief.

"Voysey's great error was to throw the wrong thing out of Christianity", Aldred wrote in *Dogmas Discarded*, published in 1940 and on which much of this article is based. "He threw out Jesus of Nazareth and retained God the father. He ought to have thrown out God the father and have left behind Jesus of Nazareth. If you cast God out of Christianity, you throw out all the theology, all the miracles, and all the superstition. You have left only the very human story of Jesus the carpenter of Nazareth, a number of wonderful parables and a simple, central ethic of brotherhood and service. If you cast out Jesus, you may certainly throw out a number of miracle stories and also the worship of a dead book, but you retain the cardinal miracle, the idea of God. This idea is a blot on the universe and a negation of the real harmony of nature".

Guy was, for a while, sufficiently enamoured of theism to lecture as a voluntary Theistic Missioner at Clerkenwell Green and other outdoor pitches. In

September 1904, Aldred changed spots, establishing the Clerkenwell Freethought Mission and subscribing briefly to what he later described as a kind of Huxleyan Agnosticism before moving on to a "netheistic" standpoint. He recalled that he would address not less than three, and sometimes five, meetings in the course of a Sunday. He was given considerable indulgence in the columns of the *Islington Gazette* though other correspondents to the paper were of the opinion he should be prosecuted for blasphemy.

Towards the end of 1904, Guy began an association with W. Stewart Ross ("Saladin"), editor of the *Agnostic Journal*, which lasted till Ross's death two years later. Ross was very much in the anti-Bradlaugh camp of the freethought movement, and that was where Aldred also came to stand. "I think Bradlaugh's greatness", Aldred wrote, "was a very small quantity in his make-up. I do not like his Atheism because it is pedantic and mincing. Yet I must confess that every stage of the struggle over the parliamentary oath and the right to affirm revealed a greatness of character . . . Bradlaugh's Atheism was a miserable pretence, although his stand on the oath was a magnificent expression of principle".

The self-styled Reverend Guy Aldred, "Minister of the Gospel of Revolt", had been going through a political metamorphosis every bit as far reaching as his religious *volte face*. Aldred recalled that it was his involvement in the Peel Institute, a Quaker Christian Brotherhood in Clerkenwell, that "converted me from a kind of Social Service Democratic Toryism to advanced Radicalism". He quickly progressed beyond radicalism, and in March 1905, aged eighteen, he joined the main Marxist organisation of the day, the Social Democratic Federation. Although he remained a member for eighteen months and wrote for the SDF's paper, *Justice*, Aldred never really found a comfortable niche within the Federation. His irreligion was not well regarded by the Federation's leaders while Aldred, for his part, did not take kindly to the doctrinaire teachings of the SDF. He considered joining the more fundamentalist Socialist Party of Great Britain, but decided against it, and very quickly moved into the Anarchist camp.

Having toyed with and finally rejected the idea of standing for Parliament as a revolutionary and atheist (he warned the readers of the *Islington Gazette* that "if returned, my fight will be on a par with that of Bradlaugh's — only greater") Guy began an association, again brief, with the Freedom Group of anarchists. In the following years, as Aldred moved towards anarcho-syndicalism, he established a number of transient groups, among them the Communist Propaganda Group and the Industrial Union of Direct Actionists.

He set up home with the Russian-born Rose



Witcop, whose sister, Millie, was the partner of the East End anarchist leader, Rudolf Rocker. They eventually married in 1926, a couple of years after they had separated, to save Rose from the threat of deportation. She was at the time very active in the birth control movement.

Aldred made a number of appearances in court during a lifetime of unremitting political activity, and had several spells in jail. His first imprisonment in 1909 was for sedition in publishing a suppressed Indian nationalist journal. Aldred was a devoted self-publicist, publishing and republishing his political pamphlets and various reminiscences. Some of his

Bakunin Press publications of the 1940s can still be found in radical bookshops. He had a particular regard for the early nineteenth-century infidel, Richard Carlile, subject of several of his pamphlets.

Guy Aldred appears to have been a rather difficult person to get on with. Emma Goldman, doyenne of the anarchist movement, described Aldred as "not only dumb but also unbelievably conceited" when she encountered him in the Thirties. His substantial corpus of autobiographical writings is perhaps a reflection of that conceit, but it has the merit of allowing us to trace in detail an extraordinary intellectual conversion.

## A Scientist's Thoughts on Religion CHARLES DARWIN

Despite irrefutable evidence to the contrary, Charles Darwin's Christian detractors have frequently asserted that he really believed in God. This extract from his autobiography exposes the falsity of their claim.

On 7 March 1837 I took lodgings in Great Marlborough Street in London and remained there for nearly two years until I was married. During these two years I finished my Journal, read several papers before the Geological Society, began preparing the manuscript for my *Geological Observations* and arranged for the publication of the *Zoology of the Voyage of the Beagle*. In July I opened my first note-book for facts in relation to *The Origin of Species*, about which I had long reflected, and never ceased working on for the next twenty years. . .

During these two years I was led to think much about religion. Whilst on board the *Beagle* I was quite orthodox, and I remember being heartily laughed at by several of the officers (though themselves orthodox) for quoting the Bible as an unanswerable authority on some point of morality. I suppose it was the novelty of the argument that amused them. But I had gradually come, by this time, to see that the Old Testament, from its manifestly false history of the world, with the Tower of Babel, the rainbow as a sign, etc, and from its attributing to God the feelings of a revengeful tyrant, was no more to be trusted than the sacred books of the Hindus, or the beliefs of any barbarian. The question then continually rose before my mind and would not be banished: is it credible that if God were now to make a revelation to the Hindus, would he permit it to be connected with the belief in Vishnu, Shiva, etc, as Christianity is connected with the Old Testament. This appeared to me utterly incredible.

By further reflecting that the clearest evidence would be requisite to make any sane man believe in the miracles by which Christianity is supported; that the more we know of the fixed laws of nature the more incredible do miracles become; that the men at that time were ignorant and credulous to a degree almost incomprehensible by us; that the Gospels cannot be proved to have been written simultaneously with the events; that they differ in many important details, far too important, as it seemed to me, to be admitted as the usual inaccuracies of eye-witnesses; by such reflections as these, which I give, not as having the least novelty or value, but as they influenced me, I gradually came to disbelieve in Christianity as a divine revelation. The fact that many false religions have spread over large portions of the Earth like wild-fire had some weight with me. Beautiful as is the morality of the New Testament, it can hardly be denied that its perfection depends in part on the interpretation which we now put on metaphors and allegories.

But I was very unwilling to give up my belief: I feel sure of this, for I can well remember often and often inventing day-dreams of old letters between distinguished Romans and manuscripts being discovered at Pompeii or elsewhere which confirmed in the most striking manner all that was written in the Gospels. But I found it more and more difficult, with free scope given to my imagination, to invent evidence which would suffice to convince me. Thus disbelief crept over me at a very slow rate, but was at last complete. The rate was so slow that I felt no distress, and have never since doubted even for a single second that my conclusion was correct.

I can indeed hardly see how anyone ought to wish Christianity to be true; for if so the plain language of the text seems to show that the men who do not believe, and this would include my father, brother and almost all my best friends, will be everlastingly punished. And this is a damnable doctrine.

# BOOKS

WITH FRIENDS POSSESSED: A LIFE OF EDWARD FITZGERALD, by Robert Bernard Martin. Faber, £17.50

Edward FitzGerald (1809-1883), the translator of *The Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam*, was a gentleman of taste and leisure who didn't discover that poem until he was already 35 and had formed an attachment to a younger man who had taught himself Persian. FitzGerald was also one of the great letter writers of English literature.

Professor Martin undertakes to describe FitzGerald's life by charting the course of his many intense friendships with other men. There was often a strong physical basis to these friendships, for he was very much attracted to good-looking young men, but FitzGerald seems to have been unaware of what now, post-Freud, is obviously homoerotic. Martin does not try to make a sensational revelation out of this side of his subject's life, but he very sensibly explains to jaded modern readers that these friendships were sometimes passionate but always chaste loves.

The FitzGerald family was as rich and as eccentric as you could find in a century full of rich eccentrics. Edward FitzGerald's brother John was a preacher who drew large crowds with his evangelical zeal and his peculiar habits. "While lecturing or preaching he would abstractedly take out the contents of his pockets and place them neatly on the lectern, then slowly remove his boots and stockings, which he would carefully examine without interrupting his discourse".

A less eccentric sister was also bitten by the evangelical bug, but FitzGerald himself was a sceptic. He found religion attractive, flirted briefly with it, but in the end couldn't accept it. He settled on a "lightly disbelieving tolerance of Christianity", as Martin puts it. He found the vaguely theistic, *carpe diem* philosophy of the *Rubaiyat* a satisfying middle course between strict religion and the dry science of Darwinism.

When he came down from Cambridge with a pass degree in 1830 he began a life that resembles more than anything else an agreeable long vac. While the rest of the family lived in various stately homes dotted around England, he took lodgings and tried to recreate the scholarly disorder of his digs in Cambridge. He lived in makeshift lodgings for most of his life, finally moving into a house of his own when he was 60. He was a dilettante. He wrote verses and collected art and dabbled in music. His "slender aptitude as an original poet" was overshadowed by his ability as a translator. Besides the *Rubaiyat* he translated Sophocles and Calderón, the latter well enough to earn a medal from the Spanish Royal Academy in 1881. And over the years he wrote

# FREETHINKER

thousands of letters to his many friends, among them the Carlyles and the Tennyson brothers, Alfred and Frederick.

His talent for friendship was limited to relationships with other men. He discovered Persian through Edward Cowell, and his fondness for William Browne was so strong that he annually celebrated the anniversary of their first meeting. The most foolish thing he ever did was to allow himself to drift into a disastrous marriage at 47, after an unenthusiastic engagement of seven years. He and Lucy Barton were married in November 1856, and the marriage was over by the following August. When FitzGerald's great friend, William Browne, was killed in a riding accident, FitzGerald made the remarkable decision to go to Lowestoft and look for friends among the sailors there. He was unself-conscious to the point of child-like innocence about cruising the beaches at night with a bottle of rum and picking up sailors. His behaviour excited comment, if not the sailors. Finally the friend he found was a heavy-drinking family man, Posh Fletcher, a fisherman, who FitzGerald thought was one of the three greatest men he had ever known, the other two being Thackeray and Tennyson.

Confronted with the thousands of letters that FitzGerald wrote, the biographer understandably finds the *Rubaiyat* a slighter work than one might if one had not read all those letters. It is clear that for Martin the letters, "among the great letters in the language", are the real treasure of FitzGerald's literary production. In those letter-writing days you could shut yourself up in East Anglia and live via the postman. Martin says, "It does not appear accidental that he spent so much of his life in a physically remote spot where a commentary on life became the surrogate for living it". Collected in four volumes by A. McK. and A. B. Terhune in 1980, the letters "constantly give us new glances at an affectionate, innocent, cultivated, and enquiring mind". This second-hand living, in Martin's view, is also reflected in the preference for translating other authors rather than writing original work of his own.

Edward FitzGerald, known mainly as the translator of one popular poem, deserves to be recognized as the prodigious and entertaining letter-writer he was. Martin's biography detaches him from Omar Khayyam and shows the real, complex Victorian behind the devil-may-care Oriental fatalist of the English *Rubaiyat*.

SARAH LAWSON

# REVIEWS

**RADICALISM AND FREETHOUGHT IN NINETEENTH-CENTURY BRITAIN: THE LIFE OF RICHARD CARLILE**, by Joel H. Wiener. Greenwood Press, £24.95

In this first scholarly study of Richard Carlile (1790-1843), Professor Wiener has drawn on a formidable amount of primary material, most importantly the Carlile Papers (now in California) and Carlile's voluminous periodical publications. From this Wiener has skillfully reconstructed Carlile's life and thought, his intellectual evolution from Christianity to deism to atheism and, finally, to a (puzzling) form of allegorical Christianity; his intermittent imprisonment for publishing works by Paine and others, and his involvement in such advanced causes as birth control and feminism. Wiener's narrative is lively and smooth — perhaps too smooth. One has little impression of the problematic. Yet there is much about Carlile that is puzzling. Thus in one place Wiener states that "He was an activist, a doer" (p.265); elsewhere he writes of "Carlile's dogged intellectualism" (p.180).

Wiener is, perhaps, most unhelpful on Carlile's final phase of allegorical Christianity. Was he an apostate from the cause of infidelity, or did he use Christian terminology for covert, irreligious ends? Was he a clever Fuerbachian or a senile Christian? Wiener neither offers a clear answer, nor does he come to grips with the question.

Assessments of Carlile will, of course, differ. For Daniel O'Connell, he was a "comical Blade" (p.171); for Wiener, he was "a complex, obdurate, impassioned man" (p.212). Carlile perceptively described himself as a "no-secrecy sort of man" (p.264). Unlike most earlier freethinkers, Carlile was almost obsessed with speaking his mind, observing that he would rather "be mentally free in prison than mentally shackled out of prison" (p.211). This passion may well have led Carlile to avowed atheism and mortalism. He was, very likely, the third avowed British atheist — with Matthew Turner and Shelley before him — and possibly the first avowed British mortalist, when he asserted in *The Republican* of 3 December 1819 "That man has no soul, or immortal part, may be proved to demonstration" (p.230).

Although Professor Wiener's book is a most welcome addition to the freethought literature, it does not, in my opinion, do full justice to Carlile's importance in the history of ideas. The book is also

curiously misleading and deficient. Whereas the subtitle aptly describes the body of the work (pp.1-267), the title more accurately describes the appended "Bibliographical Essay" (pp.269-275), which contains a general and, I think, irrelevant bibliography of nineteenth-century radicalism. Yet there is no bibliography of Carlile's mss and printed works, a most regrettable lacunae considering the bewildering number of pamphlets and journals he either edited or wrote. Carlile's publications call out for careful bibliographical description.

DAVID BERMAN

## Catholics With a Conscience

*Conscience* is the journal of an American organisation, Catholics for a Free Choice (2008 17th Street NW, Washington DC 20009). It describes itself on its masthead as "The Voice of Pro-Choice Catholics".

It would be interesting to know if anything remotely similar was published in this country by British Catholic feminists. *Conscience* is sophisticated, highly political, unrelentingly feminist, well produced and immensely readable. In addition to long analytical and review articles, it publishes two pages of eye-opening news reports culled from the international press: "In Dundalk, Ireland, a woman died of cancer after being refused treatment by doctors who feared damaging the foetus she was carrying. . .". Her husband is heroically suing in the Irish courts on this issue.

Another news item gives us a penetrating insight into the Sanctity of Life lobby in the United States: "A total of 122 acts of violence against family planning clinics and organisations which advocate reproductive rights were reported in 1984. . .". This figure includes among others:

Death Threats	17
Arson Cases	13
Bombings	11
Assault and Battery	6

Truly the phrase "Sanctity of Life" has become associated with mindless hooliganism, not just with doctrinal intolerance and bigotry.

These Catholic women writers and journalists have now arrived at the stage of enlightenment that freethinkers reached more than half a century ago. Why do they still remain within the fold at all? That is the puzzle freethinkers face every time they come across Catholics who really care for freedom and equality. I can't pretend to answer it.

MADELEINE SIMMS

# Picking up a Penguin, 1935—1985

T. F. EVANS

This year marks the 50th anniversary of Penguin Books whose paperbacks revolutionised reading habits in Britain. It would be impossible to do justice to their range and catholicity, and although many other firms now publish in paperback, Penguins still lead the field.

*The musical sound, and to a lesser degree the work of art and its reproduction, are beginning to hold a place in literate society once firmly held by the word.*

—George Steiner

In 1967 the distinguished literary scholar, George Steiner, published a collection of essays under the general title, *Language and Silence*. In one of the essays, "The Retreat From the Word", he argued that civilisation is no longer so firmly based on a foundation of literacy as we had always thought.

Steiner considered the work of Marshall McLuhan, the Canadian who evolved a theory of the retreat from the word, as very similar to his own. McLuhan placed most emphasis on the growth of electronic means of communication, and in *The Gutenberg Galaxy* suggested, in effect, that a civilisation based on the once miraculous invention of movable type was now in its final stages.

No doubt, if we consider life today, we could find plenty of evidence to support the theories advanced by these learned commentators on the advance (if such it be) of our civilisation. Yet, there is formidable evidence supporting the contrary view — that we have not yet retreated from the written word, that language and literature are not dead, that reading is still one of the most valuable and enjoyable occupations available to us. These thoughts are prompted by the celebration of a most significant anniversary, the fiftieth year of Penguin Books.

It hardly seems possible, even to those of us who can remember the day in 1935 when Penguin Books first appeared, that it was only half a century ago that paperbacks were unknown in this country. It is necessary to say "in this country", because paperback books, even if not pocket-size, were the rule rather than the exception in most European countries; in France and Germany, for example, what we call paperbacks are known as *livres de poche* and *Taschenbücher* respectively, being thus described by reference to size rather than binding.

Penguin Books are showing justified pride in their half a century of publishing by emphasising such facts as that during 1984 world sales reached 50 million copies. Last year the Penguin warehouse at Harmondsworth, Middlesex, despatched 41 million books. If these were laid end to end, they would reach from London to Moscow. The suggestion that

a line of Penguin books could stretch from London to Moscow carries with it an unavoidable implication of books as an agency for bringing together that which might otherwise be irreconcilable, and that the statistical details, however impressive, are quickly forgotten and replaced by thoughts about the effect of all this publishing.

First, it must be said that, in Britain at least, Penguin Books made an incalculable contribution to civilisation and general well-being. Such a comment may be easy to make. As Penguin Books themselves readily admit, the first ten books (now, incidentally, handsomely reprinted in a collective edition, identical in almost every respect except price, with the 1935 originals) "were a selection of relatively 'safe' titles". Perhaps only Hemingway's *A Farewell to Arms* would now be granted anything like "classic" status, although *Ariel*, the biography of Shelley by Andre Maurois, might be highly esteemed by those who do not know or admire Shelley. Samuel Butler, P. G. Wodehouse, H. G. Wells, Aldous Huxley and Arnold Bennett soon made their way into the Penguin list.

*A Passage to India* was published as a Penguin in 1936. This was twelve years after the famous novel first appeared. It is interesting to note that, following a film based on the novel, *A Passage to India* has been re-issued by Penguin during the past year, but in a larger format than the original and, of course, at a higher price.

Throughout the war years, during which by a mixture of foresight and happy chance, paper restrictions did not hit Penguin Books as might have been feared, the enterprise went from strength to strength. A full survey would have to be almost an encyclopedia. But it can be said that politics, started in the celebrated Penguin Specials before the war, art and music, philosophy, psychology and science, theatre and film, all made their appearances.

Special series developed; *Penguin New Writing* brought re-printed material from the 1930s to a wider readership. (George Orwell was the first name on the contents page of the first number.) *PNW* widened to include new and original work, much of it in the early years with topical reference to war conditions. Shakespeare and, later, new plays, poetry, including translations, a history of English literature, a monumental history of art and the invaluable Pevsner guides to the *Buildings of England* all emerged to become part, not simply of their readers' libraries but of their lives.

This article has rambled some way from thoughts about the future of the word, with which it began. But the relevance is still there. In the past — and not so long ago as all that — reading was the monopoly of a small and select class, a class selected

either by wealth or status, the nobility, successful merchants and the clergy. Now, despite shortcomings that are still to be found in the educational system and the shame of illiteracy that is widespread, we are a reading society. As we look at the piles of reading matter in the shops and see them dominated by, say, *First Among Equals* and *Lace* (I and II), the latter published, alas, by Penguin, we can have conflicting thoughts on the civilising effects of the written word. Yet, on reflection, we may conclude that even if reading has not saved the world, the world would be much poorer without it.

One specific thought here may be of persuasive value. Penguin Books did more than any other agency to "popularise" the work of great figures of twentieth-century writing. No two people will agree

on a list, but it would be likely to include Shaw, Wells, Joyce, D. H. Lawrence, Forster and probably Huxley and Virginia Woolf, all of them, in their different ways, important writers and liberators of the human spirit. Penguins have brought their work to hundreds of thousands who might otherwise not have known them well. When, for example, in 1946 they issued a set of ten titles to mark Shaw's ninetieth birthday, the response from the public was, to use that much abused word correctly for once, overwhelming.

As we look around further, therefore, we have to conclude that among those who have benefited mankind in the present century are publishers of good quality reading matter in an acceptable form. Penguin Books are still the leaders.

## On the Edge

PETER COTES

The Theatre Censorship Reform Committee, on which I had the privilege of serving, played no little part in ridding the British stage of that anachronistic institution, The Lord Chamberlain — better known to theatrical producers, managers, directors and playwrights as Her Majesty's Censor of Plays. Perhaps with the temporary banning of *At the Edge of the Union* in the BBC 1 *Real Lives* series in late July (and subsequently screened on 16 October to ensure the Beeb shows its even-handedness to all the faithful of both sides in the longest running religious tragedy of them all) it behoves a more general reform committee to be founded that will incorporate the media as a whole.

Many of us feel that although the producers, directors, technicians and journalists inside the Corporation won the day over *At the Edge of the Union*, its banning by the Board of Governors — and the disagreeable methods employed by the former Home Secretary, Leon Brittan — represented only the shape of things to come. If it was the thin edge of the wedge, bearing all the signs of a try-on as many suspected, such suspicions were soon confirmed. For on the eve of screening *At the Edge of the Union*, yet another BBC documentary programme, in the *Brass Tacks* series, this time concerning the relations between the police and organised crime, was, in the words of the *Guardian* newspaper, "ditched by the BBC . . . A spokesman said that the three written requests from Scotland Yard to scrap the film had not affected the decision".

The BBC denied that the Government had attempted to interfere with the showing of *At the Edge of the Union*, despite the Prime Minister's speech and the Home Secretary's correspondence with the Director General, the Chairman and the Board of Governors. It "smelt" of pressure being brought to bear in high places. And it is to the eternal credit of those who make programmes that

they fought back with the sole weapon that creative artists have over those who stalk the corridors of power, sit safe in their eyries and give the great British public what they think is good for it — a diet of *Dallas*, *Dynasty*, chat shows, panel games and interminable series of sit-coms. The bosses were told where to put it. Thatcher's provocative stridency and chairman Young's weasle-like murmurings of reassurance only made the wretched Leon Brittan's denials that he was "leaning on" Auntie sound more suspicious than ever.

In the wake of the Sarah Tisdall and Clive Ponting prosecutions, the cuts in the World Service programmes, a general feeling of all too many incidents that smacked of cover-ups, the correspondence columns of *The Times* (with even the *New York Times* wagging its finger disapprovingly at the Corporation, and, by implication, the British Government), there was small wonder that what had started as a show of might by gentle pressure finished up as a *cause celebre* that swept the world. And when eventually shown, with an additional seventeen seconds of library material (bombs exploding after the clamour, gunfire from all sides to prove its impartiality), both combatants were shown standing in separate graveyards.

And so we come to ask whether it was all worthwhile — the film, not the clamour it aroused, the repressive methods used by those who should have known better. Dealing in bloody battles as it did, it could only take place alongside the horrendous newsreels we see nightly on the box; the inner-city riots in Britain, the famine in Ethiopia, the Tunis massacre by the Israelis, the hi-jacking by the Palestinians, the violent rioting in the sad townships of Botha's South Africa and many other evils that bedevil our contemporary "civilisation".

But the screening was worth fighting to see on principle alone, for there has rarely been so necessary

a need for that principle as it exists today. And at its most disappointing — for let there be no doubt that after all the hullabaloo, it was an anti-climax.

Neither Martin McGuinness nor Gregory Campbell have met to talk. Each suffers a persecution complex about his opponent's intentions. They are look-alikes, yet opposites. The film's narrator tells us they are both young, teetotal, working-class elected representatives, as well represented in proportion to their numbers as our Prime Minister is with her majority. They are both regular churchgoers.

In a half light they could be taken for each other; in speech, when overheard, there could be no mistake whatsoever. But what separates them most of all is Religion. From its excesses stems a type of mind not restricted to any political faction or nation;

easily reconciled to tolerating an intolerant regime when it tells them what they have been conditioned to believe and what they need to hear.

Had the Venice of Shakespeare's day been partitioned and Shylock been in one of the warring factions, instead of a religious minority (that he helped to keep alive by his own prejudices), one might have heard him observe how much these Christians hated each other. But that would have been another play: a figment of the Bard's wonderful imagination.

The tragedy of *At the Edge of the Union* is its contemporary truth. Sentiments are uttered by one (who could easily have been the other); a prayer so much in the hearts of both men: "As a Christian I believe that God will keep us safe".

## LETTERS

### SUNDAY SHOPPING IN SCOTLAND

Mr A. Hamilton of USDAW (September) fails to explain why none of the dire consequences he predicts will occur if shops in England and Wales are allowed to open on Sundays have taken place in Scotland, which has had Sunday trading for many years. As for Mr Hamilton's plea for a free democratic vote on the subject, the people of Scotland have voted with their feet in favour of the measure since it was first introduced, by crowding into the stores, Sunday after Sunday.

JOHN L. BROOM

### FILM "FACTS" ARE FALSE

LIFE, an organisation which sets out to deny women the right to choose whether or not to continue with an unwanted pregnancy, is again showing the controversial American film *The Silent Scream*.

The *Silent Scream* purports to show a 10-week-old foetus in pain. There is no need for medical expertise, but pure common sense alone to knock out this conjecture.

We all know that, in general, babies have a rough passage at birth by being subject to much squeezing, pushing, pulling and, when necessary, to further stimuli to ensure breathing. Yet we are all completely unaware of this happening to ourselves.

Hence, there is no justification for the suggestion that the foetus can be conscious of pain or distress months prior to birth. In any event, as in birth, pain that is not registered has no significance.

CHARLES WILSHAW

### CHATTERTON AND HEADLAM

I have just read, with pleasure and profit, Andrew Whitehead's account of the life of Dan Chatterton ("Old Chat", September).

Mr Whitehead has enabled me to find a place for another piece in the colourful jigsaw of freethought history. When I was researching my article on the Rev Stewart Headlam (November 1984), I was intrigued by the story of how Headlam, when chairing a public meeting, cut short a freethinker who had been holding forth at excessive length. The speaker reacted by abusing Headlam: "You are like all parsons: you'll never let a man have his say out!"

Another member of the audience stalwartly defended Headlam: "You let him alone! I've been

turned out of every public-house debating society in London for saying things which this 'ere parson let me say at his meetings without a murmur. He is fair, this man, and don't you forget it!"

The clue to Headlam's protagonist is that Headlam or Headlam's biographer (F. G. Bettany) mentioned that the man was editor of a magazine, but named it only by a subtitle I could not trace, *The atheistic communistic scorcher*. Mr Whitehead has provided me with the main title, *Chatterton's Commune*. That Old Chat should have come to Headlam's defence at a public meeting seems very apt and is an indicator of both their characters. "The soul of integrity" would apply to each of them.

If the Christian Hell exists I envisage it as a substantial republican city-state with an imposing tongue-in-cheek plaque above the main gate bearing Dante's inscription — in the original lofty Italian, of course — of "Abandon hope all ye who enter here". (*Lasciate ogni speranza voi ch'entrate.*)

Entering the gate I expect to find, on my right, the *Freethinker* office, and on my left, a church-cum-theatre complex reserved for Stewart Headlam to swing incense and conduct Anglo-Catholic high masses and controversial "happenings". It is a safe bet that Dan Chatterton will be outside, handing out crudely-printed tracts to rebel angels wandering in to hear another Headlam sermon on "Our Lady, Bradlaugh and Bread".

My only fear about death is that I may be sent — as a punishment — to the Orthodox Heaven!

Andrew Whitehead's article may attract the odd moan about *The Freethinker* dwelling on the past; but my thanks to him at any rate.

NIGEL SINNOTT

### VALUED VICTORIAN

I was pleased to read Andrew Whitehead's article on Dan Chatterton (September). He has long been a hero of mine, and I am concerned that Chatterton's Commune is in danger of being lost if it is not rebound. It is to be hoped that this will be done without delay.

Chatterton's Commune was a most remarkable publication, set by hand from odds and ends of type and printed on a press that would make Gutenberg's machine up to date. In its pages Chatterton addressed his revolutionary appeal to the "... half-starved, herring-gutted, poverty-stricken, parish-damned inhabitants of this disunited kingdom". He issued a challenge to bishops and priests to debate with him. David Nicoll said that Chatterton "reached an audience which more pretentious writers never do" and that "he wrote above the heads of the people".

In his history of British anarchism, John Quail says that Chatterton deserves to be rescued from oblivion. Andrew Whitehead has made a most praiseworthy start, and perhaps we shall eventually see a full-length biography and the republication of Chatterton's writings.

Dan Chatterton was a victim of the Victorian values so ardently preached in some quarters nowadays. But he was a victim who fought back, and there is much in what he wrote and said that is worthy of consideration in our own times.

TERRY LIDDLE

#### OMISSION (1)

Should not the saints listed in your News and Notes column (October) have included the little known St Albran, patron saint of "regular" churchgoers?

RICHARD SAVAGE

#### OMISSION (2)

The News and Notes item, Ballinspooile (October) did omit one important fact. I have it on good authority that the lights are now left on all night in the churches in Ireland. This is to stop the statues from bumping into each other.

HARRY LALOR

Editor's comment: The omissions are regretted. We now understand that in County Cork all holy statues move after three Our Fathers, five Hail Marys and seven gin-and-tonics.

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There is to be an inquiry into the ritual slaughter of 29 sheep for a Muslim festival in Rotherham. The animals were kept overnight in a butcher's shop before being killed. The blood was allowed to run into public drains. A resident who lived near the shop said: "Blood was running down the drains all day and there was an awful smell. We were worried about the health risk".

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## Freethinker Fund

The last given total was lower than usual; it is encouraging to note that there has been a marked increase in donations. With only a few weeks of 1985 remaining we hope that Fund supporters will round off the year in good style.

Thanks are expressed to the latest group of contributors whose names are listed below.

G. L. Airey, J. L. Broom, R. C. Everett, M. D. Hallett, J. H. Hutton, B. A. Maciejewski, C. J. New and G. Williams, £1.40 each; E. Geary, £2; M. C. Ansell, E. Brown, G. Glazer, N. Haemmerle, L. T. Johnson, D. A. Macintosh, R. Roberts and W. G. Stirling, £2.40 each; In memory of Bert Follett, £3; J. Barr and E. S. D. Haslam, £4.40 each; P. George, £5; E. Henderson, P. Somers and J. Warren, £6.40 each; P. Willig, £11.40; R. J. Condon, £20; S. Exley, £21.40, and S. Beer, £27.

Total for the period 4 September until 1 October: £148.20.

## EVENTS

**Brighton and Hove Humanist Group.** The Prince Albert, Trafalgar Street (adjacent to Brighton Station). Sunday, 1 December, 5.30 pm for 6 pm. Ken Davies: Education in China. The Freethinker editor will be guest of honour at the Group's annual dinner on Saturday, 16 November, Langford's Hotel, Third Avenue, Hove. Tickets £6.50 each from Peggy Ratcliffe, 11 Powis Grove, Brighton, telephone 723475.

**British Humanist Association.** Annual dinner, Saturday, 16 November, Restaurant L'Hermitage, 19 Leigh Street, London WC1. Speaker: Diane Munday. Tickets £10 each from BHA, 13 Prince of Wales Terrace, London W8, telephone 01-937 2341.

**British Humanist Association.** Holborn Library Hall, 32-38 Theobalds Road, London WC1. Two public meetings, Wednesdays 27 November and 18 December, 7 pm. Subject: Freedom and Information. Publicity leaflets obtainable from BHA office.

**Edinburgh Humanist Group.** Programme of Forum meetings from the secretary, 59 Fox Covert Avenue, Edinburgh, EH12 6UH, telephone 031-334 8372.

**Gay Humanist Group.** Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London WC1. Friday, 13 December, 8 pm. A Christmas Antidote—Winter Solstice Party. Refreshments, Cabaret, etc. Admission £3.

**Glasgow Humanist Society.** Information regarding meetings and other activities is obtainable from Norman Macdonald, 15 Queen Square, Glasgow G41 2BG, telephone 041-424 0545.

**Havering and District Humanist Society.** Harold Wood Social Centre, Gubbins Lane and Squirrels Heath Road, Harold Wood. Tuesday, 3 December, 8 pm. John Leeson: Humanist Counselling.

**Humanist Holidays.** Christmas at Folkestone, Kent. Details obtainable from Betty Beer, 58 Weir Road, London SW12 ONA, telephone 01-673 6234.

**Leeds and District Humanist Group.** Swarthmore Centre, Woodhouse Square, Leeds. Monday, 9 December, 7.45 pm. Tom Gallagher: The Suppression of Dissent — the Ulster Parallel.

**Lewisham Humanist Group.** Unitarian Meeting House, 41 Bromley Road, London SE6. Thursday, 28 November, 7.45 pm. Ian Peters: The Case for the Poltergeist.

**Sutton Humanist Group.** Friends House, Cedar Road, Sutton. Wednesday, 11 December, 7.30 pm for 8 pm. Peter Heales: Francis Bacon and the Great Instauration.

**Warwickshire Humanist Group.** Friends Meeting House, Hill Street (off Corporation Street), Coventry. Monday, 18 November, 7.45 pm for 8 pm. Public Meeting.

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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 CV1 4AW, West Midlands.

# Record Abortion Total for Irish Women

Barry Desmond, the Republic of Ireland's Minister of Health, is appalled by a report from the Irish Medico-Social Research Board. It shows that at least four thousand women came to Britain for an abortion last year. This is the highest total ever recorded, and the Minister believes that the true figure is nearer 5,500. He is supported in this view by Dr Geoffrey Dean, director of the Research Board, who declared: "We must assume that these are the minimum rates as in many cases a woman may give the address of a friend or relative in England rather than risk information being sent back home".

Mr Desmond said he would be the last person to suggest that family planning services are the only answer to the abortion problem.

"But I feel strongly that if family planning services were more widely available, the number of unwanted pregnancies could be reduced".

Mr Desmond believes that there should be more sex education in schools and a much wider availability of contraceptives. His outspoken views have brought him into conflict with the Catholic hierarchy. On the question of family planning he said that the Church's attitude had seriously regressed during the last five years.

"But there is a substantial body of Catholic opinion adrift from official teachings, particularly relating to sexual questions", he added.

Mr Desmond accused the Church of a campaign to remove him from office. He declared that in the past a Minister of Health was supposed to do as he was told by the Church authorities.

"I have personal evidence that there is a campaign to get me out. It is ruthless, and the Catholic hierarchy is involved at the highest level". Mr Desmond alleged that the Right-wing lay organisation, the Knights of St Columbanus, were also trying to bring about his downfall.

Dr Kevin McNamara, Archbishop of Dublin, recently told the annual general meeting of the Knights of St Columbanus that it was necessary "to reaffirm the teaching of Christ that to seek sexual pleasure outside marriage is a serious sin". The Archbishop denounced contraception, and rather than family planning declared that what is needed is "a vigorous recall to the basic virtue of chastity".

• "In our society closeness in the family circle excludes sexual matters, and the manner in which we sweep them under the carpet leaves a lot to be desired", coroner Bartley Sheehan said at the inquest on a 19-year-old Dublin girl who drowned herself after becoming pregnant. She was described as a happy-go-lucky girl and the eldest of a very close family. Although others were aware of her condition, her parents did not know she was pregnant until two days after the body was discovered.

## *West German Blasphemy Trial*

proceedings were brought under a medieval blasphemy law, re-enacted under a clause of the West German Criminal Code.

It continued: "As a freethought organisation, the National Secular Society wishes to support these defendants in their struggle for free speech, and, in the strongest possible terms, to urge your Government, as well as the Minister of Justice and Director of Public Prosecutions of Baden-Württemberg, to stop all proceedings based on this obsolete authoritarian law. We would also urge that the conviction of Birgit Römermann under the same law in Göttingen last year be quashed".

A statement on behalf of the Committee Against Blasphemy Law was also sent to the West German ambassador in London. The Committee expressed surprise that the Federal Republic of Germany should still have a blasphemy law as potentially as oppressive as that in Great Britain.

"It hopes that the Bunte Liste members win their case against this absurd prosecution, and that the Committee for the Abolition of Paragraph 166 of the Criminal Code wins its campaign against this absurd law".

A telegram expressing solidarity and good wishes was sent to the four defendants by the Committee Against Blasphemy Law, National Secular Society and Rationalist Press Association.

• See below.

## AN APPEAL

The Roman Catholic Church, which claims to be universal, is responsible for this latest attack on freedom of expression in West Germany. So we hope that there will be an international demand for an acquittal of the four defendants. Freethinker readers, Humanist groups, legal and civil liberty organisations are urged to write to the West German Embassy protesting against the persecution of atheists and the prosecution of BLF members. Letters should be addressed to His Excellency the Ambassador, West German Embassy, 23 Belgrave Square, London SW1.