
The Freethinker

secular humanist monthly

founded 1881

Vol. 106. No. 3

MARCH 1986

30p

ALRA CELEBRATES FIFTY YEARS OF ABORTION LAW REFORM AND DEFENCE

A celebration to mark the 50th anniversary of the Abortion Law Reform Association in London last month brought together three generations of campaigners. The indefatigable, 91-year-old Dora Russell declared: "I have no right to be here today, not having been a founder of ALRA. But as one of the women who worked to popularise the birth control movement before ALRA was founded, I appear before you in the spirit of John the Baptist. I leave to ALRA the privilege of being Jesus Christ".

The veteran campaigner recalled the struggles of over 60 years ago to spread knowledge of contraception and make it socially acceptable.

"When Bertrand Russell and I were living in Chelsea, he was asked to stand as Labour candidate. In fact we fought three elections, and in the third, owing to the strain on his health, I took Bertie's place. These were the days when women were still waiting to get the right to vote and I began to be concerned with the problem of birth control.

"In the second election in 1923, when Ramsay Macdonald came to power, I went canvassing heavy with child, my daughter Kate, who fortunately had the sense not to be born till after polling day. To see a pregnant woman canvassing was very remarkable in those days. During elections the basement of our house, used as a committee room, was busy as a bee hive. It was there also that our Workers' Birth Control Group used to meet, and it was during one of the elections that I first met Stella Browne, who appears in a photograph of Russell and his women supporters outside the house door.

"I cannot take credit for assisting the passing of the act legalising abortion, but a great deal of work was done by a number of energetic determined women before that Act on the question of women's right to have knowledge and advice on birth control and how to avoid becoming pregnant.

"After so long it is worth looking back at the differing views held by various people about sex and the population question. Those interested in genetics thought it necessary somehow to prevent defective individuals from becoming parents. There were also those who deplored the improvidence of the poor in producing large families which they could not possibly feed. I remember that the Clydeside Labour MPs at first refused to discuss birth control with me because they were sure this was my view. They were surprised when we informed them that, on the contrary, what concerned us was the right of women to some choice in the size and spacing of their families, and the advice and information that would enable them to do so.

"Women were kept in ignorance about sex and also led to think of it as something rather nasty, only to be endured because it was the means of having children. Husbands took pleasure in sex, but never concerned themselves as to whether their wives enjoyed it too, or understood their fear of an unwanted pregnancy. The men of that day were not entirely to blame, because they also mostly received misinformation and no advice.

"I took action to support Rose Witcop and Guy Aldred when the police seized as obscene a pamphlet by Margaret Sanger on birth control which they were selling. But Maynard Keynes and I failed to persuade the magistrates. The story of how the battle went on is told in my first *Tamarisk Tree* book: of the deputation to the Health Minister on which was H. G. Wells, MPs F. A. Broad and Dorothy Jewson; and then the famous Labour Women's Conference of 1924 when we were told not to drag sex into politics. But we carried our demand for birth control advice by a thousand votes to eight, inspiring the leader 'Menace to Motherhood' in the *Daily Express*".

(continued on back page)

The Freethinker

UK ISSN 0016-0687

Editor: WILLIAM McILROY

The Freethinker was founded in 1881 by George William Foote and is published mid-monthly. The views expressed by contributors are not necessarily those of the Publishers or of the Editor.

Articles, Reviews, News Reports, Obituaries, Letters and Announcements should be sent by the 10th of the preceding month to the Editor at 14 Coundon Road, Coventry CV1 4AW, West Midlands (telephone Coventry 20070). Unsolicited reviews should not be submitted.

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Postal subscriptions, book orders and donations to the Freethinker Fund should be sent to:

G. W. FOOTE & COMPANY,
702 HOLLOWAY ROAD, LONDON N19 3NL
(Telephone: 01-272 1266)

SPECIAL POSTAL SUBSCRIPTION RATES

UK and overseas: twelve months, £3.60. (UK six months, £2). USA: twelve months, \$8. Overseas subscribers are requested to obtain sterling drafts from their banks, but if remittance is in foreign currency (including Republic of Ireland), please add the equivalent of £5 sterling or USA \$7 to cover bank charges. Alternatively, send at your own risk currency notes convertible in the UK, plus bank charges equivalent to USA \$2.

 David Neil & Co Printers South St Dorking

NEWS

RADIO 4's GOD-BLOT

Radio listeners who endure that morning dose of banalities and inanities, "Thought for the Day", will raise three hearty cheers for Benjamin Woolley's article, "Good Thing or Minority Interest", published in *The Listener*. For here at last is an article that gives the true perspective on religious broadcasting in today's secular society.

Mr Woolley starts off with a pertinent thought of his own: "Why, at peak-time on Radio 4's 'Today' programme, with nearly three million newly awakened listeners eagerly awaiting the news, does the buzz of the up-to-the-minute reporting suddenly get silenced, to make way for five minutes of ruminative speculation by the Bishop of Stepney or Rabbi Lionel Blue?

"The tempting, and rather comfortable, thought is that 'Thought for the Day' is one of those charming little British quirks, like warm beer or Prince William, that make our lives colourful and compensate for our shy manner".

Pointing out that Christianity has a stronger presence on Radio 4 than on any other station, he reminds readers that religious programmes "are not offering a public service in the usual broadcasting sense anyway. 'Prayer for the Day', is not like a Central Office of Information announcement, nor an In Touch fact-sheet. . .

"Christianity, if anything, enshrines exactly what the BBC is supposed *not* to be about. It's not like Judaism, confined to a particular group: it aims to proselytise".

The Christian emphasis was less anomalous in the days when the first BBC Director-General, John Reith, first dedicated "the airwaves" to the Christianity in which he himself believed — though even then it blatantly disregarded the general principle of "balance" which Reith demanded for every other topic. But in Britain today, the continuation of this Christian emphasis is not only unbalanced and unfair, but totally unrepresentative.

No one wants to deprive the Protestant Christian minority of its Daily Service — but now that Radio 4 divides directly after it into two separate programmes on different frequencies, why not start the division half-an-hour earlier, so as to give Radio 4 listeners religious freedom?

Much more objectionable, however, than such blatant religious programmes (which we can, after all, switch off) are discussion programmes on moral questions in which the Christian bias is undeclared and insidious. For instance, a Radio 4 programme on creationism — not in a recognised God-slot —

AND NOTES

provided the supposed "balance" by having Christian creationists and Christian evolutionists argue it out; but without a single contribution from an unbeliever, who might have pointed out that while the Christian creationists were flying in the face of all the evidence, the Christian evolutionists were inconsistent.

When "Lift up Your Hearts" changed its name (some years ago) to "Thought for the Day", we were assured that this item would no longer be exclusively religious. And, indeed, one secular humanist voice was heard soon afterwards for one week. That was years ago, and since then "Thought for the Day" has reverted to the old God-slot that it was before the change. For those who do not wish to miss the weather forecast or any of the news, it is, in the worst sense, compulsory listening.

Since opinion polls now reveal that about a quarter of the population has no religious beliefs, this sociological fact should be reflected in "Thought for the Day" and in the whole approach to religious programmes on both radio and television. At the present time, as Benjamin Woolley remarks, "only the religious are allowed to comment freely on issues of the day unrestrained by the intervention of an interviewer, and only the religious are allowed to practise their beliefs using the airwaves. . .

"The underlying assumption seems to be that religion is a Good Thing, part of traditional life, and therefore something that should involve the BBC".

POACHERS TURNED GAMEKEEPERS

It would require a modern Robert Tressall to do justice to the scene in the House of Commons when Winston Churchill's Bill, supposedly for the protection of children but in effect for the extension of censorship, had its Second Reading. David Webb, an indefatigable opponent of censorship, pulls no punches in his report on page 38. And Norman Buchan, MP (Labour, Paisley South), put the knife in most effectively with his withering comment: "When I see some of the apostles of morality in the House, I reach for my chastity belt. We see a parade of morality from people who have not always behaved with the best of morality. It may be that they are trying to achieve an inner cleanliness by supporting such a Bill; that they feel they will somehow recover a kind of purity, a restoration of virginity".

Mr Churchill had the overwhelming support of the party of Some Victorian Values (like humbug and hypocrisy). Social Democrats stayed away in

small numbers — two of the three mould-breakers in the House supported the censorship Bill. So did all of Liberal leader David Steel's merry men who were present. Labour opponents of the Bill were joined by Matthew Parris (Conservative, Derbyshire West) and Ian Wrigglesworth (Social Democrat, Stockton South).

The few Labour members who supported Churchill's Bill included Kevin McNamara and Sir Greville Janner, assiduous spokesmen in the Commons for Roman Catholic and Jewish religious interests respectively. But what on earth was Ian Mikardo doing among the Pecksniffs and Philistines?

Visitors to Ely Cathedral will in future have to pay an admission charge of £1.50. Children, old age pensioners and students will be admitted at reduced rates. It is expected that an annual profit of £80,000 will be made.

COME AND JOIN US!

Last month Richard Holt, MP (Conservative, Langbaugh), introduced a parliamentary Bill under the Ten-Minute Rule which aims to curtail slightly the number of Anglican bishops in the House of Lords. But it would extend the right of representation in the Upper House to leaders of the Scottish and Welsh national churches, the Roman Catholic cardinals, the main nonconformist churches and the Chief Rabbi.

This may seem, on the face of it, a move towards fairness and balance. But as the National Secular Society pointed out in a press release, "it completely ignores the fact that, according to all the opinion polls held in recent years on religious belief in Britain, the largest single group, apart from nominal adherents to the C of E (most of whom practise no religion, and many of whom have no religious beliefs at all), is that of the professed unbelievers—ie those calling themselves atheist or agnostic—who (comprising some 26-27 per cent of the population) number more than twice the membership of the Catholic Church (12-13 per cent).

"Why, then, should Mr Holt's proposal envisage four automatic seats in the Upper House to represent the views of Catholics, and none at all to represent the views of the far larger constituency of unbelievers?

"We are not, of course, surprised by this, since it is in line with most British institutions. . .

"But the fact that this is what generally happens does not make it right".

The NSS is not in favour of having any section automatically represented in the Upper House.

"The representation could not change as rapidly as society changes, so that progressive views would

always be at a disadvantage while traditional ones would become entrenched—as, indeed, has happened in the case of the established Church”.

Mr Holt's suggested extension of religious representation in the House of Lords would make an already bad situation worse. How long would it be until there was a clamour from other religious groups like Scientologists, Moonies and Muslims to be represented? Even the Salvation Army, already with one foot in the Establishment door, might demand the ennoblement of its head cook and bottle-washer.

An American researcher has questioned the authenticity of the Shroud of Turin, which has for centuries been regarded as the garment in which Christ's body was buried. Speaking at a conference in Elizabethtown, Pennsylvania, Walter McCrone, an authority on the shroud, said he believed it was painted twice. His conclusion was based on an analysis of the fibres removed from the cloth in 1978 and on the colours of the image.

BETTER HANG TOGETHER . . .

We have become accustomed to the joint services, inter-faith dialogue and expressions of goodwill by erstwhile Christian rivals. The disputes, accusations and denunciations have been swept quietly under the hassock, not in response to some directive from above but because the churches are operating in a shrinking market.

Ecumenical wheeling and dealing was carried a stage further by Pope John Paul II during his recent visit to India. His latest appeal for Christian unity was coupled with a call for dialogue with adherents to non-Christian faiths as well.

The Pope's spokesman, Joaquin Navarro Valls, said that since the Second Vatican Council the Church had been engaging in ecumenical discussions with other Christians. "But", he added, "the Holy Father feels that this is not enough. What is needed now is a profound dialogue with all faiths of the world, so that we can agree on the main issues of man and mankind".

Here's a how-d'ye-do! Not so long ago it was inconceivable that the head of the "one true church" would meet his "separated brethren" on an equal footing. Now the Pope is prepared to talk turkey not only with non-Catholic Christians but non-Christian worshippers of "false gods".

It is ironic that this latest ecumenical overture should have occurred in India, a land of many faiths. What price all that work and sacrifice by Christian missionaries? Was their journey really necessary?

WHAT GOD CAN DO

The blessings of Christianity are frequently proclaimed by those who try to persuade benighted sceptics that Jesus changes lives. He does indeed, and the result was demonstrated recently by a display of believers' graciousness and benevolence when the 82-year-old Roman Catholic Cardinal Suenens visited Belfast during Christian Unity Week.

Followers of the Prince of Peace turned out in large numbers to greet the elderly cardinal when he preached in the city's Anglican cathedral. A Methodist leader, the Rev Dr Eric Gallagher, has published an eye-witness account of the proceedings.

"I was there that night. I was prepared for the 300 protesters outside the cathedral led by one of Ian Paisley's Free Presbyterian ministers. But I was not ready for what happened inside. The attendance was one of the largest I have seen at any of these services but few suspected that possibly 50 or 60 protesters had seated themselves strategically throughout the congregation.

"Almost as soon as the service was underway, the interrupters got to work. I have never heard or witnessed anything like it. It was pandemonium. What the cardinal had to say or did say, I will never know. Right through his sermon, as soon as one shouting protester had been escorted out by the police, another started somewhere else. It was all against the Roman Catholic Church and the participation in the service of two of its bishops and the cardinal.

"When it was all over, some Catholic worshippers behind me asked what I felt. I could only reply that I was hurt and humiliated. I wanted to cry; they wondered if we could ever hope for reconciliation in our country".

Dr Gallagher, a former president of the Methodist Church in Ireland, is superintendent of Belfast Central Mission. No doubt his feelings of outrage and desire for reconciliation are genuine. But the hatred of the majority of his fellow-Christians for those who adhere to a different version of the faith is a result of the superstition, fanaticism and intolerance that generations of missionaries and clergymen — Methodists included — have fostered.

There is little hope of reconciliation while Christianity pervades every aspect of life in Ireland.

A man carrying a Bible and quoting scripture shot a clergyman twice in the back after a church service in Little Rock, Arkansas. A doctor who went to the injured man's assistance was also shot and is in a serious condition. The attacker, a member of the church, told the police he disagreed with church policy.

Archbishop's Progressive Stand on Research

The National Secular Society was one of the 38 organisations represented at an important all-day briefing meeting in London on "Ethical, Religious and Medical Implications of the Warnock Report on Human Fertilisation". NSS president Barbara Smoker was one of the participants in the open discussion. The meeting was chaired by Alastair Service, general secretary of the Family Planning Association.

The two advertised speakers were the Archbishop of York (himself a scientist, and unusually well-informed and rational for a man of the cloth) and Dr Anne McLaren (director of the Medical Research Council's Mammalian Development Unit). It will be remembered that in an ecclesiastical debate in the pages of *The Times* on the subject last year, the Archbishop took a progressive, consequentialist view,

which he expanded on this occasion.

The contrast with meetings on this subject sponsored by the pro-life lobby was very marked and most refreshing. The participants were all concerned with scientific fact, not carried away by emotional speeches aimed at whipping up irrational fears. There was, however, the very rational fear of legislation to prohibit all human embryo research.

Though twice defeated by parliamentary tactics last year, the Unborn Children (Protection) Bill, initiated by the evangelical Society for the Protection of Unborn Children (SPUC), supported by their Roman Catholic counterpart (Life), and chosen by Mr Enoch Powell for his Private Member's Bill, is back again, sponsored now by Ken Hargreaves, MP (Conservative, Hyndburn).

Humanism's Giant Leap of "Faith"

BEVERLY HALSTEAD

The exhibition, *The Human Story*, started on a world tour when it closed at the Commonwealth Institute, London, on 23 February. It had had a very warm welcome (see Colin Pitcher, *The Freethinker*, January). Generally recognised as an excellent introduction to the history of mankind over the past few million years, it graphically illustrates some of the crucial stages in man's physical and cultural evolution.

The general tenor of all the comments has been that this is a somewhat uncontroversial account verging on the altogether unexceptional. It is not seen in quite this way by the Rev Vernon Blackmore writing in the January issue of the evangelical magazine *Buzz* ("Faith to Face Your Future"). His is a sober account and commentary on the exhibition from the standpoint of the more evangelical sects, split between evolutionary and creationist Christians. The manner of how he manages to tread a course between the Scylla and Charybdis of contradictory creeds, without sinking into the abyss beneath, illustrates a remarkable skill. He avoids the issue by condemning the exhibition for its underlying assumptions. He is, I believe, entirely correct, and shows considerable perceptiveness in his assessment.

Mr Blackmore begins by pointing out to his readers that the "most adhered to religion in Britain is humanism", topping the table of religions by several millions. In fact he states "the majority of the population are at least nominal humanists". If this is really the case, it is fine news indeed.

Having frightened his devout readers with this piece of information, Mr Blackmore sums up the key

problem from his standpoint as being the underlying humanist assumption of "perceiving man as a creature empowered with a seemingly inexhaustible capacity to do good and the potential to create a utopian society given proper social and political resources to accomplish the job.

"It is this brand of humanism, stressing the inherent goodness of Man (even though his violent behaviour throughout the centuries would seem to stress the opposite), which still attracts devotees by the million".

He continues: "Yet, like any belief structure, humanism requires a 'leap of faith'. To believe the theories of the most popular form of secular humanism one must embrace a wide range of beliefs . . . belief in the relentless march of 'progress', the ability of science and technological development to solve all mankind's problems and, most difficult to believe of all, a belief that man has the capacity by his own efforts to eradicate poverty, violence and war".

This surely is indeed what most humanists and freethinkers do believe, and it is so deeply ingrained in our consciousness that we often fail to realise that this approach is something that we need to proclaim with more fervour. We really should take a leaf out of the Christians' book and spell out clearly what we stand for. It is surely of the utmost irony that a Reverend gentleman has to remind us of our own underlying principles. By doing so, Vernon Blackmore has performed a fine service.

I can do no better than end by quoting his most

important comment with the highest approval.

"Hope is given for the future of the world and the survival of the human species, but it is a hope based on our own, human, actions.

"Through the exhibition stress is laid on the flexibility of human culture and the progress of mankind through his own resources. Areas of present threat to our survival are highlighted — environmental damage, world trade injustice, warfare, poverty.

"If we are to survive, so runs the humanistic creed, we must act speedily, and an IBM computer

console is set up at the exit to elicit your particular solutions.

"By requesting the results from the survey to date (hardly a scientific example, as I was there on day 3!) it became obvious that attention to 'Religion' was seen by very few to be helpful: ten per cent noted religion, compared to around 65 per cent for Education and 55 per cent for International Cooperation.

"If nothing else, *The Human Story* showed that humanistic optimism is alive and well and thriving in Britain".

Change of Obscenery

DAVID WEBB

Winston Churchill, MP, has secured a Second Reading in the House of Commons for his deceptively titled Obscene Publications (Protection of Children etc) (Amendment) Bill. Its purpose is widely to extend censorship of television programmes, films, plays, books and art. In this article the Honorary Director of the National Campaign for the Reform of the Obscene Publications Acts takes a sceptical look at Churchill's Bill — and at some of its most zealous promoters.

On 17 January 1984, in a parliamentary speech denouncing the Government's rate-capping Bill, the former Conservative Prime Minister, Edward Heath, recalled that he had first been elected to the House of Commons in 1950 on Winston Churchill's slogan "Set the People Free". "It was not", he said, "a proposal to set the people free to do what we tell them to do". On 17 January 1986, Winston Churchill, MP (Conservative, Davyhulme), and grandson of the illustrious defender of this country's freedom, published a private member's Bill deliberately designed to erode that freedom, and to erode it in so monstrously authoritarian a way, as surely to make poor old Grandad turn in his grave.

The Bill he is asking Parliament to vote into law is called the Obscene Publications (Protection of Children, etc) (Amendment) Bill. It's title does, of course, bear little relation to what the Bill is actually all about. Not that that is anything unusual nowadays, especially where Bills containing a substantial element of censorship are concerned, and the real intent of which our state legislative nannies are at such pains to camouflage. The 1984 Video Recordings Act should, truthfully, have been called the Video Censorship Act; the 1982 Cinematograph (Amendment) Act should have been called the Cinema Club Prohibition Act; and the 1982 Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act should have been called the Sex Shop Eradication Act.

Mr Churchill's intention is to amend the 1959 Obscene Publications Act by making television and sound broadcasting subject to its provisions, by making it illegal for *any* innocuous sex magazines to be displayed and sold on any premises (e.g. newsagents, bookstalls etc.) to which persons under the age of 18 have access, and by strengthening the test for "obscenity" (whatever that is!) for publications in either of these categories (i.e. in the home for TV and radio and, except for a handful of licensed sex shops, virtually everywhere else outside the home for books and magazines). He is doing this under the well-used but phoney guise of "protecting the children". "It is", said Willie Hamilton, MP (Labour, Fife Central), "a highly emotive phrase . . . designed to deceive people into believing that children in alleged danger from exhibitions of violence and television programmes need to be protected".

The Bill was given its Second Reading by 161 votes for and 31 against, in a five hour, vomit-making, but often farcical debate in the Commons which, for my sins, I witnessed from a cold, draughty, hugely uncomfortable, badly lit, appallingly-amplified and hostilely-staffed Strangers' Gallery. These grim deprivations were further compounded by the presence of a sorry collection of God-botherers, moral re-armers, born-again killjoys, Jesus junkies and of course, Queen Prude herself, Mrs Mary Whitehouse.

Notwithstanding that the Bill appears to have been drafted by a motorway contractor, so full of holes is it, a point forcefully made by Robin Corbett, MP (Labour, Erdington), some of the observations made upon it by Members present transcended the bounds of credulity. Mr Churchill himself kicked off by referring to the "increasing amount of obscene material transmitted into millions of homes" and claiming that "there is readily available a new brand of highly explicit sex magazines sold too often by local newsagents . . . or at bookstalls". I've obviously been missing out somewhere. I can't *ever* remember

having seen any "obscene" material on TV, except in news programmes, and, as an actor with more than 700 TV programmes to his credit, I certainly can't ever remember appearing in anything even remotely "obscene". As for this "new brand of highly explicit sex magazines", what and where are they, I would like to know? The present savage censorship laws would prohibit them anyway. When I met Mr Churchill to discuss his Bill at the Commons on 13 February, I challenged him to point me in their direction. He declined to do so.

Mr Churchill acknowledged that he was taking on two enormously powerful vested interests "on the one hand, the moguls of the media . . . and on the other, the pimps and pornographers of the multi-billion (yes, *billion!*) pound sex magazine industry". Interesting, isn't it, that, in spite of the fact that he was accusing both of disseminating obscene material, he didn't refer to the pimps and pornographers of the media or the moguls of the sex magazine industry? Ignoring his absurdly exaggerated figure, has he never stopped to consider *why* the sex magazine industry thrives? Has he never heard of market forces and of customer demand? If not, I'm sure his party leader will readily enlighten him. She might, at the same time, like to remind him of that purported cornerstone of Tory philosophy, viz. "the freedom of the individual".

The most sickening aspect of the debate was the spectacle of well-known MP playboys and adulterers pontificating about morality, and standards, and hypocrisy. Was it not Nicholas Fairbairn, MP (Conservative, Perth and Kinross), who had to resign as Solicitor General for Scotland? What of certain "indiscretions" in his personal life? Winston Churchill himself has not been exactly untainted if press reports of his past extra-marital activities are accurate. Worst example of all, however, was surely the nauseating, sanctimonious drivel pouring forth from Geoffrey Dickens, MP (Conservative, Littlebrough and Saddleworth), whose much-publicised Cafe Royal *Thé Dansants* added to the nation's glee a few years ago and was something of a public scandal. Not that I wish to be censorious, but when such people set themselves up on a pedestal of undiluted virtue, they must expect to be shot at. What bare-faced effrontery for Mr Dickens to cite the pitiful plight of children subjected to television and saying that "They associate it with their family, with what mummy and daddy might do". Dale Campbell-Savours, MP (Labour, Workington), although a fellow supporter of the Bill, took him to task. "Will he (Mr Dickens) tell the House on what basis he was able to build a reputation as a pontificator on public morality?", he asked.

However, for my money, Willie Hamilton's comments were by far the most heartening and exhilarating. He said things in that debate that I have been longing to hear said in the House of

Commons throughout the past ten years, ever since I founded the NCROPA in 1976. How refreshingly honest to hear him describe masturbation as a perfectly normal activity ("especially in public schools"!). "Apparently", he said, "it is to be illegal only if one takes a picture of it". With bitter irony he concluded "When I look at the Tory Benches, I see the honourable Member of Davyhulme (Winston Churchill), who is well known for his sturdy defence of morality and our standards of behaviour, and others like him. But when Tory Members lecture us on those matters it makes us angry and nauseated".

Unfortunately there are hypocritical "rogues", as he called them, in his own party, too, and in other parties. We can only hope that Mr Hamilton's great, good, common-sense logic will rub off on his parliamentary colleagues. "I do not want anybody to tell me by legislation, or in any other way, how to deal with my children or what I should read or look at", he said. "There are many do-gooders telling me what is good for me and my children. I do not want that. The more individual freedom there is, the better. I shall be the judge, for good or ill, of what is good for me. I do not want anybody to tell me what is good for me and my family".

After the cheerless speeches of so many others in favour of the Bill, especially the almost hysterical homily from Sir Ian Percival, MP (Conservative, Southport), in which he dazzlingly demonstrated his extensive vocabulary by using the word "filth" some 13 times, Willie Hamilton's words were music to my ears. I'm certain that they would have been music to Winston's ears, too — Grandad Winston, that is of course. In his autobiography, *My Early Life* (now a Fontana paperback), Winston recalls his involvement, whilst still a Sandhurst cadet, with the Entertainments' Protection League, which he and another student endeavoured to establish to combat the activities of 1894's Mrs Whitehouse, one Mrs Ormiston Chant, and her Purity League to clean up the music halls of the time, relating how he had joined in when two or three hundred patrons of the old Empire Theatre in Leicester Square tore down canvas "prudery" screens which had been erected in the theatre. "You have seen us tear down these barricades tonight", said Winston. "Make sure you remember those responsible for them at the coming election". Whether or not his plea was acted upon, I don't know. But I certainly hope that the present electors of Davyhulme will remember what their Winston has done when their next election comes, by his disgraceful betrayal of freedom and his family forbears.

The Establishment's obsession with censorship in this country now amounts to positive derangement. It must be dealt with immediately. By throwing out Winston Churchill's awful Bill, Parliament will be taking a first step towards a return to sanity. We can only hope it has the sense to do so.

Gone to the Great Auditor in the Sky

DAVID TRIBE

Earlier this year the death was announced — not for the first time — of Lafayette Ronald Hubbard, science fiction hack turned religious guru and founder of the Church of Scientology. Over a period of three decades Hubbard attracted a huge following of gullible devotees whose trust and cash enabled him to establish an international business empire.

In late January I almost missed, tucked away on an inner page of *The Australian*, a modest news story, "Founder of Scientology church dies". A week later, in the "Religious" column of the same newspaper, appeared "Lessons for the Hubbard faithful". I saw or heard no other reference to an event which would have been headline news two decades ago. In fact, I was inclined to dismiss the report as just another false rumour. For years we have been hearing that Lafayette Ronald Hubbard has committed suicide, been murdered or is missing, assumed drowned, on his ocean-going yacht. The recent report was less colourful: he died of a stroke on his Californian ranch and left most of his fortune to the church he founded. Its Sydney branch confirmed that he had gone to the Great Auditor in the Sky.

The origins and background of L. Ron Hubbard are somewhat obscure, as nowhere was his creativity better displayed than in the autobiographical notes he supplied to the faithful. On this reckoning he was truly a modern Encyclopaedist: naval officer, war hero, psychologist, nuclear physicist, ethnologist, electronics engineer, philosopher, explorer, script-writer, horticulturalist, novelist and science fiction writer. The unfaithful have, alas, given a less flattering picture.

Whatever his record in World War II, he was discharged with a 40 per cent disability allowance for ailments such as arthritis; and his first significant acquaintance with psychology was the receipt of psychiatric help for clinical depression. Perhaps this was related in part to money worries, for he was said to have been arrested for petty theft over cheques. His career as a nuclear physicist never quite got off the ground, as he failed the course; and his main distinction as an ethnologist was his discovery that gullibility knows no ethnic boundaries. One claim that no one disputes is that he was a science fiction writer, first as a dime-a-line hack. There is a story that in the late 1940s he admitted, "Writing for a penny a word is ridiculous. If a man really wants to make a million dollars, the best way would be to start his own religion". Whether or not this story is true (it sounds too glib to me), he did in fact start his own religion and had money worries

no longer. "A million dollars" turned out to be a gross underestimate.

The chief works of science fiction on which this creed was built were *Dianetics*, *The Modern Science of Mental Health* (1950), *Scientology, Handbook for Pre-clears* (1951) and *Science of Survival. Simplified, faster dianetic techniques* (1951). These popularised the key words: "scientology", coined by him in 1936 for a series of "axioms" on knowledge, and "dianetics". Though a highly profitable venture from the start, the cult began more as a "science" than a religion. Hubbard claimed to have found a "scientific rather than religious or humanistic" proof of a "thetan" (soul) within each individual. Though a Church of Scientology was founded in America in 1954, outside the United States the organisation was called the Hubbard Association of Scientologists International (HASI) till 1966. No doubt the faithful will denounce distillation of a formidable verbiage into a few words, but Hubbard's "discovery" was essentially psychoanalysis (itself one of the dreariest intellectual cul-de-sacs of the twentieth century), tricked out with monitoring by an E-meter (a modified school galvanometer). This device was originally called the Mathison Electropsychometer; but presumably Hubbard had better patent lawyers than Mathison and it later became known as the Hubbard Electrometer. It gave the "auditor" (therapist) and the subject some indication of how the "treatment" was going. It was said to measure the "relative density of the body" but probably measured physiological reactions like sweating and pulse, on the principle of a lie-detector.

Subjects were encouraged to reveal the unconscious memories and negative reactions of their "reactive mind" so that the auditor could identify and gradually eliminate their debilitating "engrams". Once these were all removed, the subject gained the sanctifying status of "clear". All this was very time-consuming and expensive, and some young "pre-clears" got themselves heavily in debt to pay for their auditing. But the organisation flourished on the "pyramid" concept of many successful American-based sales outfits, whereby trainees hoped to recoup their losses by recruiting exponentially. In this happy chain of "passing the buck", the buck eventually stopped with L. Ron Hubbard. Some of the faithful — and, above all, their relatives — grew restive: but everyone who tried to leave found he or she had become emotionally dependent on fellow-members. It was also alleged that potential apostates were reminded, if need be, that they had, in the course of their auditing, made some highly embarrassing admissions. On the face of things, however, all was sweetness and light; and, whatever the misgivings of

some psychological auditors, the organisation's financial auditors expressed themselves contented.

"Unclear" critics would not be silenced, and in 1963 a private member's bill was introduced in the Australian state of Victoria to "prohibit the teaching and practice of scientology for fee or reward". The Government decided instead to appoint a Board of Inquiry, which came to the same conclusion two years later. Besides finding that Scientology was "evil", the Board declared that its founder's "sanity is to be gravely doubted". Now, whatever else might have been doubted about L. Ron, after he had overcome his depression there was nothing the matter with his sanity. He was already in the process of converting his "science" into a religion internationally. To do this he established what was then the minimal requirement: belief in "the existence of a Supreme Being". The precise form of his teaching was, however, closer to Buddhism, which is atheistic in its essence. One of the reasons for the call of the Orient was its contemporary popularity with the "flower children" and other rootless, neurotic and idealistic young people who were prime candidates for Scientology. Another attraction was Buddhism's belief in reincarnation. The Hubbard cult was filling up with "clears", who had no more challenges and nothing more to pay for. Worse, they might eventually come to think they knew as much as the master himself. By a happy serendipity Hubbard went to his ideological cupboard and discovered that it was not bare after all. His young clears had merely freed their thetans from the accretions of their current earthly life, but stretching back beyond that was an infinity of earlier existences during which their thetans had suffered unspeakable besmirchment. But, never fear, L. Ron could clear that too. Of course, it would take a lot more time, and training, and money. In fact, an infinity of them.

As all freethinkers know, becoming a religion normally invests one in the odour of sanctity, though it didn't stop the Victorian Government from bringing in a Psychological Practices Act (subsequently repealed) to ban the cult. Not only is criticism of religion generally muted, but a variety of taxation, rating and other concessions are wrung from pious governments around the world. DDs and sonorous titles are scattered among the faithful, and men who were previously merely tutors become gurus. Hubbard was delighted to discover that, like Joseph Smith, he had written his own Scriptures. He was also to emulate Jesus and, in doing so, to exercise another talent — that of naval officer. Readers will recall the occasion when Jesus called for a small ship "because . . . the multitude . . . pressed upon him for to touch him". In Hubbard's case, the multitude did not consist of sick people wanting to be healed but irate litigants and tax inspectors demanding satisfaction. Even as a religion, Sciento-

logy was still being dunned. For some years, therefore, Hubbard found it expedient to base himself on international waters. But in the end all was forgiven and he returned to die in America.

In its heyday his cult enjoyed a popularity, even among non-members, that tells us more about them than it. Its attractions for the "moral majority" were ideological. It was the twentieth century's sequel to Christian Science, which had long ago been found to be neither Christian nor scientific. Combining modern psychological jargon with gadgetry, Scientology persuaded many without scientific training that it satisfied a long-awaited need: it married science with theology and thereby *proved empirically* the existence of the soul. In so doing, it undercut academic science, which "has aided and abetted Godless totalitarian governments". (God-fearing totalitarian governments did not concern it.) It also married Western with Eastern mysticism, like an updated Theosophy. And, above all, it advertised Certainty in an uncertain world.

It is more difficult, in retrospect, to understand why Scientology was also influential for a time in radical circles. In the 1960s, for example, it had a certain vogue in Progressive League circles. The main reason is, I think, its opposition to the medical establishment. As it became apparent that many doctors spent more time with their accountants and their brokers than with their patients, the profession fell from its pedestal. In radical circles, the psychiatric branch of the profession fell hardest of all. There was a general resentment at its attempt to don a priestly mantle; but there were more specific grievances.

The non-psychoanalytical wing of psychiatry had taken to "physical" medicine in the twentieth century with a reckless adhocery. The induction of insulin coma, the use of electro-convulsive therapy, the profligate prescription of tranquillisers, sedatives and stimulants — all affronted intelligent laypeople before they seemed to concern psychiatrists themselves. In many cases there never was a scientific rationale for these treatments, and their long-term medical or social consequences were not considered. But what has brought psychiatry into particular disrepute in libertarian circles is its association with aversion therapy, and the tendency of this therapy to pass beyond medical conditions like obesity, alcoholism, drug addiction or heavy smoking for which a patient may voluntarily seek treatment, and intrude into non-medical conditions like homosexuality, school truancy or army desertion, where the issue is nonconformity and the treatment is rarely voluntary. Most notorious of all in recent years are the mental "hospitals" (prison camps) in the Soviet Union where political dissidents are sent.

In this modern context, a lot of well-meaning people thought a vote for Hubbard was a vote against shrinks.

INSTEAD OF GOD: A PRAGMATIC RECONSIDERATION OF BELIEFS AND VALUES, by James Hemming. Marion Boyars, £12.95.

James Hemming addresses himself to the disoriented in the present human situation who can no longer believe that their fundamental questions and needs are met by the historical religions, especially the Semitic theistic faiths; and who feel that these are questions and needs science is not concerned to meet. He tries to show that a scientific reorientation in the latest terms, reinforced by reassuring aspects of common human nature, can be integrated into a new perspective that gives all the warrant needed to animate a zest for life informed by perception of the present human task, and enthusiastic participation in it. His message is addressed with the young especially in mind.

His sketch of the scientific picture is in starkest contrast with that of the Bishop of Birmingham's *The Probability of God*, recently reviewed in these columns, since recital of the same cosmic events is used (more plausibly) to show the impossibility of God. Columbia University's *The University History of the World*, a collaboration of 40 members of the staff, also starts the narrative with cosmic events, and concludes with "The State of Culture Today"; in which religion is not singled out as the reason for disorientation, but "the state in which we find government, religion, morality, social intercourse, language, the arts, and that ultimate basis of civilized life, public hope". The author declares "antinomian passion" to be "the deepest drive of the age", with a longing to restore aboriginal consciousness and start afresh. James Hemming sees the innocence of aboriginal consciousness and the co-operation and social sharing of primitive groups as overlaid by the centuries of civilization, with established institutions and assumptions, but capable of restoration and triumph at the present high level of global integration and human capability. That is the substance of his message, spelled out in terms of a scientifically grounded outlook that all people can share, "regardless of what other affiliations they may have in their lives".

He divides his presentation into two parts: first a sketch of the nature of the cosmos, and the growth of human consciousness and of morality, with a look at the outcome in contemporary problems; then how individuals can relate themselves to this perspective. Two necessary links in the cosmic story get dislodged to Part II, but a major omission that is not repaired is in the chapter, "The Emergence of Modern Morality". Here he examines the moral content of the world religions, but gives not one word to the most important chapter on this in Western culture, the conceptual ethical thinking of the Greeks and

their sustained discussion of the issues, which influenced educated thought for some six centuries throughout the Mediterranean basin, and had a profound effect on the educational tradition inherited by Christian Europe. One item, Cicero's digest of independent ethics, "Tully's Offices", was a school-book in this country into modern times.

He relies on evidence from primitive groups to show that aggression, the "evil" in man, is not inborn, and therefore not a permanent handicap that must limit progress, if it does not destroy civilization. More intimately, the machismo image associated with age-long male domination is losing its prestige and appeal, and gentler nurturing virtues and values are coming into their own among the young. This affects the choice of leaders and the style of leadership expected and supported. Productive and sharing behaviour is encouraged, and its conditions fostered. A main point that the author is out to assert and justify is that this kind of open, creative society is underwritten and indicated by the way life organizes itself in systems controlled by feed-back, as shown by the life sciences and the physical sciences. The natural fulfilment of humanity, including personal fulfilment, is all in line. It is thwarted only by human perversity. Everyone is called upon by the way things are to play his/her part in bringing about this universal fulfilment, with its abundantly promising consequences.

Part II starts with an essay on self-fulfilment in this perspective. A profound mistake has been to elevate reason at the expense of emotion, since reason in isolation is reductionist, leaving the human being as a meaningless mechanism, instead of taking him into the heart of things, which his brain is naturally equipped to do. The human reality is that Man is at home in the world, and all that would blight that feeling fed by a true understanding, particularly continuing destructive conflicts that are vestigial remains of a win-or-lose era, can now be discarded as an unnecessary residue of the past, not something to which human beings are condemned by their nature. On the contrary, the individual is called by life itself to help evolution forward to more conscious and more elaborate functioning. "Man" (the author excuses the word for its convenience) has a godlike power and responsibility for the future of life (not only his own) on earth. James Hemming works in all the way the views of scientists who hold that there is a guiding force in evolution (what philosophers have called "entelechy") that is self-perfecting. He cites Hoyle particularly on this point. Or Erich Jantsch: "Morality is the direct experience of an ethics inherent in the dynamics of evolution". He says this takes us far beyond the old prescriptive

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morality, since it calls Man to live sensitively and creatively in accord with the principles of the very life he has, produced by evolution.

In the penultimate chapter, "Education for the Future", James Hemming's long and wide experience of schools and teachers puts him in a strong position, and he is able to put all the right and necessary things he has for so long said so forcefully and so well in the perspective outlook he has been developing in the book. The last chapter, "The Life Focus", brings him explicitly to his title *Instead of God*. For he can point out that what he has said about our understanding of and relations with the cosmos and with each other, in the context of ongoing evolution, can meet all but one of the needs for God manifested in traditional Christianity, all, that is, but eternal life, which can be and has to be happily forgotten. In the last two paragraphs, he restates summarily his essential theme: we can and we have to "regain the relationships characteristic of human society before we embarked upon the challenges, risks and opportunities of urban and, later, technological life. We have wandered a long way from our original sociable communities; it is time to rediscover them, in the context of the modern world. . . Our ultimate faith has to be in the life process itself which is both around us and within us, supplying the framework for our lives, and the impetus to our creativity".

James Hemming's zest and generous spirit animate his encouraging message, supported with workmanlike skill in providing chapter and verse from the facts of life as expounded by certain pundits, and permeated throughout by his own relevant wide experience. Is it then totally acceptable? His advertised stress on "pragmatic" excuses him from the fine points of analysis. Excuse invites exposure. On that, two comments here.

His main reason for taking the simple sharing and co-operative life of primitive groups as the model, with the history of civilizations as aberrant (a biological term), is to exonerate "human nature" from general mistrust and particularly religious condemnation — original sin. It is better not to entertain the concept. "Human nature" in the abstract is a myth. There can be and are generalizations about human behaviour, often contradictory, but with some validity. At the general level, human nature/behaviour is everywhere a complex phenomenon: bio-physiological, socio-cultural, historical, personal-experiential. Hemming recognizes this implicitly in terms of situation-response, and in the pre-history/history contrast of the thesis. But it would be more to the point to make the particularity of "human nature" the explicit ground for his contention, for

it entails that this is what is always inescapably with us, in the primitive group as in the civilization. That we can and should "regain the relationships . . . technological life" (above) is misleading in terms of the necessary and the possible. The conditions of co-operation and sharing have changed beyond recall, or translation. I think the mistake here is not to distinguish clearly between biological evolution and cultural diversity and development. They are decisively different processes, and their time-scales and cumulative consequences are immeasurably different. Our brains in terms of intelligence are almost certainly not vastly different from those of our forbears 30,000 years ago; our cultural capabilities and tasks certainly are.

The second comment is on a point even more fundamental. The self-organizing principle coupled with feed-back in natural processes is evident enough. This does not entail, and does not indicate, a quasi-purposive universe, an entelechy. Carl Sagan, who believes in extra-terrestrial intelligences and the quest for contacts, whom the author cites in that connexion, makes the significant remark that a re-run of biological evolution would be unlikely to produce human beings. The random factor is as evident and effective as necessity; stability or symmetry is countered by breaks. The Universe, on the evidence, is an open, innovative, bizarre affair, judged by the extraordinary products. There are self-built systems and integrated systems, of which the human body is a marvellous example. That is by no means evidence of a cosmic system, and the indications are contrary. It is not wise to build on the "holistic" idea, exploited philosophically in the years before the war, and discredited. What James Hemming fears as a mechanistic universe would leave all that he stands for and cares for intact. T. H. Huxley and J. S. Mill cherished such ideals all the more passionately because they were convinced that the natural world was not propitious. The really damaging reductionism is to sacrifice the particular to the general, as in Aldous Huxley's *The Perennial Philosophy*, scooping Indian metaphysics, focused on the One and union with the One (and seeking "peak experiences" in experimenting with drugs).

One can espouse the virtues and values James Hemming not only cares for but notably embodies on quite different contractual terms with the universe at large. Focus on the urgent global tasks that confront and should unite us: yes, by all means. Focus on collaboration with an evolutionary process, as an integral function of the universe; that still begs the question. All the same, a heartening, deeply considered, and highly commendable book.

H. J. BLACKHAM

Instead of God is obtainable from G. W. Foote & Co Ltd, 702 Holloway Road, London N19, price £12.95 plus 85p postage.

English village life was never the Arcadian vision of social harmony and universal contentment. Rural society was more clearly divided on class lines, and power there more brutally wielded by those who possessed it, than ever was the case in the towns and cities. Only occasionally did these divisions fester into open social conflict. One of the most notable such occasions was the Burston school strike which began in April 1914.

The social divisions within this Norfolk village were reflected almost exactly in religious allegiances, and the story of the Burston strike is very much a tale of conflict between rival Christian traditions. The villain of the piece was the bull-headed rector, the Reverend Charles Tucker Eland, who took it on himself to defend the social position of the Church and the farmers who worshipped there. In the other corner stood Kitty and Tom Higdon, the schoolmistress and her husband and assistant. They were articulate, independently minded, and (like many of the village labourers) chapel-goers. Kitty had been an Anglican, but forsook the Church when she first crossed swords with Eland. Tom was a Primitive Methodist and lay preacher and, like so many others of that faith, an energetic advocate of rural trades unionism.

Matters came to a head when Tom Higdon organised a labourers' takeover of the Parish Council and the Rector effected a counter coup by winning control of the Board of School Managers. Eland laid many accusations against the Higdons, but the one that did most damage was that they had mistreated two Barnardo children who attended the school. Although the evidence was almost certainly fabricated, the Higdons were dismissed.

Rather than patronise the classes of the new teachers, most of the pupils, with the support of their parents, began a school strike. They were taught by the Higdons on the Green or in a disused carpentry shop, until in 1917 the foundation stone was laid of a splendid Strike School in Burston. The Higdons' supporters stayed loyal in spite of the reprisals by the Rector and his friends, the confiscation of glebe lands and fines for non-attendance at the council school. One mother told the magistrates: "She did not see why they should be ruled by a parson".

Betka Zamoyska tells the story well enough in this slim book. She has the advantage of much first-hand testimony, and includes interesting photographs of the Higdons and their pupils. She is too fond, however, of the extended quote. It is simply not good enough to print a lengthy passage about rural life in another area at another time, and then cap it with words such as: "So it must have been at Burston".

The book is an off-shoot of a BBC television drama broadcast last year with Eileen Atkins and Bernard Hill as Kitty and Tom. Both the programme and the book have something of the air of a fable, a good moral tale of injustice avenged and wrongs righted. Was it really that simple? It would have been instructive to know whether any pupils and parents backed the school strike because they objected to the presence of Barnardo children at the school. More could have been said about the character of the Higdons, and their political and religious motivation.

There can be no doubt, however, that Kitty and Tom Higdon won the affection and respect of the villagers. He laboured mightily in the cause of the agricultural labourers. She was loved by her pupils, and provided not only the occasional bounty of new boots but also instruction on her own typewriter and sewing machine to encourage the girls to look beyond the confines of the village. Above all, they were natural leaders with a strong sense of social justice and they were able to articulate the grievances of the rural poor. It was no coincidence that as the Strike School prospered, the Church congregation dwindled.

The Burston Strike School closed in 1939 after Tom Higdon's death. It had then just eleven pupils — we are not told why the school roll had declined so greatly. The Strike School building was restored in 1950 as a social and educational centre. As for Tom and Kitty, the author reports without any awareness of the irony that both lie in Burston churchyard.

ANDREW WHITEHEAD

I'M STAYING, by Kit Mouat. Woodwick Press, £1.50

The title of this volume by a former *Freethinker* editor is the author's defiant answer to a surgeon who told her she had inoperable secondary cancers. Most of the other 30 poems, however, are not about illness. They are satirical and exhortatory. Kit Mouat is opposed to nuclear weapons, war, the undeserving and Right-wing rich, racists, and dogmatic religion.

Nowadays serious poetry and propaganda don't mix very well. The more of the one, the less of the other. However, some of Kit Mouat's satirical verse bears comparison with Roger Woddis (he may be disgracefully prolific, but he is skilful), and John Betjeman might have been proud to claim her witty and sharp "Patriotism is not Enough", which begins "Oh why are the workers so greedy?"/said Angela Fortesque-Brown". I found it devastatingly funny, and I especially like:

By the time we have paid the twins' school bills
And repairs on our villa in Cannes
We have to scrape by on a pittance—
But just look at the working man!

In "Reflections of War and Peace" we have childhood memories of the First World War, which

"Decreed my mother's barren years", and the apprehensive hope of the inter-war years: "For two sad minute's silence every year/We stood in school, heard our French mistress weep". Now years after the bomb next door in Croydon, she damns warmongers and those who

sell their arms to any hungry gang.
Let every weapon made and sold today
Be labelled thus: THIS IS A BOOMERANG.

There are echoes of Marvell and Pope; there is often a song-like quality, and two of the poems are even labelled "solo" and "chorale". "Solo — The Black Cat" is a telling description of a "Yoga-expert, flexi-cat".

In some ways many of Kit Mouat's poems are in the older tradition of English poetry when the object was both to delight and to instruct. Nowadays the educational and polemical function of poetry has fallen into disuse and even disrepute, but satire is evergreen. Kit Mouat's satire is her strong point, especially in that gem, "Patriotism is not Enough" and to a lesser extent in "Immigrants in Wales" with its attack on retired, self-satisfied Tories fleeing from the too black, too proletarian Midlands.

SARAH LAWSON

I'm Staying is obtainable from Kit Mouat, Mercers, Cuckfield, Sussex (£1.50 plus 20p postage).

A. J. P. Taylor: Eighty Years on

T. F. EVANS

When he was an undergraduate at Oriel College, Oxford, A. J. P. Taylor had no objection to attending compulsory chapel. After a while, however, he decided to "strike a blow for freedom and refused to attend". He was called to see the Dean of the college and invited to explain himself. He said that he "had no religious beliefs and therefore could not conscientiously attend a Christian service". This baffled the Dean, who nevertheless agreed that Taylor could not be expected to attend chapel. Helpfully, he suggested that the undergraduate might wish to talk over his doubts with him. Taylor replied that he had no doubts and the episode came to an end.

A. J. P. Taylor, now well-known as an eminent historian and successful broadcaster on both radio and television, is to reach his eightieth birthday on 25 March. Throughout his life, he has been a free-thinker. Unswayed by dogma, he has shown freedom of thought and enquiry during a career that has mostly been spent in circles where the untrammelled spirit of free enquiry has all too often proved a principle more honoured in the breach than the observance. He became an assistant lecturer in modern history at the University of Manchester more or less by accident and, without ever reaching the heights of a professorship, which he did not want, became an outstanding lecturer, relying more on his own knowledge and inspiration at the time than the rather rigid discipline of a prepared script. He transferred this almost unique capacity for speaking directly to his listeners from the lecture room to the television screen. He is very proud of his television lecturing and, at one stage in his autobiography, he claims that no one else could lecture as he did.

Taylor was educated for a time at the Quaker School, Bootham in York. For all his inability to conform with religious observance he was impressed by the Quaker approach and thought that despite some shortcomings, Quakers were "about the best

thing the human race has produced". This is a view with which others, not generally sympathetic to a religious view of life, might agree. In politics, Taylor has always been on the Left, but idiosyncratically so. His relations with the Labour Party have been sporadic, although he has more often been a member than not. He has taken the view that, in history generally, "the poor were always right and the rich always wrong". He has spoken for causes in which he believed, no matter how unpopular this might have made him with his university or other colleagues. Thus, he spoke against such policies of the Government in the 1930s as the Incitement to Disaffection Bill. More recently, he has been a vigorous champion of CND. He has delivered such quirky judgements as that Adolf Hitler was not "a monster of unique wickedness who could be saddled with all the responsibility for the second world war". He resigned from the British Academy because he "could not remain a Fellow of a body which had hounded (Sir Anthony) Blunt into resignation for reasons which had nothing to do with academic merit". Although on the whole very sure of himself, he has never been afraid to admit it when, on reflection, he has concluded that he was wrong.

These incidents and many, many others are to be found recorded in his most readable and entertaining autobiography, *A Personal History*, which was first published in 1983 and is available in Coronet paperback. It is written, as is everything else, for he makes no distinction between newspaper articles, his works of history and his other writings, in a crisp lucid prose that could be a model for either a journalist or a scholar.

It is sometimes said that the British do not deserve great men. A. J. P. Taylor is one of "the choice and master spirits of this age". And while he is not one to accept conventional — and more often than not worthless — badges of distinction, it is hoped that his birthday will not pass unnoticed.

LETTERS

ANOTHER PATH FROM ROME

Like Barbara Smoker ("My Path From Rome", January) I was a Roman Catholic. But unlike her, it was fear, not love, that bound me to it.

From the age of ten until my early twenties I lived in a nightmare of the Roman Catholic hell and the devil. The nightmare started when I and other boys were taken from school one day to a mission where we received a lecture by one of the "hell-fire priests" as the Jesuit priests were known. I shall never forget the tall, dark Jesuit and the terrible story he told about a white hot pit where every nerve in our bodies would scream in agony — and this was just for missing Mass on Sundays.

Being a slow learner I was simply thrust to the back of the class and largely ignored, except when I didn't know my Catechism. Then I was belted. My doubts started when I began to wonder why an all-loving God would condemn a boy to hell just for missing Mass. But when I voiced these words to a priest, I was told that the devil was whispering in my ear and to pray harder.

Paradoxically the last war did me a great favour by removing me from my Roman Catholic environment. It was at a Royal Air Force camp library in Egypt that I came across Edward Gibbon's "Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire". It took me six weeks to read it, but that first book was the start of my long journey to rationalism and self-education.

I read every "forbidden" book I could lay my hands on. My education was so basic that I almost wore out a dictionary trying to understand the jaw-breaking words. Educated people tend to take their learning for granted. To me, the search for knowledge was, and still is, a great adventure.

JOHN F. SIMPSON

CAUSE OF SECTARIANISM

David McCalden's claim (Letters, February) that the Presbyterian-led Irish rebellion of 1798 was turned into an anti-Protestant blood-bath by Catholics in the south is a blatant distortion of historical truth. The bloody exercise of repression against Protestants and Catholics was carried out by Crown forces.

The three Protestant clergymen responsible for the upsurge of anti-Catholic bigotry in the mid-nineteenth century were Dr Henry Cooke, the Rev Thomas Drew and the Rev Hugh ("Roaring") Hanna. Their inflammatory speeches and sermons led to sectarian riots on a massive scale.

Mr McCalden asks which freethinkers have come forward to speak for Ulster's survival. No freethinker worthy of the name would defend the so-called loyalist regime there.

KEVIN RITCHIE

LITTLE TO CHOOSE

While sympathising with a good deal of what David McCalden says, I must point out that in their attitudes to abortion, there is nothing to choose between the Rev Ian Paisley and his followers and the Roman Catholic Cardinals and theirs. It is quite difficult for women in Britain to understand the hatred that exists between the two branches of Christianity in Ireland when they seem to have so much in common in their

primitive attitudes to women.

I had the privilege of speaking at Queen's University, Belfast, at the first meeting of the Irish Abortion Law Reform Association some five years ago, a meeting attended by women from both sides of the Border and from both religious backgrounds. I know how much this new generation of younger and educated women detest the bigotry of the ranting old men in dog collars on both sides of the divide. I hope David McCalden will urge the Ulster-American Foundation to throw its weight behind the reform movement and help to bring Ireland into the twentieth century.

MADELEINE SIMMS

BEHIND THE TIMES

Your correspondent David McCalden gives a misleading impression of Northern Ireland as an oasis of social progress inhabited by liberal but misunderstood "loyalists". In fact "loyalist" voters have consistently returned reactionary MPs who in almost every case are members of or are acceptable to the religious Orange Order.

For over 60 years Unionist MPs from Northern Ireland have voted against reforming measures at Westminster. In Northern Ireland itself the "loyalists" have opposed reforms (eg on questions like abortion and homosexuality). Their Sunday licensing and entertainment regulations are far more restrictive than on the British mainland.

The Ulster "loyalists" who were once supported by the entire Conservative Party in Britain now have the unqualified backing of only extreme Right-wing elements. This point prompts me to conclude with a question. Is the director of the Ulster-American Heritage Foundation the same David McCalden who was a National Front activist before he emigrated to the United States?

J. E. COHEN

COMFORT IN BEREAVEMENT

In the religious radio programme "Sunday", the clergyman who had found himself in the situation of comforting the children whose teacher was killed so horrifically in the Challenger disaster said that they kept asking him where she had gone. I expected him to say he had assured them that she was now happy with Jesus in heaven. But no. He was unusually honest, and said he had explained to them that she would go on living in their memories and through the influence she had had in life — exactly what we secular humanists say to people suffering a bereavement.

What price, then, the oft-repeated claim that a religious belief (whether based on truth or not) is a great consolation in bereavement, and that since we have nothing with which to replace it we should not try to get people to subject their beliefs to reason?

BARBARA SMOKER

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Last year's splendid total has been followed by a good start to 1986. Over 70 donations, several of them substantial, were received during January. Continued financial support and a determined effort to increase circulation will enable *The Freethinker* to carry on the battle against religious superstition, intolerance and privilege.

Warm thanks are expressed to the first list of 1986 contributors which is given below.

R. L. Scrase, £1; E. Wakefield £1.30; R. J. Beal, C. M. Burnside, B. Carter, B. Cattermole, A. C. F. Chambre, P. Chapman, H. L. Clements, W. T. Crozier, J. Dobbin, J. M. Doughty, H. Fearn, D. Flint, T. Graham, W. R. Gray, H. Gurney, R. Hall, L. Hanger, D. T. Harris, J. Holland, R. Hopkins, R. Lawton, E. Litten, J. Lloyd-Lewis, J. Madden, P. McGuire, C. H. Matthews, R. Neith, M. O'Brien, F. G. Petrak, R. Power, R. V. Samuels, J. Schwiening, J. F. Simpson and I. Young, £1.40 each; P. T. Bell, £1.50; N. Barnes, B. Piercy and V. Rose, £2 each; I. Bertin, J. Lauritsen, D. C. Taylor and G. Vale, £2.40 each; S. Cox and A. A. H. Douglas, £3 each; W. Johnston, £4; V. G. Toland, £4.40; M. Davies, P. J. Gamgee, E. Gearey, J. Hazelhurst, J. Lippitt, E. J. Little, L. C. Lucas and J. A. Spence, £5 each; V. C. Mitchell, £6; T. Atkins, B. Hayes, M. Russell, V. Thapar, P. K. Willmott, C. Wilshaw and A. E. Woodward, £6.40 each; S. Dahlby, £9.80; V. S. Petheram, £10; J. Vallance, £16.40; Anonymous, £30; U. Neville, £46.40; D. C. Campbell and Iconoclast, £100 each.

Total for January: £484.80.

National Secular Society

ANNUAL DINNER

Speakers include

JO RICHARDSON, MP,

CHRIS MOREY

T. F. EVANS

CHRISTINE BONDI

The Coburg Hotel,

Bayswater Road, London W2

(Bayswater and Queensway

Underground Stations)

Saturday, 5 April

6.30 pm for 7 pm

Vegetarians catered for

Tickets £10.50 each

National Secular Society,

702 Holloway Road, London N19 3NL

(telephone 01-272 1266)

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. New Venture Theatre Club, Bedford Place (off Western Road), Brighton. Sunday, 6 April, 5.30 pm for 6 pm. Members' Forum.

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, 11 April, 7.30 pm. Julian Meldrum: AIDS and Its Moral Implications.

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

Humanist Holidays. Easter at Leamington Spa, Warwickshire. Details from Sam Beer, 58 Weir Road, London SW12 ONA, telephone 01-673 6234.

Leeds and District Humanist Group. Swarthmore Institute, Woodhouse Square, Leeds. Wednesday, 12 March, 7.30 pm. Mr Morley: Ethnic Minorities — Religious Issues.

Lewisham Humanist Group. Unitarian Meeting House, 41 Bromley Road, London SE6. Thursday, 27 March, 7.45 pm. Antony Milne: God and Modern Physics.

National Secular Society. Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London WC1. Monday, 17 March, 7.15 pm. Public Meeting. H. E. Assawy, Rabbi Berkovits, G. N. Deodhekar, John Douglas: Is Religious Slaughter Inhumane?

Norwich Humanist Group. Programme of meetings obtainable from Philip Howell, 41 Spixworth Road, Old Catton, Norwich, NR6 7NE, telephone Norwich 47843.

Scottish Humanist Council. Annual Conference, The Cowane Centre, Stirling, Saturday, 12 April, 10 am until 5 pm. Details from Robin Wood, 37 Inchmurrin Drive, Kilmarnock, telephone 0563-26710.

Sutton Humanist Group. Friends House, Cedar Road, Sutton. Wednesday, 9 April, 7.30 pm for 8 pm. Subject: Violence in the Family.

Warwickshire Humanist Group. Friends Meeting House, Hill Street (off Corporation Street), Coventry. Monday, 17 March, 7.45 pm for 8 pm. Public Meeting.

West Glamorgan Humanist Group. Information regarding meetings and other activities is obtainable from Georgina Coupland, 117 Pennard Drive, Southgate, telephone 01-828 3631.

Worthing Humanist Group. Programme of meetings obtainable from Bob Thorpe, 19 Shirley Drive, Worthing, telephone 62846.

The veteran campaigner said she looked back in remembrance to her colleagues.

"We had great fun together — Frida, wife of Harold Laski, Joan, wife of Clifford Allen, Dorothy Thurtle, Leah L'Estrange Malone, Alice Hicks, Margaret Lloyd, Jenny Adamson, Janet Chance, Stella Browne. To Stella, Janet Chance and Alice Hicks must go the honour of being the ones among us who were the supporters of abortion. Although I feared harm for our cause, I did glory in Stella Browne's intransigence. Raising the abortion issue in meetings, with wisps of hair floating from her untidy coiffure, she would resist all efforts of chairmen to put her down.

"Alice Hicks lived to see the reform of the abortion law by David Steel's bill, but the fight to defend and protect it is never ending and still requires the stalwart courage of more determined women. In spite, or perhaps because, of the spread of scientific knowledge, abortion and other sex questions continue to arouse bitter controversy and divided opinions, both of men and women. In much modern practice such as test tube babies and storing of foetuses for experiment, I very seriously disagree. But I consider that wherever such differences arise and decisions must be taken, there should be the greatest possible freedom of individual choice".

Many congratulatory messages were received, including one from the Abortion Law Reform Association of Northern Ireland where the 1967 Abortion Act does not apply.

Barbara Smoker, president of the National Secular Society, sent greetings and congratulations on behalf of the NSS. She said that what ALRA achieved with the 1967 Abortion Act was almost (in a secular sense) miraculous.

"It would probably have been impossible at any earlier moment of history, and could not have been so completely successful at any later moment. It was a matter of grasping the opportunity, and holding on to it with strength and determination as the religious opposition woke up to attack — and while the credit for that must go to those individuals who galvanised ALRA into action in the wake of the thalidomide tragedy twenty years ago, they were enabled to do so because of the structure that their predecessors had set up in 1936.

"ALRA is still very much needed today, not to bring about reform — as its title implies — but to preserve and consolidate the reform already achieved, in the teeth of continuing hostility. That hostility, grounded mainly in religious superstition, is less concerned with the natural rights of women than with the supposed rights of entities without any feelings, imagination, or stake in life, because of irrational, muddled thinking about potentiality.

"The 1967 Act is, as it was always intended to be, merely permissive — not forcing abortion on those

with a religious objection to it, but equally not allowing believers to force on others, who do not share the beliefs on which the objection is founded, the continuation of unwanted pregnancies. Other parallel social issues are still awaiting legislation, and ALRA is always generous with its support of kindred organisations still in the pre-1967 stage of achievement.

"We wish ALRA a good celebration of this anniversary — but trust it will not be needed long enough to celebrate again in 2036".

ALRA's pioneers were determined and formidable ladies, but it took four decades of agitation and education before abortion law was reformed. Fortunately their successors realise that the same determination is required to defend what was achieved in 1967.

Family and Youth Concern (formerly The Responsible Society) has started a campaign to pressurise politicians on "family" issues. Its inaugural meeting in London last month was attended by prominent supporters of the Compulsory Pregnancy Lobby. Mrs Valerie Riches, the FYC secretary, said that one of their aims was the separation of biology from sex education!

Sunday Trading "a Thing of the Present"

Sunday trading in England and Wales is already part of the tradition of Sunday, according to figures published by the National Consumer Council. Though most forms of Sunday trading are still illegal, over 3,000 advertisements for Sunday opening were collected in just six days in early February.

Over half the advertisements (56 per cent) were for illegal trading in England and Wales. Car sales — the biggest category — accounted for 35 per cent, and next came shops of all kinds selling goods illegally (21 per cent).

Other advertisements included estate agents open for business seven days a week, car accessory shops, exhibitions and premises open for "viewing only".

NCC chairman Michael Montague commented: "Here is proof in black and white of the demand for Sunday opening.

"The law has clearly fallen into disrepute".

Because of pressure on space, Obituary notices have been held over until next month.