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RELIGIOUS SEGREGATION IN SCHOOL "A LOOMING SOCIAL TRAGEDY"

Growing concern over the proliferation of voluntary-aided schools in which children are segregated on grounds of race, sex and religion is reflected in a statement sponsored by the National Secular Society and published in the Guardian newspaper. The signatories are Sir Alfred Ayer, Dr Cyril Bibby, H. J. Blackham, Edward Blishen, Christine Bondi, Sir Hermann Bondi, Brigid Brophy, Professor Bernard Crick, Govind N. Deodhekar, Michael Duane, Professor Lionel Elvin, Sir Raymond Firth, Lord Houghton of Sowerby, Madan Mohan Kalia, Ludovic Kennedy, Professor Carl Lofmark, George Melly, Naomi Mitchison, Dr Joseph Needham, Christopher Price, Lord Raglan, Barbara Smoker and Lord Willis. The text of the statement is given below.

We are very concerned about a dangerously divisive factor in our educational system: the large number of voluntary-aided denominational schools that segregate children according to their religious background. The social divisiveness this causes is seen at its worst in Northern Ireland.

Voluntary-aided denominational schools have so far been confined almost entirely to Anglican, Roman Catholic, and a few Jewish schools; but we are now seeing the beginning of a proliferation to include various immigrant religions.

In April this year, a recommendation from a local authority (Brent) that a fundamentalist Islamic primary school in its area be allowed public funding, in line with denominational schools in the Judaeo-Christian tradition, was sent to the minister of state for education.

Whatever the decision in this particular case, it cannot be long, in the name of racial and religious equality, before a separate Muslim or Sikh (or Hindu or other religious) school is granted voluntary-aided status, thereby encouraging a general upsurge of immigrant denominational schools.

This may seem, superficially, a progressive step in line with current trends towards multiracial education and bilingualism; but in fact it would mean for many children — especially girls — of immigrant families almost total isolation from the host community and from ideas at variance with those of the home background.

This would not only be a disaster for these youngsters personally, it would also inevitably build up for future generations a greater degree of animosity and violence than we have seen even in Northern Ireland. There, children are segregated on grounds of religious background only; in this case there would be the additional divisive factors of race, skin colour, and sex.

And besides driving a wedge between immigrants and the host community, separate religious schools would import to Britain some of the religion-based bitterness and strife that exist on the Indian sub-continent.

In the name of equity, however, it is manifestly impossible for the state to refuse Muslims and Sikhs the same right as Christians and Jews to state-subsidised schools of their own.

How, then, can this looming social tragedy be averted without blatant discrimination? Only by Parliament legislating without delay gradually to phase out subsidies to denominational schools of every kind.

Besides encouraging integrated schooling, this would make good economic sense: at least 85 per cent of the capital cost and 100 per cent of the running costs of voluntary-aided denominational schools are financed from the public purse, and this dual system of education is notoriously wasteful.

We cannot deny, however, that a parliamentary decision to phase out subsidies to denominational schools will need considerable political courage, since it will inevitably lose votes. It demands an all-party determination to grasp the nettle.

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Vol 106 No 8 CONTENTS August 1986

RELIGIOUS SEGREGATION IN SCHOOL "A LOOMING SOCIAL TRAGEDY" ...	113
NEWS AND NOTES ...	114
The Dictators' Church; A Flawed Legend; Victoria is Not Amused; Money Matters; Expensive Promises; Less Than Equal; "A Really Good Man"	
THE STRANGE STORY OF MOTHER BUCHAN ...	117
Gordon Grant	
HOLIDAY CAMP ...	117
Brian Parry	
NORTH OF THE BORDER, DOWN FREEMASON WAY ...	118
David Yallop	
NOT SO GAY FOR THE TAXPAYER ...	119
Ted Goodman	
UNBELIEF FROM A TO Z ...	120
Nicolas Walter	
FREETHINKER REVIEWS ...	122
BOOKS	
Evolution as a Religion Reviewer: Antony Grey	
Augustus Carp, Esq., by Himself Reviewer: Nigel Sinnott	
LIBRARIANS CONCERNED ABOUT "CREEPING CENSORSHIP" ...	123
OBITUARY ...	124
LETTERS ...	125
THE TURIN SHROUD ...	127
Barbara Smoker	
CHALLENGER: GOD IN CONTROL ...	127
RC CHURCH AGAINST CLASSROOM INTEGRATION ...	128
SUNDAY FREEDOM FIGHT GOES ON ...	128

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NEWS

THE DICTATORS' CHURCH

Every Right-wing dictator in pre-war Europe could rely on the Roman Catholic Church's support, and particularly that of the influential and intensely pro-German Cardinal Pacelli who became Pope Pius XII. Hitler, Mussolini, Salazar and others of that ilk were heroes of the hierarchy. But the Church's most loyal and favoured son was undoubtedly General Francisco Franco, the Spanish dictator in whose honour a Mass was celebrated last month on the 50th anniversary of the Spanish Civil War.

Following the Vatican's lead, the Catholic International propaganda machine mounted an unprecedented campaign in support of Franco's "crusade against communism". In Britain, the *Universe* weekly newspaper, then even more reactionary than it is at the present time, published a series of "atrocities" articles in which the anti-Franco forces were depicted as ravaging hordes of murderers, rapists and destroyers of churches and convents. The *Catholic Herald* had two correspondents on the Nationalist side. Even the usually restrained *Tablet* acclaimed Franco. Only the *Catholic Worker* refused to join in the barrage of pro-Franco propaganda in the Catholic press.

Franco's religious supporters overlooked the fact that his Nationalist army did not take prisoners. They simply described massacres of Republican captives as atrocities carried out on, not by, the Nationalists. The Catholic press ignored the murder by Franco's supporters of Spain's greatest poet, Frederico Garcia Lorca.

Franco depended heavily on outside support. The Germans obliged by carpet bombing cities and towns, a prelude to similar operations in the second world war. Franco brought in Moorish troops to do the real dirty work, like knifing and bayoneting two hundred Republican fighters in their hospital beds.

When the war ended the Pope congratulated Franco on "the victory for Catholic Spain". The dictator was photographed surrounded by a bevy of bishops, their arms upraised in the Fascist salute.

Franco's cause had many supporters in Britain, and still has. Malcolm Muggeridge believes that "the Church's position was the right one. In fact, the Church should take the same view in the Latin America of today".

Indeed there are similarities between some Latin American countries in 1986 and the Spain of 1936. But in 1986 the greatest threat to people struggling to achieve democracy and social justice comes from the United States, a country in the grip of a fundamentalist "born again" mania.

AND NOTES

A FLAWED LEGEND

The Twelfth of July demonstrations in Northern Ireland have long been a display of Protestant ascendancy. Orange lodges, often led by clergymen, have hitherto regarded it as their inherent right to process in areas with large Catholic populations, secure in the knowledge that the largely Protestant Royal Ulster Constabulary and other "security" forces would, if necessary, come to their rescue.

All that is changing. The Orange Order's private army, the hated "B" Specials, was disbanded in 1970. Members of the RUC are now putting their substantial pay packets before their Protestantism and firing plastic bullets at their erstwhile admirers.

It is highly unlikely that one in a thousand of the Orangemen who dress up in comic opera regalia every 12 July to celebrate King William III's victory at the battle of the Boyne in 1690 has the faintest knowledge of the issues and personalities involved. They hail William's defeat of King James II as a triumph for Protestantism. In fact religion played little part in that skirmish 296 years ago.

In one respect the Boyne confrontation was something of a family affair. The Prince of Orange was both King James's nephew and his son-in-law. Seen in a wider context, the outcome of the battle was of greater significance to Continental rather than to English or Irish interests.

James II was backed by his first cousin, Louis XIV of France. As a child of five, Louis succeeded his father in 1643 and ruled for 72 years. During his reign France became the most aggressive and dominant country in Europe. Other powers formed an alliance to curb the French. One of them was the Church of Rome.

James was a convert to Catholicism whose character defects did not commend him to the Pope. But his greatest fault in the Church's eyes was that he supported the expansionist Louis XIV. So there was much rejoicing in Rome when news of William's victory over James was received. Pope Alexander III, like his predecessor, Innocent XI, supported the Prince of Orange. He ordered that the Vatican be illuminated and a *Te Deum* sung in honour of King William's victory at the Boyne.

But the legends persist, and every year a mythical victory for Protestantism is celebrated in Northern Ireland. This annual orgy of pig-ignorant Orange bigotry is the ugliest manifestation of religious intolerance and fanaticism that is seen anywhere in the British Isles.

VICTORIA IS NOT AMUSED

Whoops! Purity crusader Victoria Gillick failed to notice a very large and ripe banana skin when she agreed to be interviewed by journalist Barbara Jones. This oversight resulted in a *Mail on Sunday* report and photographs which were most revealing (in more ways than one).

Mrs Gillick, a prolific breeder and devout Roman Catholic, became something of a celebrity doing battle with the DHSS because she objected to its guidelines to doctors giving contraception advice to young girls. She lost her High Court case but won at the Court of Appeal. However, she had to swallow a bitter pill when the Law Lords overturned the Appeal Court's ruling. Thousands of girls were saved from the dangers of Victoria's roulette.

It now appears that Mrs Gillick's own 16-year-old daughter Beattie — one of her ten children — is not prepared to toe the parental line. She went to Greece to visit her boyfriend, Andreas, and his parents. But the young couple moved to a holiday apartment, Beattie commenting: "I don't think I should tell my parents everything.

"I've been in the limelight for years because of this campaigning by my mother, and my father is awful. He tries to be strict but it's ridiculous. I know for a fact he did this sort of thing himself, in Greece too . . .

"At my age I believe I should be allowed to do what I like with my own body. It's really not my parents' business any more".

The topless Beattie was photographed on a beach massaging the brawny Andreas.

Mrs Gillick, who sets great store by prayer, reacted to the *Mail on Sunday* report in language *The Freethinker* prefers not to publish. Suffice to say it will not endear her to Mary Whitehouse or the Community Standards Association.

MONEY MATTERS

The Charity Commissioners are to investigate the affairs of the Selly Oak Christian Mission in Birmingham. The inquiry has been initiated after information was received concerning the pastor, the Rev David Woodfield, who is receiving a weekly salary of £220 and the use of a £6,000 car while acting as a church trustee.

A spokesman for the Commission said the only accounts they had received from the Centre are for the period ended 28 August 1983. The Centre's trust deed made no provision for the payment of any trustee.

"Trustees are not normally entitled to receive any payment out of a charity, although exceptions can

be made.

"In the case of the Christian Life Centre, the trust deed contains no provision for the payment of any trustee".

The Commissioners took action after another trustee, Mr Mervyn Moody, was barred from membership of the CLC. Mr Moody commented: "I am one of four trustees of a church of which I am not a member".

The Rev Woodfield claimed that his salary was not excessive. He added: "It is not unusual for ministers to have a company car".

EXPENSIVE PROMISES

Former Scientologist Larry Wollersheim has been awarded \$30 million by a Los Angeles court which heard that the Church of Scientology had deliberately driven him to the verge of insanity. He had been a member for eleven years, part of the time as an employee.

Wollersheim told the court that he had paid \$100,000 on courses, believing promises that these would lead to higher intelligence, business success and supernatural powers. He had been "disconnected" from relatives and friends who were critical of Scientology.

After he began to question the church's teachings, the Scientologists tried to destroy him mentally and financially by bankrupting his business.

The jury voted unanimously in favour of Mr Wollersheim.

LESS THAN EQUAL

A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another. John 13-34

The controversy in Britain over the ordination of women has been a polite affair. In Australia the debate is rather more heated. In one Sydney parish, members of the Movement for the Ordination of Women have been described as "sows", while a Brisbane church warden has dubbed the reformers "the movement for the ordination of witches".

Dr Patricia Brennan, the movement's president, has protested about the language being used by clergy opponents. She is particularly incensed by a letter published by the Rev Dr Paul Webb in *Church Scene*, the Anglican national weekly, which she referred to the New South Wales Anti-Discrimination Board.

Dr Webb wrote that the movement for women's ordination "has nothing to do with a vocation to the sacred ministry, but everything to do with the feminist movement's idea of equality . . . MOW is now aligned with all the 'oddball' groups crying

out for 'equality' (whatever that means) and recognition: groups like 'equality for one-armed, black-lesbian Jewesses'".

Dr Brennan said she had submitted Dr Webb's letter to the Anti-Discrimination Board "because we want to clear up in our minds the extent to which opponents of women's ordination can extend what started off as a church matter to discriminatory remarks about other groups in the community".

"A REALLY GOOD MAN"

Actor Kenneth Williams confessed that he had trouble stifling laughter when he read *Augustus Carp, Esq., by Himself* at the microphone. It is extraordinary that this hugely comic novel (sub-titled "Being the Autobiography of a Really Good Man") was virtually unknown until it was broadcast in the "Story Time" programme. Yet it deserves an honoured place alongside classics like *Diary of a Nobody*, *Lady Addle Remembers* and E. F. Benson's Tilling chronicles.

Augustus Carp relates his daily comings and goings in tedious detail. An avid attender of prayer meetings, he is also an active worker for good causes like the Anti-Dramatic Union, the Society for the Prohibition of the Strong Drink Traffic, and the St Potamus League for Purity. His co-worker in the Lord's vineyard is Ezekiel Stool, whose father, Abraham, is given to fits of religious enthusiasm necessitating his removal to a "home of rest". Augustus eventually marries one of the five Stool daughters, a homely girl whose charms include webbed toes.

For many years the authorship of *Augustus Carp, Esq.*, was a mystery. He turned out to be Sir Henry Howard Bashforth, MD, FRCP, Chief Medical Officer to the Post Office, Medical Adviser to the Treasurer and Honorary Physician to King George VI. He wrote articles for *The Lancet* and published several other long forgotten books. Sir Henry died 25 years ago on 21 August 1961.

Augustus Carp, Esq., has been republished at £4.95 by The Boydell Press, PO Box 9, Woodbridge, Suffolk, IP12 3DF. Freethinkers in particular will enjoy this gem of deadpan humour. It is reviewed on page 122.

Conservative and Alliance members of Somerset County Council joined forces to ensure the continuance of stag hunting in the area. Their decision not to ban the Quantock Hunt from council land was hailed by jubilant hunt supporters. The League Against Cruel Sports led the anti-hunt campaign. Labour councillors declined an invitation to attend a meet.

The Strange Story of Mother Buchan

GORDON GRANT

Every explorer on the highways and by-ways of religious sectarianism will discover amazing examples of fanaticism and daftness. Such aberrations have their comic elements, but sometimes they lead to despair and tragedy.

A dynamic leader is usually the mainstay of most sects, and the more extravagant his or her claims may be, the greater is the followers' loyalty. The supreme power claimed by or attributed to a sect leader is the ability to confer immortality on those whose faith is absolute. And of course when a recipient of everlasting life goes the way of all flesh the explanation is simple enough. Death is the penalty for a weakening of faith.

An extraordinary case of self-delusion and gullibility occurred in Scotland just two centuries ago. A religious crank named Elspeth Buchan announced she was immortal and that all who followed her would be translated direct to heaven without undergoing the process of dying. "Friend Mother in Christ", or Mother Buchan as she was generally known, soon attracted a band of disciples, mostly illiterate and simple types, but a few who were well-to-do and respected in the community. Their faith in her was rock solid. It had to be.

Mother Buchan told her flock to fast for forty days and nights, at the end of which period they would all ascend to heaven. One July evening in 1786 they left their communal abode and set out from a nearby hill from which the journey to the realms of glory

would commence. Their heads were shaved, except for a tuft of hair by which the angels would hoist them aloft. Loose slippers were worn so that they could be discarded easily when the ascent began.

Needless to say they remained on *terra firma* and returned home in a state of dejection and extreme hunger. But even that disappointment and other unfulfilled promises did not shake their faith in Friend Mother in Christ.

When she was dying in March 1791, Mother Buchan told her followers that if they remained faithful her spirit would re-enter the body after six days. They would then all fly off to heaven. If their faith wavered she would not come back for ten years, but if it really weakened they would have to wait fifty years for her return.

Mother Buchan's body was moved from place to place before being buried in a local churchyard. But it was exhumed by some of her followers who concealed it in a large stair-head cupboard.

There were only two of her faithful followers alive when the 50th anniversary of Mother Buchan's death fell on 29 March 1841. One of them, Andrew Innes, never doubted that she would return for him. For a day and a night he kept watch but no sign of life appeared in the shrivelled corpse.

Shortly before his own death Andrew Innes told the bizarre story to three friends. At his request, he and Mother Buchan were buried in the same grave.

Holiday Camp

BRIAN PARRY

There is a strong smell of burning incense in the air, the Hallelujah Chorus plays in the background and people queue patiently in front of confessional screens while two nuns lead a candlelight procession through the building distributing luminous plastic virgins to "the faithful".

"It couldn't have happened ten years ago", said a friend. "It will probably cause a bit of a stir now", I replied. For this was no church service but the opening of a new bar in Spain. And the nuns were no nuns but two local drag artists — the Costa Blanca equivalents of San Francisco's Sisters of Perpetual Indulgence — dispensing kisses to the "congregation" to make up for the horrible virgins.

The bar, L'Anouer, is based entirely on High Church Camp and even has one room (or chapel) featuring something suspiciously like an altar. We were there every night for at least one drink during our two-week stay and the bar certainly seemed to be attracting attention. People from miles around were turning up to take pictures of each other lighting cigarettes from the altar candles or, no doubt inspired by some divine spirit or other, to give giggling sermons from the lectern. Many seemed to

enter the bar on tiptoe as if the bar might be struck by lightning any minute. Indeed some nearby residents had begun to complain before the first week was out.

"They say it is irreverent" one of our Spanish hosts told us, "but there's nothing they can do about it".

L'Anouer is a wonderful bar and it makes a change to hear good classical music being played over an excellent sound system rather than the usual bar muzac. But what makes it especially appealing to me is the reaction of the Spanish revellers taking an almost childlike delight in cocking a snook at one of their strongest institutions.

Mind you, some people are already telling tales of stone virgins swaying in the evening breeze — a phenomenon noticed by more than one visitor. Some sceptics have already put this down to some of the more lethal drinks dispensed from the "confessional." Should the Pope wish to investigate he will find L'Anouer just outside Benidorm, on the main road to Valencia. But somehow, I don't think he'd enjoy it as much as I did.

North of the Border, Down Freemason Way

DAVID YALLOP

John Stalker, Deputy Chief Constable of Manchester, undertook an inquiry into allegations that the Royal Ulster Constabulary conducted a shoot-to-kill operation that resulted in the deaths of several unarmed men. It is now widely believed that he uncovered information that was highly damaging to the RUC. Mr Stalker was taken off the inquiry following a smear campaign thought to have been orchestrated by pro-RUC elements in Northern Ireland and the British mainland. David Yallop, author of several important investigative works, poses a series of questions for the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland.

Last month I was invited to become a member of a secret society. In view of the fact that it numbers among its members many of the rich and powerful who in reality control our open society, it came as no surprise that I was supposed to feel flattered to receive such an invitation. The invitation, however, aroused other emotions within me and I declined, much to the amazement of the Member of Parliament who had offered to place me among such "illustrious" people. The society in question is Freemasonry.

I find the idea of baring my right arm, left breast and left knee and walking around among a group of strange men blindfold with a noose around my neck, unappealing. I find the idea of uttering the Masonic oath bizarre. The oath in question is: "These several points I solemnly swear to observe without evasion, equivocation, or mental reservation of any kind, under no less a penalty on the violation of any of them, than that of having my throat cut across. My tongue torn out by the root and buried in the sands of the sea at low water mark at least a cable's length from the shore where the tide repeatedly ebbs and flows twice in the twenty four hours". There must be a more pleasant way of spending an evening than going through that lot. Yet, consider some of those who have done so and are active Freemasons.

The body politic is well represented. There are three Masonic Lodges at Westminster, the 64 members include the former Solicitor General Sir Ian Percival, QC (Tory, Southport), the former health minister Sir Gerard Vaughan (Tory, Reading) and Lord Whitelaw. The more one looks around this green and pleasant land the more one is forced to the irresistible conclusion that the place is awash with Masons. They are everywhere; the office of the Director of Public Prosecutions is riddled with them and the Judiciary can boast of over 40 Masonic

judges. We have long learned to accept the fact that our judges wear some rather odd clothes in public. Clearly a number of them are not averse to partially undressing in front of other men either.

The police force contains many hundreds of men ranging from Chief Constables down to the bobby on the beat who have offered to have painful things done to their bodies in the event of them revealing the secrets of Freemasonry. So many members of the police are clamouring to join this secret society that they have been granted permission by the United Grand Lodge of England to form their own lodges. One such lodge, the Metropolitan Manor of St James, was consecrated at Freemasons Hall in London on 27 January. Over four hundred Masons, the majority of them police officers, took part in the ceremony. It is one way to meet members of the Royal Family I suppose; the Duke of Kent is England's top Mason.

All of this might be considered harmless if distasteful nonsense by non-members. But there is a darker side. My own detailed research into Italian freemasonry established irrefutably that a totally corrupt lodge, P2, not only functioned as a State within a State, but was responsible for a vast array of outrages ranging from the bombing of Bologna Railway station on 2 August 1980 — an atrocity that resulted in the deaths of 85 people and the maiming of a further 185 — to the fraudulent collapse of Banca Ambrosiano and the loss of 1.3 billion dollars.

I also established very close links between the Sicilian Mafia and Freemasonry. The Godfather of one of those Mafia families explained those links to me: "Look we have members of the Family in many countries. We pride ourselves on our organisational ability, on our professionalism. We are bambinos compared with the Masons. You will have heard much on this island (Sicily) about respect. It is something we prize highly. Fear is easy to inspire. Respect is much harder to attain. Look at the Freemasons in England. They are automatically respected. They have pulled off a very difficult trick. Ultimate power, obtained in a legal manner. Not bad for a secret society".

In case the reader should be tempted to rationalise all of this away, on the basis that it involves people in far off lands, allow me to bring it a little closer to home. What is now being called the Stalker affair offers clear evidence that the evil of Freemasonry is thriving north of the Irish border. The next time that Peter Barry is in conversation with the Northern Ireland Secretary, Tom King, he might consider asking the following questions: (1) How

many members of the Royal Ulster Constabulary are Freemasons? (2) Is Sir John Hermon, the Chief Constable, a Freemason? (3) Will Mr King instigate a full investigation into the links between Freemasons who are members of the RUC and Freemasons who are members of the police force in the Manchester area? (4) Is Mr King aware of an FBI surveillance exercise carried out on John Stalker and Manchester businessman Kevin Taylor in Miami, in 1981? (5) Is Mr King aware that prior to his promotion to Deputy Chief Constable, Mr Stalker was positively vetted, in a very full procedure, by

individuals who were fully aware of the FBI report? (6) Before being appointed to replace John Stalker, was the Chief Constable of West Yorkshire, Colin Sampson, vetted to ensure that he was free of links with criminals?

Mr Peter Barry will be doing all of us a service if he is able to obtain straight answers to these questions. Perhaps when all the Freemasons have been eliminated from the affair we could then address ourselves again to the very grave issues that John Stalker was investigating until the Freemasons decided to take a hand.

Not so Gay for the Taxpayer

TED GOODMAN

It was to have been the most important censorship case in over 25 years. HM Customs and Excise, who often appear to be a law unto themselves, mounted an elaborate operation of surveillance and harassment of Gay's The Word bookshop in London. A magistrates' court committed them for trial at the Old Bailey in October. On 27 June, Customs and Excise announced that the prosecution would be discontinued. On 11 July, the charges were formally withdrawn. Customs officials were left with egg on their faces. Taxpayers were left with the bill.

The European Communities Act 1972 incorporated Community Law, including free trade between member states. This meant that it became illegal for the United Kingdom to have stricter restrictions on Community imports than on home-produced material. On 11 March, 1986 the Court of Justice of the European Communities ruled in the case of Conegate Ltd v HM Customs and Excise (case121/85) that the British prohibition of "indecent" foreign articles was illegal under Community Law, since no such prohibition existed in British domestic law. The case concerned the forfeiture in 1983 of imported West German "sailor's friend" (inflatable, life-sized vaginal) dolls, even though such dolls are lawful inside Britain, as visits to London sex-shops will reveal!

The Gay's The Word case arose under Section 42 of the Customs Consolidation Act 1876, which prohibits the import of "Indecent" articles. Section 170(2) of the Customs and Excise Management Act 1979 states that any person knowingly concerned in any evasion of any prohibition shall be guilty of an offence and may be detained. Section 161(1) empowers customs officers to enter (by breaking in if necessary) any building at any place at any time and search and seize anything liable to forfeiture.

Meanwhile (appropriately in 1984) British Customs Officers had embarked on a campaign of raiding bookshops, seizing "indecent" foreign publications and prosecuting the booksellers for being concerned with prohibited importation. Amongst the victims were Adelaide Bookshop, Atomage, Balham Food and Book Co-operative, Essentially Gay, Giovanni's, Housemans London Peace Bookshop, Lavender Menace and Zipper.

The English Courts have interpreted these statutory provisions as meaning that anyone in possession of indecent articles of non-British origin is committing the offence of being knowingly concerned in their illegal import. In addition, under the Obscene Publications Act, it is an offence to publish or to be in possession for gain of *obscene* articles. Obscenity is defined in the Act as material likely to deprave and corrupt persons likely to read, see, or hear it.

The Customs Legislation is therefore different from the obscenity law. The former prohibits foreign indecent articles, the latter prohibits all obscene ones. Indecency has been defined by the English Courts as including anything which is "immodest or unbecoming". It thus covers a much wider range of material than obscenity. In other words the prohibition on imports is far stricter than that regarding home-produced material.

The most spectacular raid was that on Gay's The Word bookshop in central London. Code-named "Operation Tiger", it started early in the morning of 10 April, 1984 when Customs officers forced their way into the flat of Glen McKee, a director of the bookshop. They kept him prisoner there for six hours, refused him access to his lawyer, searched all his belongings and took away his papers and some of his personal possessions. The officers then raided the shop, which they ordered the manageress and her assistant to close. The two were then taken to Customs Headquarters at Woburn Place for prolonged interrogation while 800 books, a third of the entire stock, were taken away from the shop.

(continued on page 124)

The new "Encyclopedia of Unbelief" is a major addition to the literature of freethought, and it will be found indispensable to all serious students of the subject, but it is far from perfect.

Gordon Stein, who is the editor of the *American Rationalist* and an associate editor of *Free Inquiry*, and a leading member of several freethought organisations in the United States, has produced several important reference books in the area of freethought — *Robert G. Ingersoll: A Checklist* (1969); *Freethought in the United States: A Descriptive Bibliography* (1978), jointly with Marshall G. Brown; *Freethought in the United Kingdom and the Commonwealth: A Descriptive Bibliography* (1981) — and he has now produced *The Encyclopedia of Unbelief* (1985).*

The Encyclopedia of Unbelief is a massive publication. It contains more than 200 generally long entries totalling about 650,000 words in two large volumes which are generously produced and very expensive. By contrast, Joseph McCabe's *Rationalist Encyclopaedia* (1948) contained thousands of much shorter entries totalling about 450,000 words in one relatively small volume which was meantly produced and fairly cheap. There are more than 100 contributors, most of them academics and most of them in North America. They include several names well known to members of the British freethought movement — David Berman, G. N. Deodhekar, Antony Flew, Jim Herrick, Paul Kurtz, Robert Morrell, Kit Mouat, Edward Royle, Nigel Sinnott, David Tribe and G. A. Wells — who have produced articles which are as good as would be expected. They also include several other reliable writers, and there are many valuable entries, especially some very interesting ones on unbelief in various religions, countries and literatures.

However, taken as a whole, the book is whatever one should call the non-religious equivalent of a curate's egg. Parts of it are good, but other parts are bad, and some parts are missing. The problems begin at the beginning, with the title and hence the subject of the book. The concept of unbelief is discussed in the foreword by Paul Edwards and the introduction by Gordon Stein, but it remains unclear. It is so vague and negative that it can be defined only by what is not believed, and in the present context it is defined as unbelief in traditional religion and the supernatural. But this is still unsatisfactory. Thus how relevant is such unbelief under a non-religious dominant ideology such as Fascism or Communism? In recent Germany and Italy or in current Russia and China, for example, does unbelief include

dissent from political rather than religious orthodoxy? Not here, it seems, which seriously reduces the book's relevance to contemporary concerns.

There is no entry on Unbelief itself, and there are uneven entries on other negative aspects of the subject, such as Agnosticism, Atheism, Skepticism, and Unbelief as a Way of Life (the first two are quite misleading). Moving to the positive aspects of the subject, there is a helpful though narrow entry on Humanism, and there are unhelpful entries on Freethought, Rationalism, Reason and Secularism (the latter begins with the unfortunate double mistake of saying that "the term *secularism* was coined by George Jacob Holyoake in 1841", when he didn't coin it but adopted it, and not in 1841 but in 1851). The basis and balance of the book might have been more secure if the keyword had been Freethought rather than Unbelief. After all how many of us think of ourselves primarily as unbelievers? As it is, too many entries are artificially connected with unbelief when they are actually concerned with wider issues altogether.

Another pervasive problem is that too many entries are too long, containing unnecessary points and irrelevant comments, more suitable for casual reading than for easy reference, and creating a general atmosphere of slackness — very different from the feeling of urgency in Joseph McCabe's *Rationalist Encyclopaedia*. And there is the double problem which faces all reference books — consistency of coverage and accuracy of information.

The book's general coverage is more or less what might be expected, and some of the more unexpected entries are welcome. Similarly the general level of accuracy is high. But there are really too many errors and omissions for such an ambitious work of reference. So while one should pay tribute to the bulk of the book's content, one must also draw attention to some of the many inconsistencies and inaccuracies in it.

On freethought organisations, for example, there are entries for the American Association for the Advancement of Atheism, the American Rationalist Federation, and the Freedom from Religion Foundation, but not for the many other American atheist, ethical, humanist and secularist organisations (though some are discussed under Unbelief in the United States or Ethical Culture); and there are entries for the Leicester Secular Society and the National Secular Society, but not for the many other British ethical, humanist and rationalist organisations (though again some are discussed under Unbelief in the United Kingdom or Ethical Culture).

Such uneven coverage is a common feature in other areas. There are entries on Unbelief in many

countries and literatures, but not for Italy (thus missing such figures as Machiavelli, Leopardi, Garibaldi and Pirandello); on Unbelief in the Enlightenment and in Science, but not in the Renaissance or Reformation; on Unbelief in various religions but not in political ideologies such as Liberalism, Socialism and Anarchism. The coverage of anarchists is very eccentric, with entries on Godwin, Emma Goldman and Voltairine de Cleyre, but not on the leading anarchists or on others who made significant contributions to freethought such as Stirner, Most, Domela Nieuwenhuis and Faure; there is an entry on Ferrer, but it almost suppresses his anarchism. At the other end of the spectrum, there is a curious reticence about the unbelief of some modern political leaders — the entry on Unbelief in Australia doesn't mention Hawke, on Unbelief in Germany doesn't mention Brandt, on Unbelief in India doesn't mention Nehru, on Unbelief in Sweden doesn't mention Palme, on Unbelief in the United Kingdom doesn't mention MacDonald or Bevan or Foot (though the latter makes an odd appearance under the Leicester Secular Society).

There is an almost complete silence about the arts, despite the significant contributions of so many unbelievers to non-verbal creativity and the great importance of painting, sculpture and music in the lives of so many unbelievers. The entry on Unbelief in English Literature concentrates on the nineteenth century, even then omitting William Johnson Cory, Edward FitzGerald, George Meredith, Samuel Butler, George Gissing, A. E. Housman, Olive Schreiner, W. E. Henley and so on, and it says nothing about the many important unbelievers in the twentieth century such as Conrad and Bennett, Forster and Lawrence, Galsworthy and Maugham, Zangwill and Orwell, Woolf and Wilson, Amis and Larkin, Brophy and Duffy, Osborne and Mortimer, Arden and Pinter, Bond and Orton.

There are strange gaps in other areas such as history (no entries on Buckle, Bury, Draper, Gibbon, Lecky, Trevelyan, White), philosophy (no entries on Flew, James, Moore, Popper, Ryle, Sidgwick, Williams) and science (no entries on Darwin, Einstein, Haldane, Huxley, Monod, Newton, Pauling).

The relevance of freethought to campaigns for sexual freedom (including contraception and abortion), and for the right to die (including infanticide and euthanasia) is covered by entries on Moral Judgments and Sexual Values, but there is little about the actual activity of freethinkers in these areas. There is nothing about such obvious topics as marriage and divorce or such awkward topics as homosexuality or paedophilia. There is little about the participation of freethinkers in campaigns for peace or for animal rights. There is little about non-religious ceremonies and rituals. Freedom of speech

and the press is related only to religion and not to civil liberties or to politics in general, which dramatically distorts the coverage of Communist countries, and the entries on Blasphemy Laws and Freedom of the Press are inaccurate in their references to Britain.

The coverage of the British freethought movement is rather peculiar. Edward Royle contributes a useful summary of Unbelief in the United Kingdom, and other entries on various people and periodicals, but he says little about recent developments. Jim Herrick ably describes the National Secular Society and *The Freethinker* (his book on the latter being repeatedly mistitled). The Rationalist Press Association suffers nearly as badly as it did in Stein's British bibliography. Its founder, Charles A. Watts, seems to have been confused to some extent with his father, Charles Watts, who had nothing to do with its formation, and the date of this is variously given as 1896, 1898, 1899 and 1900! The names and dates of its periodicals have become rather muddled as well. The entry on Joseph McCabe says that he had a "final breach with the British Rationalist Association" (*sic*) in 1928, as a result of which "he was expelled from the association and ostracised from rationalist circles"; in fact he was neither expelled nor ostracised, and he soon resumed his work with the RPA, which published his books until his death in 1955. The British Humanist Association scarcely appears, and the Progressive League doesn't do so at all. South Place appears under Ethical Culture. There are poor entries on some British freethinkers of the second rank.

The entry on Shrines and Monuments of Unbelief omits most of the surviving buildings of the British freethought movement, is wrong about some of those it does mention, and moves Owen's New Lanark from Scotland to Wales. The entry on the Leicester Secular Society throws doubt on its alleged formation in 1851, but there is no doubt about the formation of the Society of Theological Reasoners (a freethought organisation later re-formed as the Leicester Secular Society) which was reported in the *Reasoner* on 14 May 1851.

My conclusion is that *The Encyclopedia of Unbelief* is at the same time indispensable and unreliable. No serious student of freethought will be able to do without it, but it will not do on its own. Rather than replacing the previous reference books on the subject, it joins them, and it must be used with care, and when necessary supplemented and corrected by reference to many other writings. Finally, what an achievement it is, and what a pity it isn't better!

**The Encyclopedia of Unbelief*, edited by Gordon Stein. Two volumes, xvi + 819pp. Buffalo, NY: Prometheus Books, \$99.95 (available to members of the Rationalist Press Association at £50).

EVOLUTION AS A RELIGION, by Mary Midgley.
Methuen, £4.95

Mary Midgley's latest book is about the superstitious and utopian thinking which some scientists indulge in, especially in relation to evolutionary ideas; and the habits which some of them have fallen into of drawing inferences from Darwin's own work, and that of the neo-Darwinists, which aren't supported by verifiable data.

She singles out two such traditions in particular. First, the extreme individualist "survival-of-the-fittest-through-cut-throat-competition, nature-red-in-tooth-and-claw" version of Herbert Spencer's "Social Darwinism" that is favoured nowadays (whether consciously or not) by the Reagan/Thatcher "New Right" with lamentable consequences for the caring qualities of their governments' policies, and endorsed — Midgley would say pseudoscientifically — by the "selfish gene" school of sociobiology. Second, the naive Lamarckian "ever upward escalator" vision (in the teeth of contemporary ecological evidence) of steady human ascent to the pinnacle of Nature's pyramid.

Whether or not Midgley is always entirely fair to the views of those she attacks (and I note Harry Stopes-Roe's caveat in his *New Humanist* review of her book that she isn't), what she does undoubtedly do is to draw overdue attention to the sloppy thinking and illogical premises of a good deal of what passes in the popular mind for "scientific thinking" in the 1980s. Now, perhaps more than ever before, humanity is in a situation where mistakes made through the misuse of reason are more likely to precipitate global catastrophe than sheer impulsive irrationality is. It is essential for anyone who claims to be a scientific thinker to be aware of and to practice the basic rules of valid reasoning.

A prime function of philosophy is to assign concepts and definitions to their appropriate categories. While religion may have a useful role in giving some people a meaningful sense of their place in the universe through the evocation of myths and symbols, the effort to assert its literal truth is misplaced and mistakes the essentially subjective nature of each person's reality. As Midgley says, "both Creationism and Spencerism seem radically to confuse the functions of religion and science, attempting to produce an amalgam which will do the work of both. In doing so, both seem to distort not just the province which they are seeking to take over, but also the one in whose name they want to make the conquest".

While Midgley raises many more important hares than she successfully courses to ground, and some of her arguments are irritatingly discursive and

inconclusive, what I do very much like about her book is her insistence that if we are to succeed in overcoming humanity's escalating problems, those whose chosen profession is to think, in whatever discipline, had better start getting it right more often; and her passionate repudiation of the facile trendy belief that a "to-hell-with-the-rest-of-you" competitiveness is the precondition of social prosperity.

On the contrary, she avows, the sooner that humanity realises that its global interdependence and each individual's uniqueness are two sides of the same life-preserving coin, the better. Amen to that.

ANTONY GREY

AUGUSTUS CARP, ESQ. By HIMSELF; *Being the Autobiography of a Really Good Man.* The Boydell Press, £4.95.

I was inwardly disturbed when your editor first asked me to review what he believed to be a work of fiction. However, to set my mind at rest he assured me on Holy Writ and by his treasured complete set of annual reports of the Lord's Day Observance Society that this would be a morally uplifting and spiritually ennobling volume, fit for a soul of my extraordinary sensitivity, and not the effusions of some depraved Gallic novelist.

Your editor was as good as his word. This was, indeed, no foreign chronicle of idle dissipation, disbelief, gambling and illicit libidinous liaisons, but rather an early twentieth-century pilgrim's progress, written by a really good man that other really good men should learn from his Christian example and be warned of the spiritual pitfalls that may lie in their path — not least the evils of the stage and of the lost, fallen creatures that haunt its world of daemionically painted faces, hellish lights, foetid stalls and rotten boards.

The autobiography of Mr Augustus Carp takes us back to that Golden Age when the working classes were content with the lot it pleased the Almighty to grant them, when the respectable middle classes went to church twice every Sunday, and when wives and mothers faithfully fulfilled their divinely ordained roles of washing dishes, serving early morning tea, and pulling off their husbands' and sons' boots, instead of undermining their spiritual foundations by reading books on moral relativism and existentialism, or listening to — Heaven forfend! — feminist demagogues.

Augustus Carp, Esq., was the only child of a sidesman at St James the Less, Camberwell (and later at

REVIEWS

St James the Least-of-All, Kennington). His father was of a careful, scrupulous and — where morally imperative — litigious nature, and ensured that his son's education should be free from the moral perils of French. The author gives a detailed account of his infancy and youth, of his difficulties at school in finding a lofty enough level of Christian companionship, and how — with his father's godly guidance — he grew in spiritual and corporeal girth, finally to labour in the Lord's vineyard against "the degenerate pleasure-seekers standing outside theatres" through such media as the vice-presidency of the Anti-Dramatic and Saltatory Union, the Peckham Branch of the Non-Smokers' League, the Kennington Division of the Society for the Prohibition of the Strong Drink Traffic, and the St Potamus Purity League.

Resolute, as he admits, in the pursuit of goodness, Mr Carp was able on occasion to "wash his feet in the blood of the wicked". He recalls, in graphic detail, detecting an immoral relationship on the part of his headmaster and thereby secured sound Christian employment where, on a later occasion, he was able to obtain the dismissal of an inebriated fellow employee.

There were, as in any pilgrim's progress, setbacks and tribulations. Mr Carp describes the treachery, deceit and guile of an actress whom he was seeking to raise from her sinful profession; he tells of spiritually weaker or false friends who failed to discern the difference between port poisoning and alcoholic intoxication. But in the end he is guided, like a modern metropolitan Moses, to the holy sacrament of matrimony with Tact, one of the many sisters of a Christian fellow soldier for righteousness, which blessed state renders him immune from financial anxiety so that he should have at his disposal greater leisure for his "more sacred avocations".

The autobiography of Mr Carp, first published in 1924, has been variously received. I was not surprised that Mr Kenneth Williams — principal performer, so I am credibly informed, in cinematographic productions of unspeakable vulgarity and suggestiveness — should mention it only in terms of the need to stifle laughter. I was puzzled, perhaps pleased, however, to find it described as "one of those little masterpieces" by Mr Frank Muir, a gentleman who normally panders to profane seekers after mirth rather than to those earnestly gathered together in search for the salvation of their immortal souls.

In the case of the present edition it is my painful but necessary duty severely to censure the publishers for their deplorable choice of introduction by a Mr

Anthony Burgess, who has the temerity to suggest that this sublime account of a Christian's life work is merely a "skit" (to use his term) by a medical man. In a dissolute, degenerate and disbelieving age such effrontery is, of course, to be expected. Those few of us who still aspire to Mr Carp's spiritual pre-eminence as a vanguard against vice, a St George vanquishing sin, as a hero in the great campaign against the Hosts of Midian, will dismiss these scoffing canards and will instead follow the effulgence of his exemplary light and rejoice in the literary echoes of his recitation of the doxology.

NIGEL SINNOTT

Librarians Concerned About "Creeping Censorship"

Mr George Cunningham, chief executive of The Library Association, has announced that the organisation "is sufficiently bothered by creeping censorship" to be publishing a leaflet aimed at councillors and members of library committees. He says there is growing concern among members of the Association, which represents 25,000 librarians, about interference in the choice of books which are allegedly "racist and sexist".

Labour councillors in Oxfordshire have requested a review of children's books to ensure they don't portray boys in dominant and girls in subservient roles.

In London the Labour-controlled Hackney Council is "selecting books of a non-sexist, non-racist nature".

A borrower in Lambeth was refused a copy of Valerie Pakenham's *The Noonday Sun: Edwardians in the Tropics*, because it was "seeing the history of Africa, India and South-East Asia through the eyes of white British colonizers".

Mr Cunningham says "the choice of books in libraries should be a matter for professionals, and elected members of councils should not be running the libraries in that sense".

THE FREETHINKER

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The customs officers then took the manageress home and there seized all the video recordings, including those of "Dallas" and Crufts Dog Show! They thereafter went to the house of director Jonathan Cutbill and searched every room. From their conversation, it became clear that all the overseas packages to the shop had been opened for over a year.

In October 1984, HM Customs sent seizure notices to Gay's the Word regarding 144 titles, including works by Jean Genet, Allen Ginsberg, Kate Millet, Edmund White, Tennessee Williams, and even *The Book of the City of Ladies*, written by Christine de Pisan, a nun in the fifteenth century! In November the nine directors including the manageress were charged with conspiracy to import prohibited articles (ie indecent books). They faced unlimited fines and/or two years in prison. They pleaded Not Guilty and on 26 June 1985 at Stoke Newington Magistrates Court, they were committed to the Central Criminal Court. The hearing was fixed for October 1986. The decision of the European Court in the Conegate appeal caused HM Customs to drop the charges in June 1986. All the books were returned, except copies of nineteen titles considered "obscene". If HM Customs prevent future imports of these titles, Gay's the Word plan to challenge it in the courts.

Salvation came from the Continent — the European Communities' Court sits at Luxembourg. In the House of Lords, however, on 2 June, Lord Denning, 87-year-old law Lord and practising Christian, urged the British courts to "cock a snook" at the European Court and continue to criminalize indecent imports.

When will Britain adopt an adult "Continental" attitude to sex? Even without the prohibition of indecent imports, the criminalization of all allegedly obscene material means that many films and books which are freely available on the other side of the Channel are illegal here. (Fourteen per cent of films shown in British cinemas have been censored). In addition, publishers of British contact magazines are liable to prosecution for the offence of "conspiracy to corrupt public morals". Two have received suspended jail sentences (*DPP v Rendezvous*, Birmingham Crown Court, December 1985).

The British Establishment's attitude remains that sex is filthy and manifestations thereof, especially of the gay variety, should be criminalized. This cannot be explained away by Christian guilt, since other Western countries do not have such a philosophy. (In 1984 the French Minister of Culture stated that his Government had no right and did not seek to control what adults read and viewed. That same year Argentina and Brazil abolished all restrictions on freedom of expression, including sexual ones). The reason must be ethnic and/or the authoritarian "nanny" attitude of the British ruling class.

OBITUARY

Mr R. Fotheringhame

Robin Fotheringhame, of Bourton-on-Dunsmore, Warwickshire, has died at the age of 49.

Mr Fotheringhame had been a lecturer at Coventry Technical College for 21 years. He was a much respected member of staff and known to hundreds of ex-students as the organiser of A-level courses in arts subjects. He was particularly aware of the problems of older students returning to college after a gap of many years. Thanks to him, many mature students went on to achieve success at universities and polytechnics.

Robin Fotheringhame was an unbeliever. There was a large gathering at Canley Crematorium, Coventry, for the secular committal ceremony.

Mr J. Gilmour

John Gilmour, the distinguished botanist and horticulturalist, has died after a long period of illness. He was 79.

John Gilmour was associated with Cambridge, where he lived, for over sixty years. He went up to Clare College in 1925 and was Director of the University Botanic Garden from 1951-73.

He held the post of Curatorship of the Herbarium and Botanical Museum before becoming Assistant Director of the Royal Botanic Garden, Kew, in 1931. He was Director of the Royal Horticultural Society's Garden at Wisley from 1946-51, and moved from there to Cambridge.

Gilmour published a number of works and served with distinction on international committees. He was awarded the Victoria Gold Medal of Honour in Agriculture (1957) and the Veitch Memorial Gold Medal (1966).

John Gilmour had a long association with the freethought movement. He was the first chairman of Cambridge Humanists and succeeded E. M. Forster as president in 1975. He was an Honorary Associate of the Rationalist Press Association.

There was a large gathering of relatives, friends and colleagues at the secular committal ceremony at Cambridge Crematorium.

Mrs M. Liddle

Minnie Liddle, who died suddenly in London at the age of 73, was a lifelong Socialist and in her later years a regular reader of *The Freethinker*. Her son Terry Liddle, a member of Lewisham Humanist Group and *Freethinker* writer, conducted the secular committal ceremony at Falconwood Crematorium. The Socialist Secular Association was represented at the funeral by its steering committee, members of which had been friends of Mrs Liddle.

LETTERS

A SAD DISAPPOINTMENT

The Bishop asked me to thank you for sending him a complimentary copy of *The Freethinker* with the article on the Nature of Christian Belief. He does not, however, hold with the views expressed in your periodical, so will not be subscribing to it.

PETER DEACON,
Vicar General

The Diocese of Gibraltar in Europe

POPULATION CONTROL

Congratulations on the front page article in the July *Freethinker*. If only the world-wide population disaster could be tackled, most other problems would become amenable to solutions.

But — as Garrett Hardin pointed out many years ago — it is useless to leave decisions on family size to individual consciences. Unless governments everywhere use some form of coercion, the irresponsible and conscienceless will proliferate, and the responsible and conscientious proportion of populations will become ineffective minorities.

Until through governmental influence it becomes an integral part of human awareness that it is selfish and anti-social to reproduce beyond replacement level, there will be no hope for future generations to enjoy a reasonable quality of life.

G. M. LEJEUNE

FAITH AND MIRACLES

If Anthony Milne has not read previous secular criticism of the Gospels (July) what was he doing reviewing Arnheim's book? Plainly he does not understand the subject (what does he mean by claiming that "all religions are palpable nonsense"?) and cannot differentiate between the historicity of Christianity and the historicity of the events on which it is alleged to be based. Furthermore he appears to have an unhealthy contempt for philosophy and criticism.

In historical terms it matters a great deal whether or not the phrase "Son of Man" was a Messianic code-word (it is nothing to do with theology); only by assuming that it was can sense be made of Jesus' self-appointed mission.

Milne appears to think that I am claiming that some stories of miracles are true. Of course the miracles did not occur, but that does not mean that nothing in the Gospels is true. Is Milne afraid to admit that any of the Gospel record might be based on real events in case believers take advantage of this admission? That is not a respectable stance, nor is it necessary. Believers are embarrassed to admit that some Gospel stories might be invented (because this undermines their faith in the texts). Christianity does depend on the truth of its historical assertions, but it faces the problem of determining which are historical and which are not (if it fails to accept them all as historical). Arbitrarily it assumes that Jesus experienced a miraculous resurrection, but there is no reliable evidence for this alleged event (and circumstantial evidence to show that it arose from a misunderstanding). I do not understand why Milne is talking about Jesus' tomb being "sometimes empty sometimes not"; no one has ever suggested that Jesus' tomb was not empty (i.e. that the body was found still to be there). The one thing on which both Christians and non-Christian articles agree is that the tomb was empty; they only differ on the reason for the vacancy.

STUART CAMPBELL

CORRECTIONS

There are a couple of misattributed quotations in the *Freethinker* of June 1986.

Anthony Grey, in his reply to B. L. Able's letter, attributes to Voltaire the saying, "I loathe what you say, but will defend to the death your right to say it." This is a common mistake, but Voltaire never said anything of the kind — he didn't believe in complete freedom of expression, and he wouldn't have defended anything to the death. The saying was actually invented long afterwards by S. G. Tallentyre (the pseudonym of the British writer E. Beatrice Hall) in "The Friends of Voltaire" (1906), a book on various leading figures of the French Enlightenment. The chapter on Helvétius includes an account of the ban of his book "De l'esprit" in 1758-1759 and of the support he got from other philosophes, including Voltaire. The author comments: "'I disapprove of what you say, but I will defend to the death your right to say it,' was his attitude now" (p. 199). In fact it wasn't his attitude then or ever, and he said nothing like it in any of his many statements on the subject at that or any other time.

Jim Herrick, in his review of Harry Holmes's anthology "Connecting the Fragments", attributes to E. M. Forster the phrase "the Beloved Republic". Forster does use it in his essays "The Menace to Freedom" and "What I Believe", both collected in "Two Cheers for Democracy" (1951), but it is actually a quotation from Swinburne's poem "Hertha", collected in "Songs Before Sunrise" (1871). The spirit of Nature tells Man about the death of God:

Though made him and breaks him,

Truth slays and forgives;

But to you, as time takes him,

This new thing it gives,

Even love, the beloved Republic, that feeds upon and lives.

NICOLAS WALTER

CAUSE OF TERRORISM

In your article "No answer to terrorism" (June) you begin with what I regard as a nonsense! "After a resounding defeat in the House of Commons three years ago, supporters of capital punishment will be cautious about forcing a vote on that issue in the immediate future."

This "resounding defeat" you talk about was nothing more than the self-conceited action of an autocratic PM woman who has shown she has little or no time for what individual citizens ("freethinkers" or otherwise) think about how to deal with deliberate murderers or anything else. Yet here we have the very person who should be standing up for individual thought taking the side of this autocratic woman and, apparently trying to deter pro-death sentencers from getting a different decision on the basic issue as to whether the state has the right to kill murderers or not.

Can you not see your own wish to frustrate supporters of capital punishment is itself a sample of the kind of social action which gives rise to terrorism? Many of us who positively desire death for murderers and bombers and hi-jackers etc., would prefer to see a truly democratic remedy for the issue. But we are not likely to get a proper referendum on the issue when those like yourself who desert the cause of direct democracy on basic moral issues in society are rubbing their hands with glee when an autocrat denies us a public referendum and fobs us off with a mere ballot of conniving party-hack MPs whose actions are nearly always directed against giving power to the people by

way of organising referenda on specific issues of this kind where there is no Pope or other moral authority available to us for the making of such decisions.

You should take the line that the best "answer" to terrorism is to provide greater opportunities for direct democratic decision-making — always provided of course that full freedom of public discussion of such issues is practised by the State media.

Within Britain this simply does not happen. Thatcher-upholding pressmen prevent any criticism of her folly in insisting on a "ballot of MPs" for deciding whether to re-introduce the death penalty or not and it is this basic lack of a permissive press which is the greatest cause of terrorism.

EDWARD G. MACFARLANE

VICTIMS OF TERRORISM

Criticizing a Christian muddlehead such as Mary Kenny is easy (Letters, July). It does not, however, meet the problem of terrorism. It may have escaped John L. Broom's notice that terrorists make a habit of going around killing people. If as a result of this they in turn get killed — so much the worse for them! They have no more grounds for complaint — they probably have less — than a soldier has who gets killed in a battle.

Mr Broom's argument regarding de Valera, Begin and Mugabe does not impress me. I am not a whit better off because they managed to save their skins and I do not see the use of preserving the lives of terrorists in the hope that they might, at some future date, become "respected heads of state". So, too, might their victims, but that does not bother them.

S. E. PARKER

TAKING THE OATH LIGHTLY

With reference to your front page article (June), I have had the misfortune to be a party to various court cases during which I have heard many people take the oath. Unfortunately I have never heard anyone other than myself affirm, even though I know that in several instances the people who took the oath do not believe in God. Many of those who took the religious oath — including several I personally know to be fiercely religious — have nevertheless lied in court.

I therefore conclude that the oath is meaningless as a practical method of persuading people to tell the truth. As an atheist I believe it would be more honest, and as a practical person that it would be more sensible, to replace the oath with the following statement: "I promise upon my word of honour to tell the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth, and am aware that should I fail to do so to the best of my ability, I shall be in contempt of court and may be sent to prison".

GEOFFREY H. L. BERG

A PROMISE KEPT

To begin, rather than to end on the customary personal note with which we are so familiar in obituary notices of eminent people, because the subject of this little tribute has been dealt with seriously and affectionately already, and with the respect she deserves. Not, perhaps, that Dora Russell has yet — with the exception of the admirable Bel Mooney interview a few years back — received the justice a great human being fully deserves when they shuffle off this mortal coil.

Of course Dora Russell never "shuffled" — not even at the end — and from the time she left hospital

near her home in Cornwall for the last time, she was alert enough to attend to work left in abeyance. "So much still to be done", she used to say, and to plan, almost to the end, the most important points that had been left still on the agenda.

She wrote to me just after coming out of hospital, only a few days before she died at Porthcurno. She had seen a short time earlier an Appreciation of mine in the Guardian of a mutual friend, Audrey Williamson, and had asked her good friend and housekeeper, Mrs Oxenholm, to telephone to say that she would be replying on her emergence from hospital. True to her word, she did as she had promised and, ill though she was at the time, once again displayed her caring attitude.

She was concerned about the fate of Audrey Williamson's manuscript — a new history of Richard III — that had been accepted, posthumously, by a publisher. It was typical of the woman still (just) alive that her last thoughts were of a dead friend's literary estate — a fact she made abundantly clear to me in the letter itself, which was a no-nonsense sort of thing dictated, but boldly signed by Dora. Thus she died as she had lived, one of the most selfless of human beings.

PETER COTES

AFTERMATH OF THE SHOPS BILL

Following the failure of the Shops Bill in Parliament, several successful retrospective prosecutions have been brought against traders in the North East who opened in anticipation of the Bill's success. More prosecutions may follow.

What is disturbing about these prosecutions is that some trade unionists see them as a defence of the shop-workers' right to enjoy one regular day off work in common with other workers. They claim that shop-workers are particularly open to exploitation.

During the passage of the Bill through Parliament shop-workers had to acquiesce in support of religious factions and MPs who opposed it on religious grounds or from fear of losing the support of their religious constituents. It must be recognised that the Bill was beaten by the religious lobby although it was tabled in the first place for other than anti-religious reasons. It follows that both shop-worker opponents and secularist supporters of the Bill have been embarrassed by their alliances in the affair.

Some lasting damage may have been done to secularism among shop-workers. At least one leading officer of their union was not convinced that the National Secular Society dialogue with him during the debate in the press showed enough concern for shop-workers' welfare. We may have appeared to him to be too keen to score against Sunday observance to care about other issues. That freethinkers do care about workers' rights is beyond question. But others may still need to be convinced of it. We can only persist in persuasion and mend some fences with the shop-workers.

The outcome of the Shops Bill debate has shown the religious lobby to have plenty of clout. It may be that only the sectarian divisions among them have prevented the repeal of the 1967 Abortion Act.

D. REDHEAD

BOOK WANTED

I should be interested in acquiring a copy of Dr Brock Chisholm's *Can People Learn to Learn?*

TREVOR A. MILLAR
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The Turin Shroud

BARBARA SMOKER

It would be difficult to find anything less scientific than this BBC Science Unit statement published in *The Listener* on 3 July: "To suppose that a medieval European forger would have the knowledge to reproduce ancient Palestinian funerary anointments and the alkaline conditions of a white-washed tomb and post-mortem fever temperature would be to stretch credibility to the limit". This presupposes some evidence that, assuming the image to be (as is almost certain) a medieval forgery, then the forger must have had this sophisticated knowledge — and there is no such evidence whatsoever.

The so-called "shroud" bears traces of paint, and it is a matter of historical record that a 13th-century forger of relics confessed to making this particular artefact. At one time it was one of many "true" shrouds of Jesus brought back from Palestine by crusaders as souvenirs, but because this particular one was better done than most it has survived to take in 20th-century wishful-thinkers, including a number of scientists, historians, and others who are prepared to jettison the principles of science and scholarship for the sake of faith, sensation, superstition, and the production of best-sellers.

The introduction of "post-mortem fever" is a new idea, used as part of an absurd American stunt ("experiment" is too respectable a word) that attempted — and failed — to produce a similar image on a cloth wrapped round a hollow plastic mannikin filled with warm water. This is the only connection that "post-mortem fever" has with the Turin relic — though "shroud-fever" seems to have reached epidemic proportions.

Challenger: God in Control

The presidential mission which investigated the destruction of the Challenger space shuttle has made its report. A series of engineering faults, human errors and irresponsibility by the NASA managers resulted in the disaster.

But the Rev R. F. Westendorf believes that the space shuttle was destroyed by God and all the crew members killed "to take souls of believers with him to heaven".

Pastor Westendorf added that in the days that followed "God was there to comfort the bereaved families and to help them put their lives back together again.

"God did not suddenly lose control. This disaster was one small part of God's vast and incomprehensive plan for bringing his children home.

"We don't know what he's doing, but he does".

EVENTS

Brighton and Hove Humanist Group. Details of summer programme obtainable from Joan Wimble, Flat 5, 67 St Aubyns, Hove, BN3 2TL, telephone Brighton 733215.

Brighton and Hove Humanist Group. New Venture Theatre Club, Bedford Place (off Western Road), Brighton, Sunday, 6 September, 5.30 pm for 6 pm. First public meeting of the 1986-87 season.

Edinburgh Froethinkers Group. Information regarding fortnightly meetings for younger humanists is obtainable from Box 120, First of May Bookshop, 43 Candlemaker Row, Edinburgh.

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. Meetings on the second Friday of the month at 7.30 pm.

Humanist Holidays. Information regarding future holidays is obtainable from Gillian Bailey, 18 Priors Road, Cheltenham, GL52 5AA, telephone 0242-39175.

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

National Secular Society. Annual outing on Sunday, 14 September. Details from NSS office, 702 Holloway Road, London N19 3NL, telephone 01-272 1266.

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

South Place Ethical Society. Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London WC1. Sunday, 13 July, 11 am. Debate between the Rev Keith Ward and J Harry Stopes Roe: Science, Religion and God.

Sutton Humanist Group. Friends House, Cedar Road, Sutton. Wednesday, 10 September, 7.30 pm for 8 pm Report on the BHA annual conference, followed by discussion.

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.

A group of ex-servicemen and women placed a wreath on the Cenotaph in London on 22 July to mark the fortieth anniversary of the bombing of the St David Hotel in Jerusalem by Zionists. A representative of the group said that the bombing, in which over a hundred people died, "marked the start of international terrorism".

RC Church Against Classroom Integration

The Roman Catholic Church in Scotland is resisting moves to integrate Catholic children in non-denominational schools. It has been estimated that integration could be achieved over a five-year period. But the head of the Catholic Church press office in Glasgow said the Church "wasn't open for discussion on integration".

The falling birthrate among Scottish Catholics has led to a serious decline in numbers attending Catholic schools. In addition, many Catholic parents are sending their children to non-denominational schools.

Between 1975 and 1984 there was a drop of almost twenty per cent in the number of pupils attending Catholic secondary schools. The decline has been even more dramatic in primary schools where the numbers have fallen from 130,000 to 75,000 over a ten-year period.

Even the private sector has been hit. The Scotus Academy in Edinburgh has closed through lack of support by Catholic families.

Robin Wood, secretary of the Scottish Humanist Council, said the Council believes that Scotland must shake off the shackles of the past in education and go forward to a more united and open society.

"The present system breeds bigotry, distrust and

social strife. Segregated schools are divisive, unfair and uneconomic.

"Ten years ago Catholics showed in an opinion poll that they were opposed to separate schools. Now they are beginning to practice what they believe.

"That can only be good for Scotland".

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London N19 3NL.

Sunday Freedom Fight Goes on

Shopkeepers in Salisbury, Wiltshire, prosecuted by the district council for breaking the trading laws, are angry that the Cathedral bookshop is continuing to do business on Sundays. Under the provisions of the Shops Act 1950, such premises are permitted to open with certification from the council . . . In the same week as the Cathedral certificate was granted, two grocers and a garden centre were prosecuted for Sunday trading. (Daily Telegraph)

The National Consumer Council declares in its annual report that it will not give up the campaign to deregulate Sunday shopping hours. It describes as "absurd" that shop opening hours should still be controlled by law.

The report says the present law is not just out of date; it is wholly superfluous.

"Research among consumers has repeatedly shown that the great majority think that shopkeepers in England and Wales should have the freedom to open when they want to. The experience of Scotland, where the law is different, shows that shopkeepers use this freedom selectively and sensibly, and the fears that have been voiced by some church leaders and trade unionists are groundless".

The NCC promises to "press on to bring an end to a law that most consumers find ridiculous".

After a 16-month debate the New Zealand Parliament has passed a Bill to decriminalise homosexual acts between consenting males over the age of 16. Opposition to reform was mobilised by religious pressure groups, notably the Salvation Army.

Freethinker Fund

The Post Office has just announced a profit of £151 million during the last financial year. Of far greater importance to voluntary organisations and publications that rely on the postal services is the bad news that postage rates are to be increased.

The Freethinker is posted free of charge to subscribers. It could be argued that additional postage charges should be passed on to readers by increasing the cover price. We know from experience that this would not in fact increase income.

Donations to the Fund and, even more important, a higher circulation are the most effective method of ensuring the paper's continued existence. The latest list of contributors is given below.

J. Morton, £1; C. Begg, J. A. Blackmore, P. Brown, A. R. Cannon, A. E. Garrison, R. Grieve, R. J. Hale, J. Lavety, D. Redhead, K. C. Rudd, D. Shahbazin, S. Williams, £1.40 each; J. L. Lewin, £4; J. Gibson, R. Stubbs and D. Wright, £5 each; A. Akkermans, H. G. W. Copeland, J. Glenister, E. V. Hillman, G. N. Huddart, L. G. Packham and A. E. Stanley, £6.40 each; C. A. M. Stellin, £10; M. Duane, £20.

Total for June: £111.60.