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DENOMINATIONAL SCHOOLS THE SLIPPERY SLOPE TO A DIVIDED SOCIETY

"The Hindu community in the United Kingdom would, generally speaking, be quite happy to see children of all religions studying under the same roof", declared Mr M. M. Kalia, President of the National Council of Hindu Organisations in the UK and Patron of the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (World Hindu Conference) when he addressed a meeting in London organised by the National Secular Society on 26 May.

Mr Kalia, who was speaking in a personal capacity, said the Christian set-up of religious education in State schools gives rise to insecurity in the minds of immigrant people. If this was replaced by an agreed syllabus covering the many religions in this country, the demand for separate schools could be substantially countered.

Much responsibility rests on the host community to start phasing out denominational schools, he added.

"It is high time leaders of public opinion give serious thought to the problem, and work towards integration rather than divisiveness, with each religion, sect or cult clamouring for separate schools".

G. N. Deodhekar, representing the National Secular Society, said that among ill-informed people a misunderstanding had arisen, or had been deliberately fostered, suggesting that the Society is opposed only to denominational schools for minority religions.

"This is absurd", he declared. "The basic principles on which the NSS is founded assert that supernaturalism is based upon ignorance and is the historic enemy of progress. The basic objects of the NSS demand the abolition of all privileges granted to religious organisations.

"It is inevitable, therefore, that the NSS would always be opposed to all types of denominational

schools".

Mr Deodhekar reminded the meeting that in the 19th and early 20th century secularist objections to rate-supported Church schools were shared by Non-conformist Christians. Attempts to secularise education failed because of Anglican and Roman Catholic influence.

A hotchpotch compromise put together in the 1944 Education Act satisfied the different churches, including Nonconformists. It brought compulsory Religious Instruction and Christian worship into State schools, while the churches continued to control their own schools, pressing for ever more grants. Aided schools had all running costs and 50 per cent of their building costs paid for from public funds. In 1959 the grant was raised to 75 per cent and in 1966 the capital costs to 80 per cent. Since running expenses are paid out of public funds, the actual share contributed by the churches may be well below five per cent of the total cost.

Mr Deodhekar described as "fallacious" the argument that Anglicans or Catholics are entitled to their own schools because of the contribution to rates and taxes.

"Anglicans and Catholics pay Vehicle Tax and NHS contributions. They are not for that reason entitled to Anglican hospitals or Catholic roads supported by public funds.

"What the churches have achieved is the control of segregated institutes for indoctrination at public cost to the tune of 95 per cent. No wonder other religions and cults would like to get hold of public funds on a similar basis for their own sectarian and indoctrinating purposes.

"We could very well be on the slippery slope of scores of schools controlled by various religions,

(continued on back page)

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NEWS

DEATH PENALTY REPORT

"There is no rational argument for restoring capital punishment in Britain", declares Frances Crook, Director of the Howard League, which has launched a major campaign on the issue. In a press statement the League said that judicial executions are "barbaric and immoral, and are not a deterrent to violent crime. Calls to bring back hanging are an emotional response and a diversion from crucial policy questions about crime".

The Howard League's new 12-page booklet, *The Case Against Capital Punishment*, has been sent to all Members of Parliament. A group of Conservative candidates tried to make capital punishment an issue at the General Election.

MPs who defend "traditional moral values" and support the "right to life" (anti-abortion) movement are among the most ardent advocates of capital punishment. Peter Bruinvels, Conservative MP for Leicester East and a member of the Church of England General Synod, has offered to carry out executions.

Pro-hanging speeches are rapturously received at Conservative Party meetings. Delegates to a recent Young Conservatives conference chanted "string 'em up" during a debate on capital punishment.

The Howard League describes a judicially sanctioned execution as "an inherently immoral action.

"It is a barbaric, brutalising and degrading form of punishment which is contrary to respect and value for human life.

"In this country, neither the barbaric acts of cutting off the hands of those who steal, nor the castration of those who commit sexual offences, are practised. Likewise, the State does not kill those who commit murder, however heinous.

"Such acts are based upon the principle of revenge . . . and it is a reflection of the development of our penal system that we have grown away from the primitive concept of revenge towards a sophisticated and civilised concept and structure of justice".

Emphasising the irrevocable nature of the death penalty, the Howard League declares that as humans and human justice are fallible, mistakes will happen.

"There is the well known case of Timothy Evans, who was hanged in 1950, but was given a posthumous pardon in 1966, when the main prosecution witness at Evans's trial was himself convicted of a series of murders. . .

"John Preece (1981), Patrick Meehan (1976) and

AND NOTES

Albert Taylor (1978) are some examples of those who have had their conviction quashed, and could have been executed if the death penalty had been retained.

"More recently, we have had the doubt thrown upon the convictions of the Birmingham bombers" which has been referred to the Appeal Court, and the 'Guildford bombers', who most certainly would have been executed had capital punishment not been abolished".

The case for the restoration of capital punishment for terrorists is described as "the most flimsy of all. . . ."

"It is unlikely that capital punishment would deter terrorists who already risk their lives in the course of their work, through carrying explosives and undertaking dangerous risks. . . ."

"It is unlikely that the death penalty would apply to minors. This being the case, terrorist organisations would probably be even more likely to use young people to undertake their work".

And there is always the possibility of reprisals. Nine Spanish policemen were shot during the following two weeks when five terrorists were executed.

The restoration of capital punishment would cause almost insuperable problems for the courts and the prison service. Most prison governors, chaplains and doctors are opposed to the practice.

New executioners would have to be recruited and trained. They and those who support capital punishment would do well to remember the words of Albert Pierrepoint, official executioner until 1956: "I do not believe that any one of the hundreds of executions I carried out has in any way acted as a deterrent against future murder. Capital punishment achieved nothing except revenge".

The Case Against Capital Punishment is obtainable free of charge from The Howard League, 322 Kennington Park Road, London SE11 4PP, telephone 01-735 3317.

Commenting in the London Daily News on the Bishop of Stepney's "spiritual concern" about social issues, the leader of Tower Hamlets Council declared: "Perhaps he can begin to make his concern practical rather than spiritual by paying the rates on the Church's very substantial property in the borough, from which he has hitherto sought exemption. The sum involved would go some way to alleviate the problems of which he so loudly complains".

WHAT PRICE PRINCIPLES?

Antony Flew's forthrightness is certainly preferable to his political minders' devious word spinning. In his latest letter, published on page 92, he confirms a *Freethinker* denial that he was "driven out of the National Secular Society for political reasons". While not querying our account of his undignified departure, Professor Flew says he left the NSS because it passed resolutions supporting "all kinds of leftist causes". Flew's complaint is echoed in Nicolas Walter's letter, also on page 92, which is long on implication and short on accuracy. So in case the impression is gained that Nicolas Walter is a veteran of NSS annual general meetings, it should be added that his presence would cause regular attenders to scan the night sky in expectation of seeing a blue moon.

Professor Flew loftily dismisses comment about his participation in conferences organised by the World Unification Church (the Moonies). He admits that such functions, although arranged by a "front" organisation, are Moonie-funded (ie from the sale of armaments and the unpaid labour of youthful dupes). He describes this evil, brainwashing cult as "the much abused Unification Church". It is indeed much abused, particularly by distraught parents and young victims whose education and career prospects have been wrecked.

The Unification Church spends vast sums on international conferences. It was Professor Flew who revealed that in addition to platform participants, "wives are invited, and the organisers pay for fares, food and accommodation". And the Rev Sun Myung Moon's religious business empire expects a return on its investment.

Despite the perks and blandishments, many academics refuse to attend Moonie conferences when they discover the organisers' real identity. But Antony Flew, a vice-president of the Rationalist Press Association, has no such qualms. He has written elsewhere that as "a longtime atheist" he regards the Moonies' doctrines as "perhaps marginally even more unbelievable than those of mainstream religious organisations". Nevertheless he allows his name and academic reputation to be exploited by this unsavoury outfit. The Moonies' religious doctrines may be unbelievable, but their ultra-Right politics appeal to Antony Flew.

Although there are those who feel that the humanist movement would be well rid of Flew, it has never been suggested in *The Freethinker* that he should be expelled. Such a move would be unjustified. Organised humanism is not the exclusive preserve of the sectarian Left or the resurgent Right. And in practical terms, a coterie of hard rightists and Sun-type "liberals" would defend Professor Flew to the last proxy vote.

Rami Cohen's business is doing very well, thank you. He sells water from the River Jordan to Christians all over the world. It is taken in cans and blessed by a Dominican priest before being bottled. Mr Cohen, who lives near Tel Aviv, says: "As a Jew I don't believe the water from the Jordan is holy. But I'm pleased to cater for those who do". And who can blame him? Last year he sold 200,000 bottles at about £3 a time.

A "SPIRITED" LADY

Whatever we may think about the claims made by spiritualist medium Doris Stokes, who died last month at the age of 67, Grantham's second most famous daughter appears to have been a much nicer lady than her slightly better known political contemporary.

Doris Stokes's obsession with "the spirit world" developed after the death of her infant son. She became a magnificent one-woman show; fans flocked to her performances at theatres and halls all over Britain. She made a successful tour of Australia.

In addition to countless public appearances, Doris Stokes published six best-selling books. These were of course "ghosted" works.

Doris Stokes eschewed the flamboyant clothes and baubles which often adorn those of her calling. In fact her ordinariness helped to keep her top of the spiritualist pops.

Appearing on television was a mistake. It was one thing to perform tricks of the trade in a darkened auditorium before a determinedly gullible audience who had paid good money. But the probing television camera was unkind.

Doris Stokes chatted away to those "on the other side" as she would to her next door neighbour over the garden fence. It is difficult to ascertain how much she actually believed. One newspaper summed up her philosophy as "an impressive tribute to the unconquerable banality of the human spirit". That said, tribute should be paid to the indomitable courage with which she endured a long period of ill-health which necessitated 13 operations for cancer.

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ENTERPRISING HUMANISTS

Local humanist groups vary considerably in size and range of activities. A monthly meeting is the usual contact with the public, although some groups undertake more ambitious projects like exhibitions at libraries and festivals.

Brighton and Hove Humanist Group decided to "go public" in style at this year's Brighton Festival. When it was announced that the programme would include Town Plays, performed by local organisations in The Lanes area, Brighton humanists took the plunge. They made scenery and costumes and compiled a script under the guidance of professional writer Anthony Masters.

The result was a play entitled *The Fifth Freedom*, which takes the audience on a trip through history. Freethinkers emerge from the past and combine with those of today to "shoot some well-aimed darts at the world's religions". Judging by the reaction of audiences at the seven performances on two Sundays in May, the darts reached their target! The Group also published an attractive and informative leaflet for distribution after each performance.

Brighton has an history of organised freethought that goes back for over a century. It is gratifying that the town's unbelievers keep the flag flying.

TAKING ADVANTAGE

Orthodox Jews in the Golders Green and Finchley areas of north London have been granted a special dispensation to switch on lights and use the telephone on the Sabbath. The Court of the Chief Rabbi made this ruling after 25 homes were burgled. Cash and jewellery worth £16,500 have been stolen.

The break-ins took place on Friday nights when Jews who strictly adhere to Sabbath rules will not switch on lights or make telephone calls. Rather than break the rules, orthodox victims waited for two days before reporting a burglary to the police.

In one case the intruder made his escape without being seen because the householder would not defile the Sabbath by turning on lights.

Rabbi Aronow, of the Hampstead Synagogue, confirmed that orthodox Jews may now telephone the police if they believe that a thief is still on the premises. "If he has gone, that is another matter", he added.

Councillor Peter Hollingsworth, a former Lord Mayor of Birmingham, has demanded that all non-Christian pupils should be taught Christianity in the city's schools. The senior Conservative councillor complained that "many schools in the city do not have a proper Christian assembly".

Sterilisation: do we *Really* Care?

MARY STOPES-ROE

The recent case of Miss X aroused strong feelings. Feminists and civil libertarians complained of rights infringed while doctors defended their professional judgement. Mary Stopes-Roe has personal experience of relevant cases and detects a hint of hypocrisy in the whole debate.

Threats of sterilisation, of compulsory birth control, have a particularly sinister sound in a world that still remembers Nazi Germany. The perfection of the race, the elimination of second-rate stock, ended up as we all know with horror and disgust in the concentration camps. This line of thought, understandable though it is, may be confusing opinion on the sterilisation of one particular girl.

A further complication is added by the extreme emphasis which is currently laid on the rights of the individual, again in part at least an outcome of protest against the totalitarian regimes of the twentieth century. But to insist upon rights being exercised by a particular individual who has not the capacity to decide on how and when to exercise them nor to profit from the outcomes is perhaps to make a mockery of this. The problem last month was that of the young woman who is nearly 18 years old but who will never be able, we are told, to take proper responsibility for herself since although she has the body of an 18-year-old she has the mind of a pre-school child.

I am not talking about the law. This doubtless will be correctly applied since deliberations can now take place over a longer period than was previously thought. I am talking about public opinion and about public policy. Public opinion will be divided on the problem, which is understandable and right since, as for all issues in medical ethics, there is no easy answer. There are those who believe that every individual has the same right to live as fully as capacity allows, within the law, in the expectation that personal responsibility will trim the sails. And there are others who believe that in certain circumstances the individual's rights must be curtailed to protect either society or him or her self.

Professor Kennedy discussing the legal aspects of the case (*Times* 1.4.87) put the point that treatment without consent should only be given to a person for therapeutic reasons, ie for the benefit of the individual and not for the benefit of those responsible for the individual or for society. Whatever the legal position, I think this point is arguable in itself.

It does not seem to me self-evidently right that we should expect workers in the caring business, whether professional or lay, paid or unpaid, to extend themselves beyond what is possible, reasonable and in the end profitable for the sake of an individual who cannot or will not exercise his or her own

restraints on behaviour. And this is what is at issue if a sexually active 18-year-old with no possibility of exercising restraint for herself is to be protected from exploitation and manipulation: whoever is responsible for her daily life will have to take care for her.

Here we come up against my first example of what seems to me to be the hypocrisy of our public policy. Policy is now to substitute community care for institutional and to remove the barriers that "confined" the mentally handicapped and to let them live as normally as possible in the community. But how far is the community, whoever that is, likely to care for, protect, or even give a damn for, the less-than-able who are thus liberated? Barriers could be shelters and to be confined in an imaginative and sensitive way may in fact be very supportive. People like the 5-year-old in an 18-year-old body are now far freer to mix and take their chance and it seems likely that their chance will be to be taken advantage of. One wonders, cynically perhaps, whether the financial advantage of leaving them to the care of the community does not have some importance.

However, the young woman's rights to enjoy the pleasures of social and sexual contact may be worth all that (although personally I doubt it, considering the exploitations to which she will be an easy prey). But the most important question is, what is she going to enjoy? If, as is apparently one of the causes for concern, she is becoming sexually aware, it is certainly possible that she may enjoy sexual contact. But the outcome of sexual contact without benefit of proper contraception, the use of which seems to be another problem, is pregnancy.

Pregnancy is for some a desirable condition in itself, but probably only a minority of women actually enjoy it per se. The pleasure and satisfaction of being pregnant is related for the most part to the desired outcome. But if the outcome is not desired and is probably not even understood, where is the pleasure and delight? How could a five-year-old, whatever body it inhabits, contemplate the joys of motherhood, the production of life, the exhilaration of creation and so on? What enjoyment is likely to be derived from the exercise of the right to feel alarmingly sick, to get alarmingly fat and to be subjected to a terrifying and painful ordeal in which one is literally split open?

And here we come to my second example of public hypocrisy. No Court or Local Authority would for a moment allow a woman as mentally handicapped as this young woman is said to be to have the care of an infant or child. Once the child is born, it too is a person with its own rights, and the duty of

these institutions is first and foremost to the child. So that even if the ties forged by the physiological changes do mean that the mother has an affection for the baby, as a five-year-old might indeed feel affection for a doll, she cannot keep it. Our public policy apparently decrees that she must retain her inalienable right to physical wholeness, be sent out as a sheep among wolves, go through the frightening, painful and meaningless experience of pregnancy and

childbirth and emerge without anything to show for it. The only aspect of the whole proceeding which the poor child possibly could enjoy is the warmth of sexual contact.

Does some sort of public conscience insist that pregnancy is the price she has to pay for this simple pleasure?

This article was first published in Humanist News.

Is There a Cure for Scientology?

HELEN HASTE

What accounts for the success of Scientology and other cults which became established in post-war Britain? Despite their ridiculous teachings, dubious recruiting techniques and harassment of defectors, they continue to attract new followers. Dr Helen Haste, Senior Lecturer in Psychology at the University of Bath, believes that the answer lies partly in their ability to meet real needs.

There is a tendency to be shocked by the accumulation of fabulous wealth, particularly when it is done not through honest toil but through gifts, votive offerings or the exorbitant charge for services. When there is some suspicion that the money is lining an individual's pockets as well, the moral hackles are raised. To an extent, the "Panorama" (BBC 1) programme on Scientology fell into that trap.

But it does not matter very much that the Church of Scientology has "trillions" of dollars in assets; it does not matter greatly that L. Ron Hubbard indulged a Croesian lifestyle. The moral issue of Scientology is in its effects on individuals, the erosion of their independence and their gradual enmeshing in the "group". The fact that this process also erodes their financial resources catastrophically is symptomatic rather than the central issue. Once part of the cult, the ingroup, drastic measures are used to retain them; harassment, blackmail and threats of physical violence are, apparently, the sanctions used against the defector. It is to their credit that many defectors were willing to appear (some incognito) in *Scientology — the Road to Total Freedom*, and that 400 have banded together to sue the Church of Scientology for fraudulent appropriation of their money — the latter again reflecting the fact that one has legal redress for financial, but not for psychological, damages.

The Church of Scientology may be pernicious in its practices, and may, once a person has "joined", use strong-arm tactics to keep their allegiance. But it remains true that people do join voluntarily. What do they offer such that people will step firmly onto the slippery slope? Ultimately, haranguing the public about the devious tactics of Scientologists —

or Moonies or any other similar group — will be of little avail if people do find something beneficial in the system.

The techniques of the Church of Scientology are effective because they answer some genuine needs, and arguably, in the short run do genuine good. Even on the programme, no-one denied that one of the front organisations, Narconon, did effectively detoxify drug addicts; no-one can either deny that providing a supportive organisation is an essential part of the curing of addiction. Part of the success with ordinary newcomers ("pre-clears", in the terminology) is that there is a programme which builds up a sense of personal efficacy. Part of the success is due to the provision of some psychotherapy. Neither of these is easily available elsewhere, particularly in Britain.

The newcomer is taken through these processes with the help of an "auditor", a person who is in conventional terms untrained in psychotherapy. Indeed, one of the early efforts to stem the influence of Scientology was by charging them with practising psychiatry without a license. The auditor uses a simple galvanic skin response machine to find out areas of the individual's vulnerability and worries, and encourages them to talk through these, providing support and sympathy, and constructive help, as they do so. This is undoubtedly of value to the individual; their entirely understandable gratitude to the therapist is of course part of the process of enmeshing — and the "confessions" elicited at this stage can be most useful should the individual choose to defect — but from the point of view of the individual on the receiving end, the opportunity to work through problems has genuine benefits.

Perhaps of much more importance, and quite impossible to legislate against on the grounds of malpractice, is the "science of dianetics" itself, the techniques used to give the individual a sense of personal efficacy, personal potency and strength. One example of these techniques was shown on the programme; it involved shouting orders at inanimate objects — to focus the individual's capacities for will and intention, part of the mechanism for strengthen-

ing determination and concentration. (Other, more respectable, trainers in psychological techniques use similar methods; the point is to enable the individual to take responsibility for their own feelings and desires in a neutral and non-threatening context, and thus to provide a sense of personal efficacy, and a set of psychological skills, for dealing with the real-life situation.)

There is now a fair body of evidence that personal sense of efficacy is a key factor in people becoming involved in social action, in taking initiatives and generally in taking responsibility in their own lives. The science of dianetics has much in common with the American school of "you can do it if you believe you can" self-improvement, and indeed some of the appeal of it must lie in the promise of economic and social reward. But a sense of personal efficacy is a felt need, and it also has social importance quite beyond its contribution to entrepreneurship.

So we have established that Scientology provides a short-cut to the acquisition of at least two subjectively-experienced needs, the chance to work through problems and the development of a sense of personal efficacy. As long as the opportunity to obtain these is scarce, cults which provide them will flourish. Once inside, however, the newcomer has further rewards. Like all cults, whether political or religious, Scientology has a progressive set of hurdles to increasing "insidership" or expertise; to be a member is not enough, one must seek ever more esoteric truths. And the "truths" of Scientology are indeed esoteric. The advanced Scientologist has access to the secrets of the universe in the form of knowledge of an alternative history of the universe which has all the elements of the best Saturday morning sci-fi movie — a conflict between Good and Evil, conquest of the planets, the transformation of the Titans (in this case, called "Thetans") into beings who transcend time and space, and whose powers we now inherit and, if sufficiently worthy, can use for the benefit of mankind. Not for nothing was L. Ron Hubbard a skilful and successful science fiction writer. But as many people have pointed out, the stories of science fiction are the stories once called fairy stories, which themselves appear in various guises in all faiths; Hubbard merely completed the circle by making a religion out of science fiction.

Arguably, it should be a freedom worth preserving to believe in mumbo-jumbo, to worship Luke Skywalker and make Darth Vader the incarnation of the Devil. How far should we go in legislating against belief in the irrational? This remains the dilemma of a free society, and Scientologists make much of the importance of that freedom. Perhaps the key issue is the manipulation of group psychology. Again, like all cults Scientology generates a power-

ful "ingroup v outgroup" ethos, either through genuine paranoia or through the cynical manipulation of the sense of threat which results from the rest of the world's suspicion of the members. Members are encouraged not only to reject outsiders but also to actively do them harm — provided that they remain within the law, according to the "Panorama" programme. There is plenty of evidence from history that the perception of a threat from outside is a powerful means of creating solidarity, and very difficult to undermine — from the outside.

I am sceptical that a great deal can be done about the Scientology cult; many governments have imposed sanctions on it, and have merely strengthened the sense of being a beleaguered but blessed coterie. A clever man, Hubbard left behind him a trained team of *young* elite members — including several media stars. At the moment, it seems that Hubbard's guru status is secure; the sexual misdemeanours which seem successfully to create havoc for the careers of American and British charismatic leaders may one day find their parallel amongst the presumably vigorous young elite — clearly accusations by outsiders of financial chicanery have not. But as Scientology does not rest on the moral perfection of its leaders, but on the personal benefits to the individual member, it may, like the Baptist church and the Democratic and Conservative parties, be resistant to the frailty of its leaders.

The positive thing that came out of the "Panorama" programme was that the defectors felt betrayed, first by the deceits they finally saw being practised, and secondly, by the strong-arm tactics revealed by their defection. While for the observer the moral issue should not perhaps be the making of too much money, the sense of personally being defrauded of one's money may eventually lead to the sense of being personally defrauded of one's life — and all that personal efficacy may then be turned against the defrauders.

Bishop Disowns Widow's "Incredible" Visions

Roman Catholics in Boston, USA, have been told by Bishop Francis Mugavero that the Virgin Mary is not making personal appearances in the diocese. He made a declaration that the apparitions which Mrs Mary Luken claimed to have seen "completely lacked authenticity". He told the US Bishops' Conference that "no credibility" could be attached to the "visions".

Mrs Luken, a widow, reported her first sighting in 1970. Since then she has been organising vigils.

Bishop Mugavero has instructed Catholics not to participate in the vigils. Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, head of the Congregation of the Doctrine of the Faith, has written a letter in support of the bishop.

Thoughts on Victoria

T. F. EVANS

Queen Victoria ascended the throne on 20 June 1837 and ruled the British Empire until her death in 1901. T. F. Evans examines some of the fundamental social changes that occurred during her long reign. He also considers lesser known facets of Victoria's character, including her attitude to religion.

Between the years 1837 and 1901, immense changes took place in the fabric of British life and society. The first great novel by Charles Dickens, *The Pickwick Papers*, appeared in book form in 1837, and the world which he presented of stage coaches and old coaching inns was only just beginning to disappear, while the transformation to be wrought by the railways, then just visible, would be portrayed with dramatic colour in *Dombey and Son* ten years later.

By 1901, H. G. Wells, sometimes thought of as a direct descendant of Dickens, had already published *The War of the Worlds*, and the same year was to see the appearance of *The First Men in the Moon*. Air travel was now in view. The great mechanical transformation of life that had been taking place all through the 19th century was now reaching its consummation. To take obvious examples only: the bicycle and the motor-car, the telephone and the typewriter, were now facts of life. The next six decades saw their improvement and refinement, but it was not until the advent on a large scale of the computer that the next great transformation of society was to take place.

It was not only in science and mechanical development that vast changes took place between 1837 and 1901. Religion and philosophy were thrown into turmoil. All was change too in the arts. In 1837, Wordsworth was still alive and writing. By 1901, James Joyce was certainly on the horizon. In 1837, there was no serious British theatre. By the end of the century, Ibsen and Shaw were battering at the door.

Finally, in the all-important matter of killing one's fellow human beings, in 1837 there were many who could recall the battle of Waterloo. By 1901, "the last of the gentleman's wars" had started in South Africa; war was soon to be no longer a pastime for gentlemen or players (or indeed anybody else).

The years 1837 and 1901 have not been chosen at random. Even the least monarchist readers of this journal will know that Queen Victoria came to the throne in 1837 and died in 1901. The absence of a royal wedding this year to stir the blood of all true-born patriots may be compensated for by the celebrations to mark the 150th anniversary of Victoria's accession. Those of us who think that the present Queen has been on the throne for so long that she must by now be heartily sick of the position and the duties involved may reflect, with awe or any

other appropriate emotion, that she would have to stay for nearly 30 more years to equal the record of her great-great-grandmamma.

Monarchies have gradually disappeared, and those that survive today are, in most respects, eccentric anachronisms which, if they work at all, do so by forgoing most of the attributes which were formerly thought to justify this particular form of government and administration. Paradox abounds. The British monarchy is thought somehow to be in the gift of God. There is a close relationship between the Crown and the Church of England. Yet the most important function of the Church in this respect is to preside over the coronation of a new monarch. The Archbishop of Canterbury may perform the actual crowning, but all the staff work is arranged by the Duke of Norfolk who is a Roman Catholic and leading lay member of the church which Henry VIII abandoned when he decided to found his own.

Strangely, Victoria was not a deeply religious person. She and the Prince Consort may have taken communion, but not frequently. She performed such observances as were unavoidable, but there was a vein of scepticism in smaller religious matters. Thus, although feeling that she was Queen by divine right, she dismissed as "twaddle" the remark of a pious prelate who, seeking to console her on the death of Albert, asserted that "henceforth . . . Christ himself will be your husband." She said: "The man must have known that he was talking nonsense. How can people like that comfort others or teach anybody."

Victoria often defied the Sabbatarians. She incurred their disfavour through travelling by train on Sunday. When they forced the Government to prohibit Sunday band concerts in London parks, Victoria declared she could not "sufficiently express her regret at the incomprehensible blindness and mistaken piety of the so called 'Evangelical Saints'."

The life of Queen Victoria gives us much to think about. It was during her reign that Walter Bagehot published his important work, *The English Constitution*. In that book he considered the parts of the constitutional machinery that were "efficient", by which he meant that they worked, and those that were merely "dignified", by which he meant those that served some other purpose than that of functioning in a utilitarian manner. He included the monarchy as one of the "dignified" elements in the constitution.

Bagehot was one of the first writers to chart the transition of power in this country from Crown to Parliament and gradually from Parliament to the Cabinet, to the extent that some theorists now describe the system as "presidential" on the American model. No less a person than the Lord Chancellor, Lord Hailsham, has found the present

system so disagreeable in some respects that he has declared we live not in a monarchy or a democracy but in an elective dictatorship. (It is perhaps fair to a distinguished lawyer and politician to add that the full horror of this constitutional development impresses itself on his finely balanced mind only when a Labour administration is in power.)

To comment further along these lines would be to drift into deep and difficult waters. It may be more interesting and profitable to look, if only briefly, at some personal features of a subject that, whether to royalist or republican, never seems to lose its fascination. Those who are inclined to pursue the topic will find the greatest interest in a new biography of Victoria, timed to coincide with the 150th anniversary of her accession. Entitled *Victoria: Biography of a Queen* (Unwin Hyman) it is the work of Stanley Weintraub, well known as an authority on English and American writers of the later Victorian period.

Those to whom the name Victoria connotes sometimes drab railway stations, not particularly exciting streets in run-down city centres, or unimpressive stone statues of a fat old woman pointing with an imperious gesture out to sea from an esplanade or public building, will be surprised at the picture drawn by Stanley Weintraub of the fresh young woman who, awakened in the middle of the night to be told that she must assume the throne, bore herself with great dignity and self-control and who, although there were significant relaxations of those qualities, generally maintained them throughout her long reign.

Contemporary accounts may possibly be open to the charge of sycophancy, but there is the ring of truth in one observation by the diarist, Croker. He wrote of the young Queen when she had read to the Privy Council a Declaration, drafted for her by the Prime Minister, Lord Melbourne, of her forthcoming marriage to Prince Albert.

I cannot describe to you with what a mixture of self-possession and feminine delicacy she read the paper. Her voice, which is naturally beautiful, was clear and untroubled, and her eyes were bright and calm, neither bold nor downcast, but firm and soft.

Even the republican, Bernard Shaw, was to comment on the beauty of her voice quite late in her life.

Of all the many features of Victoria's life and reign that arouse comment, three may be selected. First, is the character and temperament of the Queen herself, and her devotion to the Prince Consort. Almost certainly a great rarity among royal marriages, Victoria's union with Albert was a true marriage, untouched by any suspicion of disloyalty or infidelity. Second, is a feature of her more overtly political side and her relations with Gladstone and her letters and diaries. Worse, she contemplated Disraeli, the two great Prime Ministers of the

second half of her reign. Third, is the view of Victoria as the head of a dynasty and the place of the monarchy in England, then and now.

It is very hard to look at Victoria in the light of 20th-century democracy. There are occasional flashes to which one warms. Thus, on one occasion, when Gladstone sought to impose a new tax on beer, she protested:

The richer classes, who drink wine and who are not in any way restricted in their indulgence, can well afford to pay for wine. But the poor can ill afford any additional tax on what in many parts is about their only beverage.

On the other hand she could not agree with imposed improvements in elementary education. In fact she thought standards were too high already. It was no service to children of the poor to raise their expectations by educating them for posts that would not be there for them to occupy. It is a point of view that has not entirely vanished a hundred years later.

She allowed herself to be flattered by Disraeli who, in his memorable phrase, "laid it on with a trowel". With Gladstone, it was an entirely different story. She grew to dislike him intensely. She wrote of him as a "half-mad firebrand" and in similar terms in various devices to prevent his return to office, even threatening to abdicate on one occasion. She also passed Government information to the opposition when Gladstone was in power. Her view of democracy was certainly flexible.

A final thought in this year of Victorian reflection may concentrate on the nature of monarchy itself. At present it is possible to think that the much-vaunted advantages of democracy are not as great as they are sometimes said to be. There are few people in democratic societies who do not see their own country misgoverned to such an extent that they long for a strong man or woman to take control and impose his or her will. A glance at those countries where this has been done, or is being done, is enough to drive the thought away. But it does not make some features of democracy any easier to take.

It is hard to see why the human race ever decided to organise itself on the basis of monarchy, once primitive tribalism had passed away. In modern times the idea of sovereignty of the orthodox Church-and-State Tory has been that somehow there was a kind of mystery stemming directly from the will of God. The philosopher Hobbes reached something like the same conclusion, but he introduced the idea of the people surrendering to a sovereign.

The divine right of kings is not now a widely held doctrine. But if a serious attempt is made to find out why we are "ruled", if that is the right word, by the House of Windsor, if that is the right name, it is hard to reach a conclusion that does not include the irrational religious element.

BOOK

FURTHER PARTICULARS: CONSEQUENCES OF AN EDWARDIAN BOYHOOD, by C. H. Rolph. Oxford University Press, £12.50

C. H. Rolph is a doughty fighter for good causes, well known to readers of this paper through his lectures on law reform, civil liberty and freedom of the press. In his latest book, *Further Particulars*, he picks up the threads of an earlier memoir, *London Particulars*, looking back on a long and useful life of honourable service to his fellow human beings.

This mere note on a work so full of good things fails to do any real justice to its author whose comments on such dignitaries as Dean Inge, Rebecca West, George Orwell, Kingsley Martin, Richard Crossman and scores of others, struck me as being both shrewd and perceptive, affectionate and witty, all at the same time. His detailed account of the fine work done by Barbara Robb, the fighter who became a thorn in the flesh of certain hospital authorities in the 60s, and in whose campaign Rolph himself was to become deeply involved, is as touching as anything in the book. And his Report of the same period containing findings and impressions after a trip to New Zealand and Australia, delivered to the Parole Board (then headed by Lord Hunt at a time when James Callaghan was Home Secretary), would have been an outstanding contribution to parole system literature — had it been published. It is reprinted in the present volume.

A seeker after truth, however unpalatable the conclusion reached may be from the humanist point of view, Rolph has given Christianity every chance. His references to Bishop John Robinson and Sir Richard Acland are given at length. He wants to believe, but is too honest a witness to adopt attitudes that the rationalist must necessarily reject. And in his final chapter he tells us why, and where he stands at the age of 84.

The consequences of Rolph's Edwardian boyhood long ago repudiated Margaret Thatcher's mean-spirited "Victorian Values", and his thinking today (as it has been from the start of a concerned life) helps to provide us with a 20th-century social history of importance.

PETER COTES

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FREETHINKER PAMPHLET

CRIMINAL TRIALS — THE SEARCH FOR TRUTH, by Tom Sargant and Peter Hill, The Fabian Society, 11 Dartmouth Street, London SW1H 9BN, £2 (post free)

Tom Sargant, OBE, was the founding secretary of *Justice*, and worked for that organisation for 25 years. Peter Hill devised and produced the BBC *Rough Justice* series, for which *Justice* provided most of the leads and much of the information. They have written this 33-page pamphlet (No. 348 in the Fabian research series) to point out a number of serious defects in the English criminal justice system as they see it. Each flaw they illustrate with a practical example of a real miscarriage of justice which resulted from it. Most are quite horrifying: not only because of what happened, but also because of the extreme difficulty there was afterwards in getting the matter put right.

The points they make range widely — too widely, indeed, to cover all of them in the space of this review. One of the problems is the law of criminal evidence, certain parts of which appear to have been designed to suppress the truth rather than to bring it out. The celebrated "rule against hearsay", for example, prevents anyone repeating in court what another person said about the incident which gave rise to the trial. The rule is so strict that it even applies where the original speaker is now dead. Thus in one case, where X was on trial for an offence against Y, now dead, X was not permitted to call witnesses who had heard Y say it was Z, not X, who attacked him. (It also applies, incidentally, if the original speaker is too young to call as a witness, and in a case well known to lawyers a white man accused of assaulting a three-year-old girl was not allowed to call the child's mother to tell the court that the child told her the man who did it was black!)

Another problem is that the law treats witnesses as the property of one side or the other, and forbids the person calling a witness to cross-examine him, which is the only way of getting the story out of a witness who is reluctant to talk. So if a witness vital to the defence is uncooperative, the defence can only get his story out of him if the prosecution call him, which they will not do, of course, if they think his evidence will undermine their case.

Similarly, witnesses are only permitted to answer the questions which the lawyers acting for each side actually put to them; which sometimes means that they are unable to tell the court the whole

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truth where this does not fit in with the line of questioning each side took. This poses particular problems with expert witnesses, forensic scientists especially. In one rape case a forensic scientist gave evidence that he found in the victim's body various unusual substances which were present in the defendant's body fluids; but it never came out that as it happened the victim had similar substances in her own body fluids, which meant that this piece of evidence proved nothing.

The authors devote a large section of the pamphlet to forensic evidence, its importance, its use and its abuse. Contrary to what is widely believed, they say that forensic science is now sufficiently developed that forensic evidence is almost always more reliable than the testimony of eye-witnesses. Yet forensic evidence is frequently used only as a back-up to eye-witness testimony and the police account of their interrogation of the accused, and it is sometimes used selectively — the bits that fit in with the rest of the evidence, in other words, and not the bits which destroy it. The root of many of these difficulties, say the authors, is the adversarial nature of the English criminal trial. Outside the common law world, criminal justice is inquisitorial: the court is seen as conducting an official enquiry, in the course of which it questions the witnesses, and uses its own initiative to collect the evidence it needs to get to the truth. But in the common law tradition, the trial is seen as a contest between two opposing sides, each of which presents a case, and the function of the court is simply to decide between them. The trouble with this system is that it makes everything depend on the honesty and sense of fair play of the prosecution, and the diligence and competence of the defence. If the prosecution is unscrupulous or heavy-handed, or the defence lawyer is negligent, the innocent defendant is in trouble. If both of these conditions are present, he will be lucky indeed to avoid a conviction for something he did not do.

In one place Sargant and Hill overstate their case, and that where they say that the Court of Appeal "will not on any account listen to evidence that could have been called at the trial, holding appellants responsible for the incompetence of their lawyers". This was once the position, but nowadays the Court of Appeal is willing in principle to hear such evidence, although it does so very rarely. In other respects they make their points with great moderation. Furthermore, their tone throughout is thoroughly constructive. Instead of merely saying how bad it all is, they make workable suggestions as

to how most of the problems they identify could be solved.

Alas, I fear it will be an uphill struggle to bring about most of the changes they suggest. In mediaeval times, defendants who refused to plead guilty or not guilty were ceremonially crushed to death under piles of heavy weights; this was not abolished until 1772. Defendants, having pleaded not guilty, were formerly not permitted to give evidence in their own defence; this lasted until 1898. At one time a convicted defendant was not allowed to appeal, even where he could show quite conclusively that he was innocent of the offence of which he stood convicted; that remained the case until 1908. Nothing seems to be harder work than getting abuses in the criminal justice system put right.

The trouble is that the lawyers are usually conservative in outlook, given to telling anyone who will listen that the British system of justice is *The Envy of the World*; and radicals who urge changes in other parts of the body politic tend to make an unholy alliance with conservative-minded lawyers when changes in the criminal justice system are proposed. In criminal justice, radicals identify with jury trial, which they value as a safeguard to political liberty; and they are too easily persuaded that any attack on the criminal justice system is an attack on jury trial. Thus, as Sargant and Hill glumly conclude at the end of their Fabian pamphlet, it has been left to the Conservative Party to make such reforms in criminal justice as have happened in modern times, and it is them whom we must thank for an independent prosecution service, safeguards for the interrogation of suspects, advance disclosure of the prosecution evidence in summary trials, and other things besides.

Radicals, no less than conservatives, need to clear their minds of accepted dogma and false preconceptions before they think about criminal justice. This pamphlet should help them on the road to free thought.

J. R. SPENCER

JOURNAL

THE RAVEN: ANARCHIST QUARTERLY. Freedom Press, Angel Alley, 84b Whitechapel High Street, London E1 7QX, £2.50, annual subscription £10.00

The Raven has been a long time coming, but it has been worth the wait. It is produced by the Freedom Press, the small anarchist publishing enterprise based in Whitechapel. And a good job they've made of it. The first issue of what is intended to be a quarterly journal is neatly and attractively put together. Of its 96 pages, eight are devoted to high-quality black-

and-white illustrations. Happily it has avoided the pitfalls of sloppy art work, inappropriate typeface and patchy proof-reading which bedevil so many Left-journalists.

The highlight of *The Raven's* first issue is Nicolas Walter's scrupulously well-informed and engagingly written article on that mischievous maverick Guy Aldred. Nicolas Walter details Aldred's rapid progression "along a well-trodden ideological road from Christian and Liberal radicalism through secularism and socialism to atheism and anarchism." Aldred was a man of courage and an inexhaustible propagandist (at one time he was an occasional contributor to *The Freethinker*). But it's difficult to fault Walter's judgement that Guy Aldred's prodigious energy was counterbalanced by "complete lack of any sense of humour or proportion and an extraordinary combination of self-confidence and self-conceit, which made him an *enfant terrible* in all the many organisations he joined and made him quarrel with almost all the many people he worked with."

The other buttress of this issue is Heiner Becker's contribution on the history of the anarchist paper *Freedom* and of the Freedom Press, in which he expands on themes raised in his brief articles for last October's centenary issue of *Freedom*. Heiner Becker knows more about the early years of British anarchism than anyone else, and presents the fruits of his research with admirable clarity.

But *The Raven* is intended to be not a requiem for British anarchism but a focus of debate. And there's certainly plenty that's debateable in Colin Ward's article on "Anarchism and the Informal Economy". Colin Ward attempts to regain for the libertarian Left concepts such as "enterprise", "initiative" and "self-help" which, he suggests, have been lost by default to the Right wing of politics. He foresees a return towards an informal economy, with less emphasis on traditional forms of wage labour. The argument is attractive, but contains more than a modicum of wishful thinking.

The other articles are less substantial, but by no means discreditable. If the journal is able to appear on time from now on and to maintain its editorial standards while attracting a wider range of contributions, it will develop into quite the best publication of the libertarian Left that Britain has seen for some years.

ANDREW WHITEHEAD

Parishioners have literally been "taking the collection" at Roman Catholic churches in Cleveland, Ohio. A 17-month investigation into the disappearance of more than a million dollars from collection plates has resulted in five collectors being charged with theft. Video cameras filmed one man stuffing 3,500 dollars into his pockets.

LETTERS

"LEFTIST CAUSES"

I was sorry but scarcely surprised to discover that, not content with publishing in your March issue Karl Heath's malignant misrepresentation of my views on racism, you have since in your April issue continued the offensive editorially. Certainly it is strictly, though trivially, correct to say that I was not "driven out of the National Secular Society for political reasons"; if, that is, this is construed as referring to the sort of resolution of expulsion which I take it that Karl Heath would like to see passed now by the Rationalist Press Association and the British Humanist Association. But, equally certainly, the NSS did, by passing a never ending series of resolutions supporting all manner of leftist causes, make it impossible for me, or for any other enemy of socialism, to continue in membership.

As for your "serious misgivings" about participation in conferences organised by the much abused Unification Church, it is here sufficient to insist that, though the funds are indeed "Moonie money", the organisation by the International Cultural Foundation is academically impeccable. So to attend is no more to support the UC than to accept a research grant from the Ford or Volkswagen Foundations is to endorse Ford or Volkswagen cars.

Finally, my objection to the Anti-Apartheid Movement is, of course: not that I adhere to genuinely racist policies; but that I abhor the Leninist ANC, which that Movement endorses. Since the ANC, unlike Chief Buthelezi's Indaba, finds it necessary in order to sustain support to "necklace" dissidents, one might have hoped that freethinkers would hesitate to join those clerics who, dancing attendance upon Mrs Winnie Mandela, are perhaps sighing for the good old days when they too could burn heretics alive.

ANTONY FLEW

UNDER PRESSURE

The editorial comment on my letter (May 1987) says that my suggestion that "political pressure was applied on both sides" in the dispute between the National Secular Society and Antony Flew is a "totally unjustified allegation". I must say that I found such pressure unmistakable both in the Annual General Meetings of the National Secular Society and in the columns of *The Freethinker*, and both for and against him, and that I find the continued vendetta quite alien to what freethought ought to be.

NICOLAS WALTER

BLATANT DISTORTIONS

As the editor of *Anti-Racism — An Assault on Education and Value*, may I point out that Karl Heath's letter (April) and his review (March) are both untruthful and defamatory. The book neither condones racialism nor seeks to condemn all those who are opposed to it. Heath claims that "all decent people are anti-racist". It doesn't follow that all "anti-racists" are decent people. Thus the book's central argument is that neither education nor race relations are served by extremists who adopt, and berate others for not adopting, policies which are themselves racialist (a) in their hostility to whites and (b) in their crude stereotyping of "blacks".

Heath obscures our main point with a series of blatant distortions and misrepresentations. He quotes me as saying "The word 'racist' is a sophistical device. . .", omitting the beginning and end of the

sentence: "Used in such a programme . . . and is not therefore conducive to harmonious race relations". He does not reveal here that I was in fact discussing a special use of the word in "facism-awareness" propaganda or that my reference to the "solecism" of "social justice" occurs in my summary of Ray Honeyford's exposé of the illogical extension of the term.

Heath accuses A. C. Capey of trying to justify the word "nigger" in Huckleberry Finn; whereas it is the book he defends against the anti-racist censors who have appreciated neither its literary merit nor its subtle anti-racist message. Tom Hastie is treated to a sneer, with no mention of what his chapter is about. And Heath's false accusation about Antony Flew alleging "genetic inferiority" in minority ethnic groups is quite outrageous. Since Professor Flew has already written to you about that I shall not repeat the refutation, but merely endorse his disgust.

I conclude that Heath's wild accusation that the book is "perverse, fraudulent and evil" is therefore not only totally unsubstantiated, but is itself a clear example of the spiteful hysteria and lamentable illogic that an obsession with "racism" produces.

FRANK PALMER

ACCUSATIONS

I must protest at the low standard of journalism shown in the editorial comment on Nicolas Walter's letter (May). To liken Antony Flew to the Moonies by a snide juxtaposition is more worthy of the editorial standards of the *Sun* than *The Freethinker*.

It would be amusing, if it were not so serious, to see the editor supporting the view that there is nothing to criticise in the activities of the anti-racist lobby, while the News and Notes item of the same edition is entirely about attacks by this lobby on the National Secular Society.

There has also been a letter in the *Guardian* accusing the President of the NSS of being racist. This type of counter-productive anti-racist activity can hardly be regarded as fringe when the "most idiotic response" to the NSS statement came from the man who is now chairman of the ILEA.

There is no doubt that there is a faction that would prefer to see racial equality based on confrontation and segregation rather than harmony and integration — witness the demand for Black sections in the Labour Party. The divisiveness of this is seen by considering what the reaction would be to demands for White sections, yet that is the obvious consequence.

R. G. TEE

JUSTIFIED REACTION

If, in a predominately white society, with a predominately white judiciary and police force, petrol is poured through more letterboxes of black house-dwellers than white house-dwellers, it is reasonable to suspect that the arsonists are white.

If the investigating white police find clues such as empty petrol cans but fail to recover them for fingerprinting, etc, it is reasonable to suspect a cover-up. If a Police Inspector in charge of an investigation refuses to acknowledge that failure to collect such evidence is a serious omission, it is reasonable to suspect that there is a dangerous white racist element in that society.

It would be surprising if some blacks and their sympathisers did not over react to such suspicious events, no arsonists having been caught, and it is right for people like Antony Flew to warn against over reaction — provided that their first concern is the exposure and combating of the racism that causes that reaction.

Enoch Powell stands condemned not for his speeches about "rivers of blood", but for his failure to condemn the violence his words may have encouraged.

Is Antony Flew similarly at fault?

E. F. CROSSWELL

THE REALITY OF RACISM

Anti-racism, as contrived by Antony Flew, Tom Hastie, Frank Palmer and Harry Stopes-Roe, appears to offend their delicate white susceptibilities.

Racism brings real discrimination, real insults, real threats and real injuries to the black community day in and day out. To claim that between racism and anti-racism there is a position of moral neutrality is dishonest sophistry and a mean-minded quibble.

Bertrand Russell exposed such a position as bogus and absurd in the chapter on the Nichomachean Ethics in his *History of Western Philosophy*. When Aristotle suggests that truthfulness is a golden mean, Russell recalls the mayor who, on completing his term of office, declared that he had endeavoured to steer the narrow line between partiality on the one hand and impartiality on the other.

KARL HEATH

PAINÉ AND FREETHOUGHT

Tony Green and Glyn Emery (Letters, May) bitterly complain about the space devoted to Tony Benn's London lecture in celebration of the 250th anniversary of the birth of Thomas Paine on the grounds that it was "Labour party propaganda" (Green) and "little more than a sequence of socialist slogans" (Emery).

Both correspondents maintain the primary role of *The Freethinker* to be "the encouragement of secular humanism" and "supportive of secular humanism". Of course it is quite true the journal proclaims on its title page to be a secular humanist monthly. But perhaps in common with a number of other readers, I find this term rather vague, a situation not helped by the failure of both critics to define it. In view of this, how can anyone be certain that Tony Benn's opinions are not the correct expression of secular humanism, and those of readers Green and Emery reactionary? Moreover, why should anyone assume that socialism is not an integral part of secular humanism?

Subject matter with a social content cannot be divorced from politics, and from what I have read in *The Freethinker* much of what is published in it relates to important, if frequently controversial, social issues. Consequently one can expect such material to reflect various political standpoints, including socialism, and this is just what we see in the report of Tony Benn's lecture. In his views on what he sees as the implications of the contemporary application of certain of Paine's ideas are incorrect, then it is up to Green and Emery, and others who think like them, to show him the error in his thinking.

Thomas Paine's ideas had an immense influence on the freethought movement, but not it alone, for they had, and have, a political content, a fact which cannot be ignored. Even *The Age of Reason* was written in part to support a political stance. It strikes me, therefore, that Tony Benn's approach is more in accord with Thomas Paine's motivation and thinking, though relating his ideas to a modern socialist ideology.

If, say, David Steel had responded to the invitation given him to address a meeting on Thomas Paine, he would have brought out what he saw as Paine's influence on Liberal thought as much in the past as possibly in the future. Contrary to what Professor Emery holds, this is a legitimate approach, whether

employed by a socialist, a liberal, or even a conservative. (Paine advocated state aid to those wishing to set up in business; perhaps Mrs Thatcher got the idea from him.) Of course we cannot say for certain if Paine would have approved of the political ideology claiming to be his rightful heir.

I feel that Tony Benn's lecture was refreshing, humorous and challenging. Unlike Mr Green, I assume that most people likely to read *The Freethinker* are intelligent enough to assess an article or viewpoint from an informed standpoint; consequently to hide it away from them can only be interpreted as a fear of free and open discussion, coupled with support for censorship of political and other views not approved of by him.

R. W. MORRELL,
Secretary, The Thomas Paine Society

BENN ON PAINE

Glyn Emery (Letters, May) is bothered because Tony Benn, MP, said that, if Thomas Paine were alive today, he would take up the cause of a socialist British revolution by consent, with the same enthusiasm that Paine invested in the Revolutions in America and France two centuries ago. Professor Emery understandably says that such assertions are incapable of demonstration or even refutation. Paine died 178 years ago, so we cannot ask him. But we can examine his ideas and see what relevance they have to today.

Because Paine was very much a man of principle, his ideas live and that makes the task so much easier. Paine said that having had some part in two revolutions was living to some purpose; his ideas are certainly not alien to the context of considering a revolution in Britain, however changed the circumstances may be. But a socialist revolution? Socialism had not been "invented" in Paine's day. Paine applied scientific analysis to politics, as did Marx many years later and in a much more thorough-going way. Some of Paine's proposals (in Part II of *Rights of Man*) for a welfare state are based on scientific examination of albeit crude statistics, and in *Agrarian Justice* he comes close to a socialist point of view.

So many socialists have included Paine's writings among books that have influenced them — worth wondering why. It is clear from the way he writes that Professor Emery is not a socialist (nor, indeed, does your other critic, Tony Green, appear to be). He objects to prime space being devoted to Benn's socialist ideas, while himself devoting space to denigrating Benn's lecture in terms like "little more than a sequence of socialist slogans . . . tired old slogans".

Paine suffered smears in his lifetime and even since; again, worth wondering why — and applying to today's world.

CHRISTOPHER BRUNEL

CHANGING TIMES

The article by Eric Westman, *This Takes the Palm* (April), does little for the humanist cause. Such smearing of other people's beliefs suggests ignorance and lack of rational arguments. It also makes humanists little better than the irrational they allegedly oppose. However ridiculous such activities may seem to logical minds, it is very likely that their origins were based on sensible behaviour.

A classic case is the sacred cow in India. The ban was given religious force when, in the distant past, priests realised that cattle were being killed with no thought for the future. The real reasons have long been forgotten and only religious importance remains.

It was pointed out some years ago that many anomalies in the Old Testament are due to stories being passed down orally over many generations. They were finally written by people living in urban surroundings who were describing rural life which they had never experienced.

More recently a student of Chinese picture writing has shown that apparently illogical symbols are simple and obvious when considered against the rural culture that was the norm when they were first created. Their idiom relates to practical living of that time.

The culture shock that the old find in our rapidly changing society also works in the reverse direction when we study the reasons for past behaviour. We should try to avoid the trap into which many missionaries and colonisers have fallen and not assume that causes applying in our society are or were also valid in other places and times.

R. G. SILSON

INSULTING PALMIST

Eric Westman's article, *This Takes the Palm* (April), certainly does. Insult is never a good substitute for argument, and misplaced insult only harms the insulter.

I thought it was well known by now that Isaiah's line about the Messiah riding "on an ass, and on a colt, the foal of an ass" is Hebrew repetition and does not imply two animals. If Matthew misunderstood this (as others have done) he would merely have implied that the colt trotted along beside its mother, probably a familiar sight in the east then as now. Where this scene is depicted in art, that is how it is usually done.

Neither need we assume that when clothes are used to pad a saddle, or to ease a rider's path, they leave the rider with nothing on. I don't think we presume that Sir Walter Raleigh was in his birthday suit when he laid his cloak before Queen Elizabeth!

And if Mr Westman doesn't know that it is possible to be "moved" emotionally as well as physically, he must be the only one in that state.

E. M. KARBACZ

MEANING OF THE GOSPEL

I deplore Eric Westerman's ignorant mockery of the gospels; this sort of thing gives freethinkers (and *The Freethinker*) a bad name. Please allow me to enlighten him.

Jesus did not ride "two donkeys at once", at least not according to Mark and John. Matthew refers to an ass and a colt because he is quoting Zechariah 9:9, where the repetition (typical of Jewish writing) is merely for emphasis; "a colt the foal of an ass" is merely another way of expressing "an ass".

It is evident that the ass was not stolen and that Jesus had made arrangements to use it. In fact there is cause to believe that he did this deliberately to fulfil the prophecy of Zechariah 9:9!

No-one stripped "stark naked"; the "garments" cast on the ass and spread on the ground can only have been the *simla* (cloak), which was a multi-purpose outer garment.

The cutting and spreading of palm branches was not an act of vandalism; it was a traditional greeting. The palm was a symbol of victory and rejoicing.

"Son of David" was a title of the Messiah (as his descendant), not a description of Jesus immediate parentage.

If "all the city was moved", which is unlikely since Mark does not mention it, it was the people who were moved, not the city itself!

If the incident known as "The Cleansing of the

Temple" occurred it was a deliberate act by Jesus to fulfil the prophecy of Zechariah (14:21) that "there shall no longer be a trader in the house of the Lord of Hosts on that day" (see also Matthew 21:13). "Hooliganism" — no; fanaticism — yes!

The incident of the fig trees seems to have been misunderstood; it was probably an allegory about Israel (see Luke 13:6-9).

STEUART CAMPBELL

ADVANTAGES OF ESTABLISHMENT

So long as we must have an Established Church in this country, the appointment of its bishops by the State, discussed by T. F. Evans in *Moving the Bishops* (May), is part of the necessary quid pro quo for the privileges — financial and other — which it enjoys. And the Church of England seeks to "eat its cake and have it". (I know that the arrangements for the Church of Scotland are different, but that church is differently organised.)

The Church was disestablished and disendowed in Ireland by Gladstone's first Government on 1 January

Freethinker Fund

Extensive advertising is out of the question for *The Freethinker*. But its articles and editorial comments are frequently quoted in the press, and in this way the freethought message is disseminated far beyond the organised movement. Unfortunately even this form of promotion is expensive and, as the paper is already subsidised, necessarily limited.

Readers' generosity has enabled *The Freethinker* to survive for over a century. Every month newcomers join familiar names on the list of contributors to the Fund. Financial support and increased circulation will ensure the paper's publication and the extension of its influence.

F. E. Ellmore, £1; A. P. Allen, N. Bacrac, B. M. Chatfield, E. F. Crosswell, J. D. De Jong, W. D. Eaton, R. C. Edmunds, R. Fennell, M. D. Gough, H. M. Merrill, P. Pistorius, D. Rookledge, L. Stapleton and D. Swan, £1.40 each; S. Beer and L. V. Keen, £2 each; S. Farrelly, C. Lovett and J. A. Stratford, £2.40 each; E. C. Hughes, £2.90; D. Bressan, £3.40; G. F. Clarke and B. Hayes, £5 each; N. G. Baguley, J. Cornish, Mr and Mrs Love, P. Ponting-Barber and R. K. E. Torode, £6.40 each; S. Trent, £7.40; P. Forrest, £8.40; A. E. Garrison, £10; I. Campbell, Edinburgh Humanist Group, £20; M. F. Villiers Stuart, £22.80; Anonymous, £30; Mr and Mrs Biles, £50.

Total for April: £228.70.

At Van, in eastern Turkey, Muslim fundamentalists attacked patrons of a cafe with clubs and stones for not fasting during the "holy month" of Ramadan. Sirin Tekin, a 19-year-old student, has died from his injuries.

1871, and in Wales by Lloyd George's Government on 31 March 1920. Until the latter date, disestablishment and disendowment in England also was a live political issue. That it has not been since then reflects not only the decline of the Liberal Party, but also the virtual disappearance of Nonconformist interest in the matter. "Ecumenism", for the Church of England, has certainly worked. Indeed, many people in this country today probably do not even know what an Established Church is.

Among the advantages which the Church of England enjoys at the expense of all taxpayers is that its revenues are guaranteed by the State. In this and other ways the establishment of a church lessens the right of citizens to their own judgement of the many matters upon which religion impinges. Disestablishment and disendowment of the Churches of England and Scotland — separation of Church and State — is a necessary though not sufficient condition for the full enjoyment by all persons of the right to their own opinions.

R. J. M. TOLHURST

EVENTS

Brighton and Hove Humanist Group. New Venture Theatre Club, Bedford Place (off Western Road), Brighton. Sunday, 5 July, 4.30 pm. Tea party followed by Annual General Meeting.

Brighton and Hove Humanist Group. Summer programme obtainable from Joan Wimble, honorary secretary, Flat 5, 67 St Aubyns, Hove, BN3 2TL, telephone Brighton 733215.

Edinburgh Humanist Group. Programme for 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.

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

Havering and District Humanist Society. Harold Wood Social Centre, Gubbins Lane and Squirrels Heath Road, Harold Wood. Tuesday, 7 July, 8 pm. Don Baker: Thomas Paine — a Man of Great Influence.

Lewisham Humanist Group. Unitarian Meeting House, 41 Bromley Road, London SE6. Thursday, 25 June, 7.45 pm. Noel Thomas: Freedom and Addiction.

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

Sutton Humanist Group. Friends House, Cedar Road, Sutton. Wednesday, 8 July, 7.30 for 8 pm. Clive Turner: Darwin Brought up to Date.

Thomas Paine. 250th Anniversary Exhibition at the Ancient House Museum, Thetford, Norfolk.

Warwickshire Humanist Group. Friends Meeting House, Hill Street (off Corporation Street), Coventry. Monday, 15 June, 7.45 for 8 pm. Public meeting.

Denominational Schools

cults, sects and sub-sects.

"A just arrangement in a multi-religious society would not necessarily mean separate schools for each religion. It could also mean, in equity, abolition of all such schools and the integration of children irrespective of the religion of the home.

"The NSS advocates a policy which would phase out existing denominational schools, and sanction no new denominational schools, whether Anglican, Catholic or Muslim".

Primary school head Robert Tutton said he had spent his teaching in county primary schools. As a young teacher he was "puzzled and irritated by the way we had such silly assemblies and indoctrinated children into deism as hard as we could go.

"When I became head of such a school I determined to change things, although every day I am forced to disobey the 1944 Act regarding the place of worship and religious instruction".

Mr Tutton, who is a member of the British Humanist Association and the National Secular Society, said that the labelling and segregating of children for various reasons had ended in most county schools. This is not the case with church schools, which by their very nature segregate and indoctrinate.

"You cannot rub shoulders, argue or associate with a cross-section of other children because your parents think you have to be protected.

"No real debates can take place about belief systems or many other issues because the staff, and in particular the head, have been chosen to uphold a special ethos which undermines any counter-argument.

"Almost all of the church schools are pervaded by their particular faith. Many are frankly elitest. Many claim to be more caring than county schools, which is an insult. Virtually all the cash to run them is provided by you and me.

"Even those who are slow on the uptake cannot fail to realise that this problem remains entirely political. The Tories make political capital about protecting choice, and the odious Harry Greenway joins with others in a sanctimonious display of moral rectitude every time the subject is aired.

"The Labour Party and the Alliance are embarrassed about the whole matter, while making whimpering noises from time to time.

"The Socialist Education Association has passed numerous resolutions on segregation and indoctrination, but they are ignored".

Mr Tutton referred to the campaigns which have been run to convert church schools into county ones with open access.

"We must keep up our efforts", he declared, "because the threat of a divided society is self-evident".

Reign of Terror in Iran

Amnesty International has published a report on the "pattern of cruelty and inhumanity" of Iran's penal code.

The report gives details of the "justice" administered by religious leaders and kangaroo courts which have resulted in thousands of deaths and mutilations. A large proportion of the "offences" are sexual or alcohol-related.

It is known that at least eight people were stoned to death last year. The penal code stipulates that "the stones should not be too large so that the person dies on being hit by one or two of them".

Crucifixion is another form of capital punishment in Iran. It is stipulated that a moharab (enemy of God) should not spend more than three days on the cross. If he is still alive after that time, his life is spared.

An electric guillotine for severing fingers and hands was recently demonstrated at Mashad City. Reporters and officials watched as four fingers were sliced from a prisoner's right hand.

Amnesty International has been campaigning against abuses in Iran since the time when the American-backed Shah was in power.

The new report, Iran Briefing, price £3.50, is obtainable from Amnesty International, 5 Roberts Place, London EC1E 0EJ.

Scotland's Confused Christians

The Rev Frank Gibson, the Church of Scotland's social work director, has described as "most extraordinary" members' response to the question, "Do you believe in life after death?" Just over 52 per cent said they did, and many others said they didn't know what to believe.

The Church's *Lifestyle Survey* also shows that only around 35 per cent of members pray every day. Middle-aged and elderly people pray more frequently than the young. Nearly twice as many women as men pray every day.

Scottish Roman Catholics are more assiduous in religious observance than other denominations. But the Church is facing serious difficulties in future over a shortage of priests. It has launched a recruiting drive in the Glasgow archdiocese which has only 60 students in senior seminaries.

There are 245 priests ministering to 300,000 Catholics in the Greater Glasgow area. Nearly one-third of them are over 60. The heavy workload is taking its toll, and the average life expectancy for a priest in Glasgow is 57.

Church attendance among Catholics in Scotland is declining. It is estimated that under 50 per cent go to church regularly.