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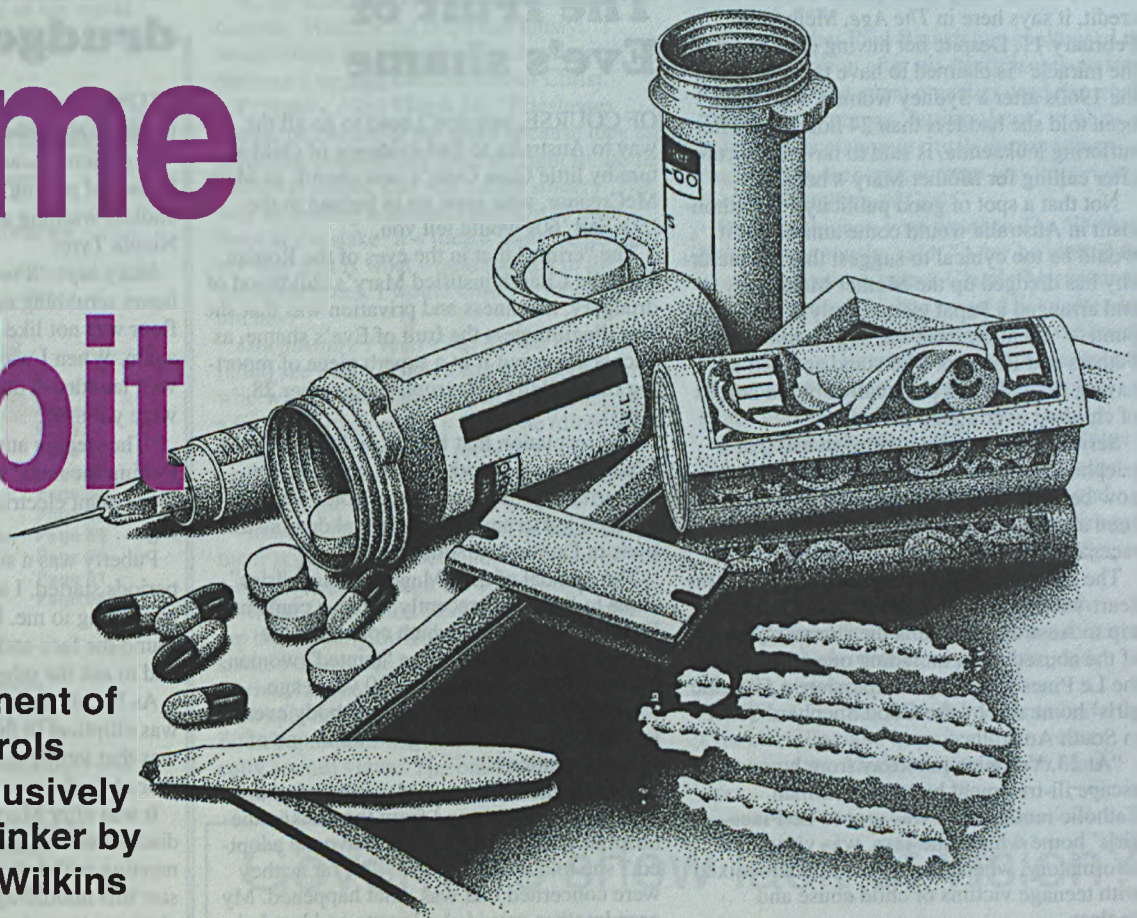
Freethinker

Founded by G W Foote in 1881

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April 1994

Drug law feeds crime habit



A re-assessment of
drug controls
prepared exclusively
for *The Freethinker* by
Prof Leslie T Wilkins

**Scandal of
Church
child abuse
- Page 50**

**Robots
in the
classroom
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and religion
at Easter
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UP FRONT

with the Editor

Sins of the Sisters

HIS Holiness (that's the Pontiff, *not* John Selwyn Gummer, you daft ha'porth) will surface Down Under early next year to preside at the beatification of Mother Mary MacKillop, placing her just one step short of sainthood.

The rumour current among infidel Aussies – that church bosses, astonished to hear of an ornament of their sect who had no charge of child abuse hanging over her head, felt they *had* to sanctify her – seems to have scant basis in truth.

No. Mother Mary has a pukka miracle to her credit, it says here in *The Age*, Melbourne, February 11. Despite her having died in 1909, the miracle "is claimed to have taken place in the 1960s after a Sydney woman, who had been told she had less than 24 hours live after suffering leukaemia, is said to have been cured after calling for Mother Mary's help."

Not that a spot of good publicity for Catholicism in Australia would come amiss. But it would be too cynical to suggest that the hierarchy has dredged up the Mother Mary story, and arranged a Papal visit, simply to divert the punters' attention from the large number of Fathers and Brothers who stand accused of having sexually and physically abused hordes of children over a long period.

Seriously, things are getting so bad that a telephone help-line called Broken Rites has now been set up to help females who have been abused by nuns, some of them very recently indeed.

The same issue of *The Age* which reports the heart-warming news of the Pope's impending trip to Australia also tells the stories of some of the abused girls, including one who was at the Le Pines Home of Compassion, a Catholic girls' home run by the Good Shepherd Sisters in South Australia:

"At 13, Veronica ran away from home to escape ill-treatment by a strict Roman Catholic mother. She was sent to Le Pines girls' home which, she says, was virtually a reformatory, where hardened offenders mixed with teenage victims of child abuse and neglect.

"The girls were used as 'slave labour' in a laundry run by the nuns, Veronica says. A 'particularly masculine' nun was in charge of the laundry, she recalls, with two much older girls. These girls had been prostitutes who had bashed and robbed their clients and scared the younger girls.

"The girls slept in dormitories in curtained-off cubicles. One night, the two girls came to her bed and raped her with a candle. One held a pillow over her head and pinned her arms down while the other raped her. They told her

if she stopped yelling they would take the pillow off her head.

"As they left, she noticed the nun standing at the foot of her bed with a torch. The nun handed her a flannellette menstrual pad to staunch her bleeding and warned her not to talk about it. 'You know what happens to people who tell lies,' she told her.

"More than 35 years have passed and Veronica had never spoken to anyone about it, not even her husband, until she rang Broken Rites. She was concerned all the media coverage was about abuse by men, whereas her experience was of abuse by women. The experience left her unable to relate to women and afraid of sex."

The fruit of Eve's shame

OF COURSE, you don't need to go all the way to Australia to find evidence of child-torture by little Gum Gum's new chums, as Mary McCreanor, who grew up in Ireland in the '50s and '60s would tell you.

The "crime" that in the eyes of the Roman Catholic Church justified Mary's childhood of drudgery, harshness and privation was that she was illegitimate – the fruit of Eve's shame, as Nicola Tyrer put it in a superb piece of reporting in the *Daily Telegraph* (September 28, 1993).

The revelation that for nearly 200 years the Church ran a network of "sin bins" where unmarried mothers and their babies were dumped led to angry anti-clerical demonstrations in Dublin last Autumn.

The scandal of the "Magdalene laundries" came to light only recently, when a convent in Dublin sold off land which contained the graves of some 40 of these "tainted" women. The laundries existed up to 10 years ago.

In Mary McCreanor's case, nobody even knows how she came to grow up in one of these institutions.

"My mother was put under great pressure, both by her mother and from the nuns in the hospital where I was born, to have me adopted," she told the *Telegraph*. "As far as they were concerned that was what happened. My grandmother provided a layette and handed over £50 to the nuns. They undertook to find a respectable middle-class family to bring me up."

Mary's mother remembered screaming with anguish as her two-day-old baby daughter was torn from her arms by the holy liars. For the next 16 years Mary, now 49, remembers nothing but what she calls "the home."

"It was an enclosed convent in the middle of Ireland, full of children, from babies right the way up to 16-year-olds. We thought we were orphans, but of course we were the children of

unmarried mothers in a society where that sort of thing was not supposed to happen...

"The nuns were terribly cruel. There was always the threat that if you defied them you would be 'sent away.' Four girls disappeared while I was there. The cane was used regularly. When I was seven. I was in charge of the babies. We were supposed to tell the nun in charge which ones had wet the bed. The guilty ones would have to line up and hold out their hand to be caned, two-and three-year-olds holding their hands and screaming. I used to try to cover up for them by drying the sheets on the pipes..."

Unremitting drudgery

FROM early childhood the drudgery was unremitting. Those who have uncovered the "Magdalene" scandal have stressed the symbolism of putting those spotted with sin to endless washing and cleaning chores, reports Nicola Tyrer.

Mary says: "From 10-years-old, we spent hours scrubbing and polishing floors. If the floor was not like glass we'd be made to do it again. When I was 14 I was sent to the convent laundry. You couldn't do it when you were younger.

"The steamy atmosphere was draining. Putting the nuns' heavy habits in and out of those giant electric boilers was back-breaking..."

Puberty was a sin, of course: "When my periods started, I asked the matron what was happening to me. Her response was to slap me round the face and tell me not to be vulgar. I had to ask the other girls."

As Nicola Tyrer comments, sex education was elliptical in the extreme: "All they told us was that letting a man touch your leg was a mortal sin."

It was after Mary had left the home that she discovered she had parents. But the eventual meeting with her mother proved traumatic. "I saw this middle-aged woman flying down the platform towards me with her arms open to embrace me and I froze. No one had ever hugged or kissed me..."

For the past 26 years Mary has lived in London. She has long ago forgiven her mother. She cannot, however, forgive the Church: "It has blighted two lives. My mother was made to feel having a baby and wanting to rear it with love was a sin. As for me, I was robbed of my childhood."

UP FRONT

with the Editor

From Page 50

Misery and suffering

IN LIGHT of all this, special thanks to Dr James Bourne for drawing my attention to the letter from Peter de Rome, which appeared in *The Times*, January 29, and which really says it all: "In the debate over religious education surely it does not matter how many religions are taught as long as it is pointed out that they are all merely hypotheses, and that many now regard religion as a vulgar error which has perhaps caused more misery and suffering than any other idea in the history of the world."

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Light relief

IT IS a relief to turn from the stark cruelty of contemporary Roman Catholicism to the simple dottiness of the Church of England, which to the religion industry now stands in roughly the same position as the good ship *Titanic* occupied in relation to British shipbuilding.

Readers from all over the country have sent me cuttings about the Rev Anthony Kennedy, Vicar of Lutton with Gedney Drove End and Dawsmere in Lincolnshire, who has been expressing himself colourfully on the question of his splintered, foundering sect's decision to ordain women priests.

In, for example, the *Blackpool Evening Gazette*, March 9, he is quoted thusly: "I would shoot the bastards if I was allowed, because a woman can't represent Christ."

Yorkshire Post, March 10: "Priestesses should be burned at the stake because they are assuming powers they have no right to. In the medieval world, that was called sorcery. The way of dealing with sorcerers was to burn them at the stake. It's illegal now, but if I had my way that is what would happen to them. In medieval times, I would burn the bloody bitches."

Lincolnshire Free Press, March 8: "I still fail to see how a woman can represent Christ, who was a male. The Church of England is in a financial mess and it's the same idiots who got us into the financial mess who are advocating ordination. Women priests should be burned at the stake. They are witches."

And *The Times*, March 9: "The New Testament is quite clear. God chose Jesus, who was a man. Priests through the centuries have represented Jesus at the altar. Men and women are biologically different. We can never be the same. I do not see how a woman can represent Christ. Surgery cannot do it."

Simple dottiness? Of course. And I am not referring to poor Mr Kennedy and his (biblically sound) views. The ones who are really to be pitied are those females who demean them-

selves and their sex by even worshipping in the woman-hating Christian Church - let alone by seeking to join its priesthood.

Vicar on bum rap

MIND YOU, it is good to see from *The Northern Echo* (February 25) that the winds of change are blowing through some areas of Anglicanism: "It wasn't quite what you would have expected from the vicar. More than 100 people had packed into St James the Great Church in Darlington and were listening reverently to the sermon. And then it happened - there was no doubt about it. The vicar had said the word 'fart.'"

"Now Father Paul Blanch has apologised to the congregation after his fruity language from the pulpit... The guest preacher used the word 'fart' and the phrase 'farting about' to illustrate that the elaborate rituals surrounding Anglo-Catholic services were less important than the Kingdom of God."

One parishioner, who wrote to *The Northern Echo* anonymously, said: "After he uttered the words there was a pause. Clearly he expected us to be amused. Nobody was. I have attended St James's for 30 years and have never heard such language uttered in church. I'm sure most of the congregation wouldn't use such language outside."

Father Blanch, Vicar of Hunwick and Howden-le-Wear near Crook, is surprised at the unholy row. He said: "I am very sorry and would apologise if it was taken in the wrong way. But if one cannot use common parlance now and then what can one do?"

Quite. And the noises emanating from priestly bums frequently make as much sense as those which issue from their reverend mouths, so where's the problem?

Anyhow, Father Blanch intends to leave the Church of England in protest over women priests, so the whole thing will soon blow over.

Governors show lack of vision?

THE headmistress of a Catholic School, sacked after she claimed to have seen a vision of the Virgin Mary, has failed in her High Court bid for reinstatement, the *Slough & Langley Observer* reported on March 4.

Frances Staley, 49, had sought an injunction forbidding Rosary Roman Catholic and Infant School, Heston, from holding short-list interviews for her replacement.

But Mr Justice Sedley ruled that an Industrial Tribunal, and not the High

Court, was the "appropriate forum" for her to argue her case.

Outside court, Mrs Staley said she believed her visions - which she confided only to two high-ranking priests - were the unspoken reason for her suspension and eventual dismissal last year.

She said: "I saw Our Lady at home on a number of occasions in 1993. There has been a hidden agenda. I think that played a part, absolutely. It's part of our belief, it's not something you can be dismissed for."

Believer of honesty and charm

IT WAS Andy Warhol who decreed that everyone should be famous for 15 minutes. Peter Gamble's brief moment of fame came as a result of a pioneering BBC drama-documentary, *Expulsion*, produced by Roger Mills in 1971. This film re-created, with actors (including the young Nigel Havers) playing the children, and the adults involved playing themselves, the investigation of drug-taking, and the subsequent expulsions, at Anglo-American College, a private sixth-form college founded in Oxfordshire a few years previously by the author. By a sad irony of fate, Anglo-American College had been forced into voluntary liquidation only weeks before *Expulsion* was screened (followed by a studio discussion chaired by Ludovic Kennedy) on October 19, 1971.

This episode is described in some detail in the book, but perhaps more interesting is the honest and evocative account of the author's early life in the South London of the 1920s and 30s. His family, their neighbours, his own growing awareness that he was attracted to boys rather than girls, his precocious interest in (and fan letters to) novelists like Ernest Raymond and Forrest Reid are nicely described. We read of his various changes of school and the characters he encountered there, his early work in a publisher's office, and his editorial work before and during the war with *Readers Union*. As a conscientious



The More We Are Together: Memoirs of a Wayward Life by Peter Gamble. Paul Watkins Publishing, Stamford PE9 2EN. £19.95 hdbk.

Review: DANIEL O'HARA

objector, he served two terms of imprisonment in Exeter, before being sent as a Bevin Boy to work in the Derbyshire coal-mines.

After the war, he turned to teaching, and within a few years went up to Oxford as a mature student to read English. Having lodged at the Anglican Seminary, Ripon Hall, he found himself being encouraged to enter the ministry, and though he had come from a family of unchurched agnostics, and had little by way of substantive Christian belief, this was apparently no obstacle to his ordination by Bishop Barnes to a curacy in Birmingham, where he transformed a deserted tin mission into the centre of a thriving community by instituting a choir and relevant social amenities.

After Birmingham, and a spell as chaplain to Anglicans in Europe, he returned to his first love, schoolmastering, now able to combine teaching with chaplaincy duties in a series of private schools. Though he formed romantic attachments to a number of his charges, it would seem these remained relatively innocent, if perhaps unwise and occasionally arousing some suspicion. At least, there were no serious scandals.

After the failure of Anglo American College, Peter Gamble spent the last 10 years of his working life as a master and chaplain at Harrow, from which he retired in 1982. Since then he helped out in a parish for a few years before finally settling into a bungalow in Surrey. Despite suffering a stroke some years back, he still leads an active life, keeping in touch with family, friends and former pupils.

Though a long way from the mainstream of church and clerical opinion, Peter Gamble retains his "intuitional hope" of finding "beyond death...reunion, growth, fulfilment" while acknowledging that his family would dismiss all this as a piece of wilful self-deception.

If *Freethinker* readers can stomach these residual religious beliefs (which do not intrude throughout the book, being simply stated only in its final pages), they will perhaps find much here with which they can identify, and all written with a refreshing honesty and evocative charm which remain in the memory long after the final page is closed.

Where not to look for science books

IN ONE of the occasional pieces collected in the volume recently issued by Penguin Books, *Did Darwin get it Right?*, the eminent biologist and emeritus professor at Sussex University, John Maynard Smith, observes: "...people do not want to believe that they are the product of evolution by natural selection. They would prefer to believe that God created them with some special role in mind."

The truth of this observation was brought home to me forcibly during a recent visit to Guernsey, when, the weather being too bad to do much but read, I went to the two main and well-stocked bookshops in St Peter Port, armed with my *Penguin Popular Science* catalogue, listing some 150 titles, to search for some congenial reading-matter.

One bookshop had a vast collection of fiction and classics, but I could find no "Science" section. An enquiry to one assistant elicited a puzzled response: was I looking for children's books? I said I was looking

for several of the titles listed in a recent *Penguin Science* catalogue.

Eventually, I was shown a corner which contained a few copies of Stephen Hawking's *A Brief History of Time* (surely the most bought but least read book after the Bible?) and several shelf-feet of books on astrology and the occult. They had none of the titles I was looking for, but said they could order them. Not, in the circumstances, very helpful.

The other shop likewise had no obvious section of books on science, but an enquiry eventually revealed a few volumes tucked away on a bottom shelf, of which the only one listed in my *Penguin* catalogue was *From Eros to Gaia* by Freeman Dyson. In exasperation I expostulated: "Don't you even have Richard Dawkins' *The Blind Watchmaker*?" To this the assistant, a mature male, replied: "Oh yes; it's over there under *Fiction*."

Infuriated, I replied: "But it's not a work of fiction!"

"That's how we classify it," replied the

salesman, unabashed.

After my return to London, I found one of the volumes I had been looking for: *One Long Argument: Charles Darwin and the Genesis of Modern Evolutionary Thought* by the veteran Ernst Mayr in a small but well-stocked bookshop in the Kilburn High Road (where they had no less than three shelves of popular science). The collection of essays by Maynard Smith (just published) turned up a few days later in a shop specialising in legal books in Fleet Street.

The visit to Guernsey was not, however, entirely fruitless. One volume, long out of print, I had been seeking for ages turned up there in a second-hand bookshop. It is a collection of entertaining and perceptive reminiscences by Darwin's granddaughter, Gwen Raverat, entitled: *Period Piece: A Cambridge Childhood*. It cost me the princely sum of 20 pence!

Guernsey certainly has its virtues, but a lively interest in contemporary science seems not to be among them.

Daniel O'Hara

A sense of gloom among the robots

LAST year, Eugenia Potulicka, a Polish professor of education, spent time in England studying the 1988 Education Act. When Professor Roland Meighan asked her how she would be reporting back, she had no hesitation: "Oh, I shall tell them that it is totalitarian." With the 400 extra powers given to the Secretary of State for Education, he or she would be able to act like a Russian commissar.

Ironically, while Poland is moving towards a freer, more flexible educational system, such as that advocated by Meighan, our children are suffering under a dictatorial, Conservative system. And the Roman Catholic John Patten, acting more like a Russian commissar every week, is now planning to close 1,000 local authority schools. Contrast Patten's attitude with that of the First Century Roman, Quintillian: "The skilled teacher, when a pupil is entrusted to his care, will first seek to discover his ability and natural disposition and will next observe how the mind of his pupil is to be handled...for in this respect, there is an unbelievable variety, and types of mind are no less numerous than types of body."

What a different concept from a strictly limited National Curriculum, to which all non-privately educated children are subject, and in which they must be tested at seven, nine, 11 and 14.

It is this contrast that concerns Roland Meighan in *Theory and Practice of Regressive Education*. The emphasis on subjects and the imposition of these on younger and younger children represents, he says, "a kind of ancestor worship" which does not match "the knowledge characteristics of a society in a state of knowledge explosion and in the situation of a communications and technological revolution." A state exhibits "dangerously short-sighted zeal" when it mandates the number of minutes that teachers must devote to each subject: it "makes robots out of teachers - and ultimately out of children too."

Being married to a teacher, I realised over the years how much education had changed for the better since my own grammar school days: how learning had become "freer," more enjoyable, so that children no longer crept "like snail/Unwillingly to school." But put out persistent lies about falling standards, increasing illiteracy et al, and the way is clear for "reform" - "back to basics." Things were always better in an undefined past!

The idea that school could be fun offended what used to be called the Protestant work

***Theory and Practice of Regressive Education* by Roland Meighan, with contributions from Professor Sir Hermann Bondi, Martin Coles, Professor Philip Gammage and Janet Meighan. Educational Heretics Press, 113 Arundel Drive, Nottingham NG9 3FQ. £6 pbk.**

Review: COLIN MCCALL

ethic, and must now be extended to include a cynical Roman Catholic. As an American educator John Holt remarked, "Back to basics" really stood for "No more fun and games at school."

Perhaps the most harmful effect will be - indeed is being - felt in primary schools which, as Philip Gammage says, had "been in fairly good heart since the 1960s" and "have been nice places to be in, as visitor, parent, teacher or child." And he has visited well over a hundred in the last decade.

More recently he has found, instead, a "sense of gloom and foreboding ever present in the staff room," where primary teachers feel "let down, unrecognised and misunderstood."

Professor Gammage is "of Plowden hue." Like Quintillian, he still considers "the child to lie at the centre of learning": the curriculum "cannot be imposed from the outside but must take into account the entering characteristics of the learners." There are, he suggests, three main reasons why the 1988 Education Reform Act is "out of step" with professional knowledge.

First, there is a class attitude to education, exemplified by the exemption of independent schools from the National Curriculum; secondly, there is "a crudely commercial view of education" ("to get you somewhere, preferably profitable"); thirdly, there is a deep distrust of "experts" in the field.

The book includes a satirical contribution from Martin Coles, itemising "twenty-one ways of discouraging fluent reading," a sensitive chapter by Janet Meighan on the "hijack" of young children's learning ("Learning how to learn gives way to learning how to be taught") and Sir Hermann Bondi's 1976 radio broadcast, "Why I don't like religion," before Roland Meighan's summary of "the triple tyranny and regressive education."

The first tyranny is that of the National Curriculum, which Meighan calls "a massive exercise in adult chauvinism" and Professor Frank Smith has described as "The Berlin Wall of Education." The Polish visitor, Professor Potulicka, Assistant Dean of the Faculty of Education at the University of Poznan and a member of the Solidarity Education Commission, recognised it, from bitter experience, as "from the same stable as the National Curriculum of Stalin, Hitler or Tito."

The second tyranny is the unwritten or hidden curriculum, involving passive learning, like memorising the "right answers"; treating competition as more important than co-operation, writing and reading as more important than talking and thinking, men as more important than women, and dogma as more desirable than doubt.

"No teacher I know sets out to teach these by design," says Meighan, "except perhaps some teachers of religion in the case of the last one. The messages are conveyed gradually and persistently by the apparatus of an institution that is based on compulsion."

The third tyranny is that of the peer group, children being compelled to spend 15,000 hours minimum in the forced company of their peers.

All three tyrannies operated during the 1960s and 1970s but, "under the regressive era of the 1980s, they are simply imposed with more central control, increased institutional aggression and general severity."

Now we are to have police controls for rounding up truants. Orwell! thou shouldst be living at this hour...

Mutilation ban urged

MPs from all parties yesterday condemned the practice of female genital mutilation, urging the Government to outlaw it in Australia.

Liberal MP Ms Trish Worth urged the Federal Government to recognise its obligations under international human rights conventions and legislate against the practice.

"We do not permit women being stoned

to death for adultery, as is the practice in some parts of the world," Ms Worth said.

"We do not allow children's and women's faces to be mutilated. It is therefore imperative that we do not allow the genital mutilation of women or little girls just because that area of their body is hidden from sight." *The Age*, Melbourne, February 22 (see January issue of *The Free-thinker*).

WHAT'S ON...WHAT'S ON...WHAT'S ON

Announcements are inserted in this increasingly popular column free-of-charge. However, voluntary contributions towards the cost of typesetting would be much appreciated. Cheques and postal orders, made payable to G W Foote & Co, should be sent with copy to: The Editor, *The Freethinker*, 24 Alder Avenue, Silcoates Park, Wakefield WF2 0TZ.

Birmingham Humanist Group: For information about Birmingham Humanist Group contact 021 353 1189.

Blackpool & Fylde Humanist Group: For details, please contact Secretary D Baxter. Telephone: 0253 726112.

Brighton and Hove Humanist Group: 40 Cowper Street, Hove (near Hove Station, bus routes 2a, 5 and 49). Sunday, April 9, 5.30 for 6 pm: Public meeting. Sunday, May 1, 5.30pm for 6 pm: *Buddhism, a Way of Life*.

Crawley, West Sussex: Charles Stewart is working to establish a Humanist group for the area. Interested readers should contact him at 50 Boswell Road, Tilgate, Crawley RH10 5AZ. Telephone: 0293 511270.

Central London Humanists: For details, please contact Cherie Holt on 071 916 3015. April 28, 7.30pm at Conway Hall: Dr Colin Bewer: *Medical Ethics*, featuring the current topic of embryo research. Sponsored by SPES.

Cornwall Humanists: Contact: B Mercer, "Amber," Short Cross Road, Mount Hawke, Truro TR4 8EA. Telephone: 0209 890690.

Coventry and Warwickshire Humanist Group: Waverley Day Centre, 65 Waverley Road Kenilworth. Monday, April 18, 7.30 pm: Discussion on a Secular Humanist approach to sexuality.

Devon Humanists: For details, please contact: C Moutain, "Little Gables," Burgmanns Hill, Lymington, Exmouth EX8 5HN; 0395 265529.

Ealing Humanists: Details: telephone 081-422 4956.

Edinburgh Humanist Group: Programme of forum meetings obtainable from the secretary, 2 Saville Terrace, Edinburgh EH9 3AD; telephone 031-667 8389.

Gay and Lesbian Humanist Association (GALHA): Information from 34 Spring Lane, Kenilworth CV8 2HD; telephone 0926 58450. Monthly meetings (second Friday, 7.30pm) at Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, Holborn, London WC1.

Glasgow Humanist Society: Information regarding meetings and other activities from Hugh Bowman, 7 Elm Road, Burnside, Glasgow G73 4JR; telephone 041-634 1447.

Havering & District Humanist Society: Hopwa House, Inskip Drive, Hornchurch. Tuesday, April 5, 8pm: Public meeting.

Humanisma kaj Etika Unuigo: Faldfolio pri gajaj celoj estas senpage havebla de IHEU, Oudkerhof 11, NL-3512 GH Utrecht, Nederlando.

Humanist Society of Scotland: Scottish Humanist Conference at the Smith Art Gallery and Museum, Stirling, Saturday, April 23, 10am to 5 pm. Details: Robin Wood, 37 Inchmurrin Drive, Kilmarnock, Ayrshire; telephone: 0563 26710.

Leeds & District Humanist Group: Swarthmore Centre, Woodhouse Square, Leeds. Tuesday, May 10: Professor David Cove, Department of Genetics, University of Leeds: *Genetic Engineering - Boon or Bane?* Tuesday, July 12: Summer Garden Party.

Leicester Secular Society: Secular Hall, 75 Humberstone Gate, Leicester LE1 1WB. Public meetings, Sunday, at 6.30pm.

Lewisham Humanist Group: Unitarian Meeting

House, 41 Bromley Road, Catford, London SE6. Thursday, April 28, 8pm: Ashley Hills: *Unitarians and Humanism*.

Manchester Humanists: St Thomas's Centre, Ardwick Green. Public meetings on the second Friday of the month at 7.30pm. Information, telephone: 061-432 9045. April 15: Ann Cresswell: *Child Protection - a Positive Approach*. May 13: Dr Andrew Read: *Genetic Engineering - Threat or Promise?* June 10: Dorothy Greaves: *The Rochdale Pioneers*.

National Secular Society: Individual membership costs £4 per annum. Special rates for organisations wishing to affiliate. Details from the Secretary, Terry Mullins, National Secular Society, Bradlaugh House, 47 Theobalds Road, London WC1. Telephone: 071 404 3126.

Norwich Humanist Group: Martineau Hall, 21a Colegate, Norwich. Thursday, April 21, 7.30pm: Brian Snaod: *Non-religious Funerals and Weddings*.

Preston and District Humanist Group: Information regarding meetings and other activities is obtainable from Georgina Coupland, telephone 0772 796829.

Sheffield Humanist Society: Three Cranes Hotel, Queen Street (adjoining Bank Street), Sheffield. Wednesday, April 13, 8pm: David Granville: *Northern Ireland - Religious Conflict or Colonial Legacy*.

South Place Ethical Society: Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, Holborn, London WC1 (telephone 071-831 7723). List of events obtainable from above address. Thursday, April 14, 7pm, Conway Hall: *A Wicked and Seditious Person*. Dramatisation of the life and times of Thomas Paine in his own words. Written by Martin Green and performed by Alan Penn. Tickets £3 from South Place Ethical Society secretary.

Stockport Secular Group: Newly-formed. Details of activities from the Secretary, Carl Pinel, 85 Hall Street, Offerton, Stockport SK1 4DE. Telephone: 061 480 0732.

Sutton Humanist Group: Friends House, Cedar Road, Sutton. Wednesday, April 13, 7.45pm: Diana Sampson: *Crime Prevention and Safety*. Wednesday, May 11, 7.45pm: Ron Surridge: *The Library Campaign*. Wednesday, June 8: Yvonne Bracken: *Philosophy for Children*. Wednesday, July 13: Susan Dorrell: *Trading with the Third World*. Wednesday, September 14: George Mephem: *World Population Prospects*.

Tyneside Humanist Group: Meets on third Thursday of each month (except August), starting 6.45pm in the Literary and Philosophical Society building, Westgate Road, Newcastle-upon-Tyne. April 21: *Charter 88 and Human Rights*. May 19: *Samaritans*.

Ulster Humanist Association: Meets on the second Thursday of the month in the Regency Hotel, Belfast. Contact: The Secretary, 25 Riverside Drive, Lisburn BT27 4NE (telephone 0846 677264).

Holiday Breaks: Humanist couple would welcome like-minded paying guests at our Dumfries-shire country home (a C of S manse for 260 years!). Three acres of grounds. Delicious food, ch and log fires. Books from our travels around the world, Humanist magazines, rational conversation. Fishing, golf, hill-walking. Very reasonable rates. Main line railway station nearby. Telephone: 0859 66218.

Worthing Humanist Group: Heene Community Centre, Heene Road, Worthing. Public meetings, last Sunday of the month at 5.30pm. Information: Mike Sargent, 0903 239823. April 24: Toby Crowe (Socialist Party of Great Britain): *Is Marxism Dead?* May 29: Annual General Meeting.

The Perils of Perfection

Or a Plague on Pleroma, a tragi-comic satire by Paul M Pfalzner, Ottawa

EVERYBODY knows God is perfect; naturally, nobody would want an imperfect God, would they? So He's perfect, and, to boot, Omnipotent, Omniscient, Omnibenevolent, Omnipresent and Eternal – totally and completely perfect, I'll have you know!

Someone perfect, of course, never needs to do anything and never can have any wants – only imperfect gods, if there are such, or you and I, imperfect persons, have wishes, desires, needs, fears, hopes, pains, joys, and want to do something. If I'm itching, I'll scratch, natch – but God can never itch; that wouldn't be perfect, and so he never does anything.

For eons, everything was perfect for God. But then, one fine day – of course, *all* His days were always fine days – but one fine day of eons of fine days, He thought – God does think once in a while, it's hardly doing anything – He thought He might be even more perfect if He just had a Universe of His own. So bingo! He's omnipotent, after all – He had this teeny Universe, all His own, teeming with stars and nebulae and galaxies and dust and comets – and it was perfect.

So God sat back and enjoyed – of course, He doesn't really enjoy anything, He's too perfect for that – but, anyway, for eons, about 15 billion years or so, God did nothing and just felt(?) perfect about His perfect Universe.

But there came another fine day – and God created Man! And all Hell broke loose! Why, oh why, did He do it? Did He feel imperfect that fine day? Really, it was a disaster, a never-ending disaster.

At first, for a day or so, Adam was OK, but then he got Eve – and things went downhill forever after. She talked to a snake, she picked an apple (perhaps it was a pomegranate, but no matter), and she offered it to Adam. Well, that was just too, too much, so God had no choice: *He told them to get out and stay out!* Never to come back, to find a place of their own, and a curse on all their descendants. By golly, He was in a snit!

And Eve thought, wait a moment, isn't He responsible? After all, He's omnipotent and omniscient, He should have known the snake would cause trouble, so all this is really His fault; why does He get into such a snit about it? Hasn't He got any sense?

But she knew there was nothing she and Adam could do; after all, they couldn't take God to Small Claims Court, could they? So they, Adam and Eve, were miserable and cold; they had to get clothes, they had to find a hut, they worked up a sweat (they had no modern conveniences then, no jacuzzis, no vacuums or dishwashers) and, heavens above, they even had SEX – and kids, too.

Well, that was awful, the work, the stink, the tummy-aches, all that, and the pain, childbirth, you know, He gave it to her. He didn't just get mad – He got even! (Did He feel pain when He gave birth to the Universe?)

And then, another horror, when the kids got to be about 12, there was INCEST – yes, imagine! But they just had no choice, so incest got started, nobody knew what to do and nobody could stop it.

That's how it started; but, you know, later, the Egyptian pharaohs were really good at it: they married their sisters for 2,000 years and it was OK – nothing bad happened. They didn't know it was bad, poor souls; I guess they hadn't heard of Him – and then there was Cleopatra: she was OK, so beautiful and seductive, Julius Caesar and Mark Antony both passionately fell in love with her and messed up Egypt.

Anyhow, things got worse and worse: Cain and Abel, you know, they were into something else: MURDER, they called it, and it wasn't nice, but it's been with us ever since, and He couldn't do a thing to stop it, either; neither apple-eating, nor incest nor murder – He just wasn't able to manage change, was He?

So now, He was real angry – furious – and He was going to wipe them all out – well, Sodom and Gomorrah and Lot and all that lot. It was just too too awful: He was going to destroy them all. But, can you imagine, He couldn't quite do it, He was too kind – that was a fault! – so He wiped out everybody except Noah and his family – of course He also, inadvertently (?) wiped out all the animals – except for one pair of each kind – so He knew about sex, after all, didn't He, but He just hated it, couldn't stop it.

That's what His priests said, too: once you started with that, you could never stop! But what do they know about it? But now, nothing He did worked out right – was there some Demon about who spiked His works? Couldn't be; He was omnipotent, after all, though it sure looked funny – but that kind of thinking couldn't be allowed, could it? It was BLASPHEMY!

But when nothing worked, and humans were just no good, no good at all, then He smote them. He thundered and roared at them. He sent plagues and bedbugs and locusts, and He showed Moses His backside – to no avail. So God was really desperate. He didn't feel perfect any more, not a bit, and He hadn't really been well ever since He'd gone to the trouble of creating Man and Woman.

Now, desperate as He was, He decided to have a Son – no problem for Him, of course – and His Son was born – to a virgin of course – and then, they killed him.

Well, that was OK – it was all part of The Plan. And still, NOTHING WORKED, NOTHING! Really, the rest of the story is just too lurid, they killed and pillaged and raped and baptised, all claiming to know the true answers to everything. After all, He had it written down in His Good Book – but nobody knew what it meant, so why didn't He speak more clearly?

Anyway, they burned the heretics and Jews, they routed the infidels, they roasted the witches, they drove out the Huguenots, killed the Cathari, the Albigenses, the Hussites. They worried about Jansenists, atheists, devils, ghosts, and whether three was One, or one was really Three. They had indulgences, ascensions, Bulls, anathemas, processions, intercessions, relics, shrouds, incense, wafers, confessions, damnations, mortal and immortal sins, penances, monks and nuns, celibacy, absolutions, flagellations, excommunications, epistles, apostles, Unitarians, conventicles and chasubles, and the Rhythm Method.

They couldn't agree on anything, not even whether He existed or not! And some even said He was dead, or senile, probably impotent, that He had never been perfect if He ever existed, and that He was, in fact, a common nuisance, and His words and deeds a danger to peace and good government.

And so, one fine day, it was decided that He must go, that He could no longer be allowed to run loose in the Universe – and they locked Him up and threw away the keys. And ever since, nothing and nobody has ever been perfect.



Don't alter your mind world that's out of

VIEWS on the use of "mind-altering" drugs, particularly those listed as prohibited substances, tend to be based more on feelings than on facts. Perspectives range from abhorrence to advocacy. For this reason, I shall first quote from some historical materials which may help readers to assess the quality of my evidence in the light of my personal involvement.

An historical note: It was legislation passed in 1964 that set British policy of dealing with "mind altering" drugs upon its present course. At that time, I was Deputy Director of Research and Statistics at the Home Office and had just returned from a year in the United States, where I had been attached to the President's Commission on Crime.

When the 1964 draft legislation came to my attention, I prepared a memo advising against the changes, which I passed "upstairs." I have retained a copy of this document. Some quotations will, I think, provide an appropriate background to the current problems.

After preliminaries, I wrote:

While it is true that there has been no systematic or scientific evaluation of different methods in the control of drug use, I must express grave doubts regarding the wisdom of setting penalties as in the present draft. The situation seems to me to be very similar to that which the United States faced somewhat earlier and the proposed heavy penalties are also similar. It may be expected that similar results will follow.

The users of these drugs are unlikely to be deterred by being treated as "bad," but they are certainly not happy about being regarded as either sick or mentally-disturbed. Badness is, in some sub-cultures, prestigious, madness is nowhere a matter for boasting.

It would seem to me best to prescribe that persons found guilty of the unauthorised use of these drugs should be dealt with under section 60 of the Mental Health Act...

There is a danger that if the trading in drugs becomes more risky, the pushers will

develop more indirect methods. These indirect methods can be more dangerous for society. Habituated persons may be given supplies on the condition that they sell to others. This is the current US position...

The "British System" of drug control has, until now, received much acclaim in the United States, where the punitive approach has failed. Some States are now trying to model their legislation on their interpretation of the reasons for the success of the British system. Some scholars have expressed their considered opinion that the "cause" of the drug addiction problem in the United States (mainly in New York and California) has been the punitive legislation which has produced the wrong image of the products in the "sub-cultures" concerned.

It may seem that the "image" of a product is a rather unsubstantial factor on which to base an argument of this kind, but it must be remembered that market research has shown that a "product image" can make all the difference between a successful and [an] unsuccessful sales campaign. As an example of an "image" that failed consider the Strand cigarette, and compare this with the success of Gold Leaf.

The Times Editorial of Monday, April 20, 1964, in drawing attention to new Government proposals for dealing with the misuse of drugs, stated that the legislation "could eventually be harmful" unless addiction was treated "as a medical and social problem," adding that "...nothing but harm can come from treating drug users as ordinary criminals." Drugs, as the same article indicated, had become a political issue.

Historians often think it important to inquire as to the significance of the timing of events. Perhaps there was a reason that a "moral panic" focussed upon "drugs" developed at this particular time, in the United States, Britain and in several other countries. It seems possible that some contemporary events may have had an influence on both the timing and the content of the legislation. Without access to documents (which if they ever existed, would doubtless be classed as secret) it is possible only to speculate.

With no suggestion of any association other than mere concurrence, it may be noted

that the time was the mid-60s, a period for student riots, the free speech movement, "Reds under the bed," and such. Furthermore, members of "fringe" groups involved in unacceptable political behaviour also tended to be experimenting with substances defined as "narcotics."

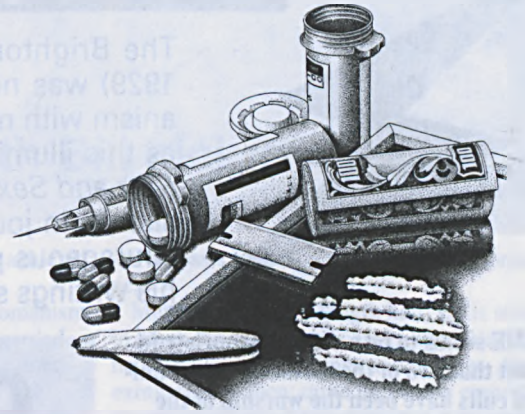
It is difficult in democratic countries to use police surveillance search in relation to undesirable political activities; search warrants would be necessary. Drugs control however, was not defined as political but as welfare. Therefore, in a good cause, police "no-knock" warrant searches seemed acceptable and were, accordingly, legalised. Perhaps this suggests Humanists should be suspicious when politicians, of any party, support by claiming that they are seeking moral objectives!

Be that as it may, in England it is unlikely that the 1964 legislation owed anything to the need to increase police powers. Our Home Secretary was not the kind of person who would be underhanded; there is no doubt that his motivation (though mistaken) was to do good. He was, after all, a Methodist lay preacher. He was certainly highly thought of in the prison service at that time was strongly "treatment oriented." This suggests that individual rights would be eroded more effectively by seeking good to (bad) people, than by direct action upon individual freedoms.

In the United States, the position would well have been different. In addition to the wing student free-speech movements, there was the build-up of anti-Vietnam activism, and among those concerned there was a high likelihood of the use of marijuana. This was convenient: its odour is easier to detect than Left-wing political activities with which its use tended to be associated.

Some credibility is given to this by the fact that seldom were the "prohibited substances" distinguished, the consequences of marijuana use and heroin injection are very different. The fact was a common factor, and the enforcement

mind: it's the joint!



A re-assessment of drug controls prepared exclusively for *The Freethinker* by Professor Leslie T Wilkins

“pure” dosage. There were also several reported deaths from the same cause in Bristol in the previous week.

Is this not ironic? Users have come to expect low-grade products and behave accordingly; when they get a high quality product it kills them. But deaths of addicts or inexperienced users is only one of the side-effects of the illegality of the market. These events possibly indicate another serious problem – namely, that the market is expanding into new sectors. It is possible that novices, uninformed on the procedures of “cutting,” have entered the market and sold on the product as they obtained it.

A market forces argument: The price a drug can command is, as with all other commodities, a function of demand and scarcity. Reducing the supply (the main tactic of the control forces) serves to increase the price, and hence the desirability of trading in the product for those prepared to take the risk.

The cost is a reflection of the risk, not the type or quality of the product. Thus we might say that, for the most part, drug-pushers are not selling drugs: rather, like insurance companies, they are trading in risk. Insurance trades in risks which exist “in nature,” whereas drug-sellers trade in risks created by law and law enforcement.

If there were no risk factor for sale, the price could not be sustained and would quickly drop to levels which might even fail to attract legitimate industry, particularly as home production and home cultivation is a simple matter.

It is argued by those who wish to continue the present policy that, if risk were eliminated, use would become even more widespread. I think that a stronger case can be made for the contrary viewpoint. Since the mark-up is a product of risk, it is the high mark-up which is the factor sustaining the

market at the basic (that is, street/user) levels. The price means that most users must also sell; the market must be expanded if it is to survive.

It is also doubtful whether users are deterred by the fact that they must often enter a somewhat hazardous (if not sleazy) environment in order to obtain their preferred substance. Consider how elements of danger are so often seen as an attraction! It seems unsafe to argue that risk-taking is always unattractive and will reduce participation.

Those who claim that increased usage will result from the absence of risk of heavy penalties have put forward little in support of their case, except that they feel that it must be so. Arguments asserting that penalties must result in less use can find no facts to support the claim. Of course, ceasing to apply the penal law would benefit those who are currently users, in that they could get supplies more easily and there would be no need for them to seek to extend the market in order to obtain their fix; they would not need to take the added risk of committing property crime in order to obtain excessive sums of money for their purchases; they would not be subject to the risks of an uncontrolled product, with its attendant spectre of AIDS — a slow or a fast death.

Perhaps the main benefit to be obtained by modification of controls and penalties might be achieved if these were differentiated by the types of products involved. Putting all classes of “substances” into one category (illegal) means that action cannot be differentiated, either on the part of the controllers or of the controlled.

Those who wish only to obtain small supplies of, say, marijuana (or other “soft” drugs), must go into the same market as those seeking hard main-line and highly dangerous and non-standardised substances. It is not difficult to imagine the sales pitch: “Why not try something stronger?” If there is any “Rake’s Progress” in drug use (and evidence suggests that there is a slight trend), it is certainly fostered by this exposure.

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Blast from the past: Number 16

The Brighton-born poet and social reformer Edward Carpenter (1844-1929) was no Secularist: his writings mingled elements of rural Utopianism with mysticism. But neither was he a conventional superstitionist – as this illuminating (edited) extract from his *Some Remarks on the Early Star and Sex Worships* (part of his seminal *Love's Coming of Age*) clearly shows. In journalistic shorthand, Carpenter could be said to have been a courageous pioneer of both modern feminism and of Gay liberation, and his writings still may be read with profit and pleasure.

THERE seems to be a certain propriety in the fact that two of the oldest and most universal cults have been the worship of the stars on the one hand, and of the emblems of sex on the other.

The stars, the most abstract, distant and universal of phenomena, symbols of changeless law and infinitude, before which human will and passion sink into death and nothingness; and sex, the very focus of passion and desire, the burning point of the will to live. Between these two poles the human mind has swayed since the eldest time.

With these earlier worships, too, the later religions have mingled in inextricable but not meaningless entanglement. The Passover, the greatest feast of the Jews, borrowed from the Egyptians, handed down to become the supreme festival of Christianity, and finally blending in the North of Europe with the worship of the Norse goddess Eastre, is, as is well known, closely connected with the celebration of the Spring equinox and of the passing over of the Sun from South to North of the Equator – ie, from his Winter depression to his Summer dominion.

Curious

The Sun, at the moment of passing the equinoctial point, stood 3,000 years ago in the Zodiacal constellation of the Ram or he-lamb. The Lamb, therefore, became the symbol of the young triumphant god. The Israelites (Exodus xii.14) were to smear their doorways (symbol of the passage from darkness to light) with the blood of the Lamb, in remembrance of the conflict of their god with the powers of darkness (the Egyptians).

At an earlier date – owing to the precession of the equinoxes – the Sun at the Spring passage stood in the constellation of the Bull, so, in the older worships of Egypt and of Persia and of India, it was the Bull that was sacred and the symbol of the god. Moses is said to have abolished the worship of the Calf and to have consecrated the Lamb at the passover – and this appears to be a rude record of the fact that the astronomical changes were accompanied or followed by priestly changes of ceremonial.

Certainly it is curious that in later Egyptian times the bull-headed god was deposed in favour of the ram-headed god Ammon; and that Christianity adopted the Lamb for the symbol of its Saviour.

Similarly, the Virgin Mary with the holy Child in her arms can be traced by linear descent from

Stars, sex and religion

the early Christian Church at Alexandria up through the later Egyptian times to Isis with the infant Horus, and thence to the constellation Virgo shining in the sky. In the representation of the Zodiac in the Temple of Denderah (in Egypt) the figure of Virgo is annotated by a smaller figure of Isis with Horus in her arms; and the Roman church fixed the celebration of Mary's assumption into glory at the very date (August 15) of the said constellation's disappearance from sight in the blaze of the solar rays and her birth on the date (September 8) of the same constellation's reappearance. (These dates have shifted now by two or three weeks owing to the equinoctial precession).

The history of Israel reveals a long series of avowedly sexual and solar worships carried on alongside with that of Jehovah – worships of Baal, Ashtaroth, Nehushtan, the Host of Heaven, etc. – and if we are to credit the sacred record, Moses himself introduced the notoriously sexual Tree and Serpent worship (Numbers xxi. 9, and 2 Kings xviii. 4); while Solomon, not without dramatic propriety, borrowed from the Phoenicians the two phallic pillars surmounted by pomegranate wreaths, called Jachin and Boaz, and placed them in front of his temple (I Kings vii. 21).

The Cross itself (identical as a symbol with the phallus of the Greeks and the lingam of the

East), the Fleur de Lys, which has the same signification, and the Crux Ansata, borrowed by the early Christians from Egypt and indicating the union of male and female, are woven and worked into the priestly vestments and altarcloths of Christianity, just as the astronomical symbols are woven and worked into its Calendar, and both sets of symbols, astronomical and sexual, into the very construction of our Churches and Cathedrals.

Jesus himself – so entangled is the worship of this greatest man with the earlier cults – is purported (the date of his birth was not fixed till AD 531 – when it was computed by a monkish astrologer) to have been born like the other sun gods, Bacchus, Apollo, Osiris, on the 25th day of December, the day of the Sun's re-birth (ie, the first day which obviously lengthens after the 21st December – the day of the doubting apostle Thomas!) and to have died upon an instrument which, as already hinted, was ages before and all over the world held in reverence as a sexual symbol.

Sexual

I have only touched the fringe of this great subject. The more it is examined into, the more remarkable is the mass of corroborative matter belonging to it. The conclusion towards which one seems to be impelled is that these two great primitive ideas, sexual and astronomical, are likely to remain the poles of human emotion in the future, even as they have been in the past.

Some cynic has said that the two great ruling forces of mankind are Obscenity and Superstition. Put in a less paradoxical form, as that the two ruling forces are Sex and the belief in the Unseen, the saying may perhaps be accepted. To call the two Love and Faith (as Dr Bucke does in his excellent book on *Man's Moral Nature*) is perhaps to run the risk of becoming too abstract and spiritual.

Roughly speaking we may say that the worship of Sex and Life characterised the Pagan races of Europe and Asia Minor anterior to Christianity, while the worship of Death and the Unseen has characterised Christianity.

It remains for the modern nations to accept both Life and Death, both the Greek and the Hebrew elements, and all that these general terms denote, in a spirit of the fullest friendliness and sanity and fearlessness.



DOWN TO EARTH

with Bill McIlroy



Yet another false dawn

THE last notable influx of converts to the Roman Catholic Church in Britain was during the Reds-under-the-bed scare of the immediate post-war decade. They were attracted to a church hailed as "the bulwark against Communism." Then, as now, an ultra-conservative occupied the papal throne. But above all, Rome offered "certainty" to bemused searchers after religious truth. What became of them after the Second Vatican Council?

Now several hundred members of the Church of England have converted to Catholicism after losing the battle against the ordination of women as priests. But on this occasion the mood of triumphalism is rather subdued. Indeed, one is almost sorry for Holy Mother Church as these assorted Anglican oddballs seek refuge in her ample if barren bosom. And it is hard cheese on the old girl that the two Government luminaries among them, Environment Secretary John Selwyn Gummer and Employment Minister Ann Widdecombe, are high in the unpopularity ratings at Westminster and in the country.

Extensive media coverage turned Miss Widdecombe's reception ceremony into something of a production number - despite that hat! Mr Gummer, in contrast, was received into the RC Church almost secretly, although it was expected following the General Synod's decision on women's ordination. Furthermore, he declared: "The Catholic Church is taking the lead in the battle against secularism."

Of this pious pair, Gummer has caused deepest resentment in his former church. "He kicks us as he goes," said one bishop. After serving on its General Synod for 13 years, Gummer described the Anglican church as a sect and announced: "I have become convinced that there is no guarantee of orthodoxy except with the see of St Peter."

Mr Gummer's smug certainty about his new church is going to take a few knocks. For a start, he will find that it is riddled with "modernist" tendencies. Already women lead prayers, while there are moves to allow more girls as altar servers and for priests to marry. Most ominously of all, there is a pressure group campaigning for the elevation of women to the priesthood.

Sister Myra Poole, of the Catholic Women's Ordination movement, has issued a stern warning to the one-issue converts from Anglicanism: "In the Roman Catholic Church, we too want to get rid of the all-male priesthood, or women will forever be regarded as second-class citizens." And as the number of suitable male candidates for the priesthood dwindles,

Sister Myra and her chums look set to achieve their aim.

Anglicans who have converted to Romanism will be aware that their defection is regarded with bitter contempt by most of their former colleagues and parishioners. They can live with that. But worse will come with the realisation that their welcome into the Roman Catholic Church is by no means an unqualified one. Those endeavouring to liberalise the church will regard them as hard-line opponents of reform; traditionalists will wonder how far they can trust incomers who have played the Judas role in another church.

Rome's fellow-travellers in the Church of England have a penchant for elaborate ceremonial and ritual. But those who have moved over will discover that Catholic churches are not all architectural grandeur, smells and bells. Those built during the last 50 years are usually rather stark, with the aesthetic appeal of a railway waiting-room. Services have become less structured. Mass is celebrated in the vernacular, while the faithful are distracted from their devotions by twanging guitars, whingeing kids and cloying mateyness. Of course, there is still plenty of snobbery and high camp. But not everyone can get to Brompton Oratory.

While some Catholic journalists and commentators regard the latest spate of conversions as signifying that a new dawn is breaking and England's return to the true faith is nigh, departures from the Roman church go virtually unnoticed. Yet many Catholics who will no longer accept Rome's dogmas and papal intransigence on social and moral questions, have simply and quietly decided to worship elsewhere.

Better still, there has been a falling away from all the main churches. This is indicated by the large proportion of participants in polls and surveys listed as being of "no religion."

Vandals for Jesus

IT IS not just a major challenge to their authority and preposterous beliefs that causes Christians to react with the arrogance and intolerance characteristic of their creed. High on the list of their current targets are those who follow an "alternative" lifestyle. This can range from belonging to a witches' coven to running a vegetarian food shop.

Here in Sheffield the Jesusites have been directing their venom at Mark - surname known to close friends only - the high priest of a local coven. He also has a shop, Rocky Horrors, which stocks colourful clothes, jewellery, books, posters, badges and the like. Rocky Horrors has been described in the press

as "an oasis of curiosity in a street of correctness."

Mark has shoulder-length hair. He is attired in black, his finger nails are painted black and he wears an array of rings and bangles. An exotic figure, then; quite unlike the competing groups of dowdy Bible-punchers who preach the gospel and hand out soppy tracts in the city centre.

Mark's shop sign has been hacked to pieces and in public he is subjected to verbal abuse by religious vigilantes. He says: "Things like that don't seem very Christian to me." That is where Mark is mistaken. It is all too familiar behaviour by the "Jesus saves" fraternity.

Fortunately for Mark, he is living in post-Christian Britain. In the ages of faith, when the churches had total control over people's lives, dissenters and supposed witches were burnt, hanged and otherwise done to death by the thousand. God's directive *Thou shalt not suffer a witch to live* was obeyed with fanatical zeal in Catholic Europe and taken by Protestant settlers to the New World.

The Bishop of Sheffield says that Mark is taking the latter-day witch-hunters too seriously. In fact, it is they who take their holy book, the Bible, too seriously.

Mark should take to heart the widely-publicised piece of advice a former Government minister gave to a friend in trouble: "Don't let the buggers get you down!"

No noose is good news

UNDETERRED by previous set-backs, the hangman's loyal fans in the House of Commons have again tried to effect his reinstatement. Supported by "pro-lifers," eight patrons of the Conservative Christian Fellowship and Ulster Unionists - including the Reverends Ian Paisley, William McCrea and Martin Smyth - John Greenway (Conservative, Ryedale) still could not rally enough votes for his amendment to the Criminal Justice Bill.

Mr Greenway said eight policemen had been murdered since 1991. Deplorable as that is, MPs no doubt had in mind victims of error and perjury who would have gone to the gallows.

Sir Nicholas Fairbairn, Right-wing Tory and no softie on crime, described the death penalty as "evil and wrong in every way." A distinguished lawyer, he appeared in 17 capital cases and obtained two royal pardons for wrong convictions of murder.

Mike O'Brien (Labour) said those in favour of hanging should be prepared to see innocent people hanged. He could have truthfully added: "And they wouldn't care either."

C H Rolph: Unsung crusader

THE national press coverage on the death of C H Rolph, admirably comprehensive though it was, inevitably failed to do full justice to one of nature's gentlemen, a crusader who was a great unsung hero of many a battle on behalf of causes which he felt worth fighting for when they were still unacceptable.

Many of us today benefit from his liberalising speech and writings on behalf of the Mental Health and Obscene Publications Acts – only two among a score of others which, but for his skillful and often passionate advocacy, might have lain longer than they did by the wayside rather than on the highroad of accomplishment.

Wherever injustice, big or small, existed, there was "Bill" Rolph to smell it out – writing about it as easily or as fiercely as the occasion demanded, with invective in some instances but more often with a graceful pen – witty and satirical.

"He was a good writer and a good man," wrote *The Independent* obituarist. Yes, and, as I know from experience, a good friend, also. One of the last letters ever written by this prolific letter-writer before going into

An appreciation by Peter Cotes

hospital for the last time was to send me a clipping from a periodical that I had not seen. Not an adverse, so much as an inaccurate, review of a book of mine that my quick-eyed ally knew to be "embroidered" to suit the reviewer's "angle." It was characteristic of the man that he had not brought the review to my notice earlier – only after he had made correction by a letter to the Editor to put matters right.

I suspect, from one letter in particular that stands out in a half-century's correspondence between us, that Bill was aiming at alleged drama critics, more than literary critics, when he wrote: "Smart Alec 'critics' I just can't abide. They're destructive and parasitical. They destroy. All they create is rage and hate and despair. As Sibelius said (and he suffered atrociously from them): 'No-one has ever erected a statue to a critic.'"

Bill's own press for the many books he wrote and the discussions he evoked by his writings and famous diary pieces (such a prominent feature of the famous old *New*

Statesman and Nation under Kingsley Martin's editorship), was, in the main, favourable. And so it was not a case of "sour grapes" when he dispassionately attacked falsehood in the interests of factuality. He loved truth.

We sat on various committees together down the years, and I was able to observe his obsession with getting "fair play" for all claimants who might appear at one or other of the Old Age Pensions Committees meeting twice monthly at the Charing Cross and Kensington Town Halls, and for the wronged who might have their cases investigated by the National Council for Civil Liberties. He constantly reminded those who appeared before us that we were not granting favours or privileges – only their rights. Then there were the less personal matters of conscience much earlier on, when together we fought with pens and organised shows for the League for the Boycott of Aggressor Nations in pre-war days.

He was the most active "backroom boy" of them all in the Old Bailey *Lady Chatterley* trial when "the great and the good" appeared for the defence. But Bill organised that case from "below stairs" and out of the limelight, later writing his account modestly: *The Trial of Lady Chatterley* was published as a best-seller by Penguin.

My own book on the celebrated trial of Elvira Barney at the Old Bailey had an Introduction setting the Court scene and was greatly aided by Bill's knowledge when he recalled for the benefit of readers his own participation at the time as Chief Inspector Hewitt of the City of London Police (Rolph was, of course, his pen-name: he was born Cecil Rolph Hewitt on August 23, 1901).

He went on taking up the cudgels against the big battalions until the end. Both Thatcher's "Victorian Values" and Major's "Back to Basics" were absurd and retrogressive, according to one of the many letters I received from the author of *Books in the Dock*.

Bill's second marriage to Jenifer Wayne, the BBC radio writer and producer, was a good one. My old friend was indeed a humanist and when in 1982 his beloved Jenifer died – she who had turned Anglican – he who had been to church with her (as much to please as anything else) firmly continued to refuse to say the Creed. He wrote in one of his last books, *Further Particulars*, that although he might like to be a Christian: "I can't bring myself to make the leap from a vague sense of the numinous to Christian belief."

Another recent letter to me, lively as ever, had it that he was pretty lucky despite his great age and certain discomfort suffered: "However, I can read and write and (up to a point) walk and think. I call that lucky." We were the lucky ones, having him among us for so long.

Waco Christian deaths verdict seen as Government defeat

ELEVEN members of the Branch Davidian Christian sect were acquitted of murder and conspiracy charges in the deaths of four police officers during a raid on the group's complex last year in Waco, Texas.

The February 26 verdict cleared four defendants entirely. Five were found guilty of voluntary manslaughter, and two others on illegal weapons charges.

An article in the February 27 *New York Times* (February 27) called the verdict "a stunning

defeat not only for the Justice Department, which prosecuted the case, but also for the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms" (ATF), the federal agency which planned and executed the initial attack on the fundamentalist Christians.

Four ATF agents and six Branch Davidians were killed during the February 28, 1993, raid. Another 86 Christians died on April 19 after a six-hour FBI assault with tanks and tear-gas ignited a deadly fire. The April raid was approved by President Bill Clinton and Attorney General Janet Reno.

"The Government used a great deal of muscle that they shouldn't have," one juror told the *New York Times* following the verdict.

Another juror said: "I couldn't imagine anybody being in a home with that many women and children and having a big tank coming through the front door. This is America. This isn't a police state. I don't care what they did, I can't see that."

"You don't negotiate with tanks and tear gas," commented defence lawyer Dan Cogdell. "And you don't bring a case you can't prove."

The Government is considering whether to lay other charges against the 11 or other Branch Davidians. Meanwhile, lawyers for the Christians say they may bring civil charges against the Government.

Fiery sermon raises the roof

RUTH YULE, a lay preacher, was delivering a fiery sermon on the need for her flock to trust in the Almighty when 60 mph winds sent the entire roof of St Matthew's Church in Nottingham soaring into the air, to land on the vicarage.

No one was injured. *The Independent*, March 15.

YOU'RE TELLING US!

Circumcision

AS ONE who was circumcised at the tender age of 30, I feel I am in a particularly good position to comment on D S Lee's criticism of the operation.

The medical reasons (usually phimosis or tight foreskin) for the procedure are anything but "relatively rare." By the time they reach 30, about 20 per cent of men in the UK are cut, mostly for medical reasons. This figure was given to me independently by my surgeon and by a nurse and is borne out by my own experience as a gay man and by the experiences of gay friends who report a similar proportion.

Many others are too embarrassed to see their doctor (it took me years to pluck up courage) and suffer in silence smelly, uncomfortable, tight foreskins (and I've encountered six of those so far out of 25, a further nine were cut). Such foreskins ruin sex lives - gay or straight.

As for hygiene, having encountered plenty of smelly and dirty uncut willies but never a comparable cut one, I can assure Mr Lee that the idea that circumcision is more hygienic is an empirical fact, not a "peculiar notion."

When it comes to scarring, this is often true of adult circumcisions (I have the stitch marks to prove it) but infant ones, done by a good surgeon, often give results so good that one can find no visible trace no matter how hard one looks (and I have looked!). Mental scarring I've never come across. All the cut guys I know of are either indifferent or actually like it.

Unlike it's despicable female namesake, male circumcision has absolutely no adverse consequences whatsoever. I can personally testify that stories of masturbation being impaired and sensitivity of the glans being ruined are old wives' tales.

While I cannot comment from personal experience on vaginal or anal sex, having tried neither, it is generally accepted by doctors that it makes no difference. That sensitivity is not much reduced (if at all) is borne out by the fact that premature ejaculation remains the most common sexual dysfunction in the USA, despite the rarity of foreskins there. Oral sex is bliss - lollipops are definitely better unwrapped!

There was a time when I would have agreed with Mr Lee that routine infant circumcision was cruel and pointless. I even felt quite strongly about it. However, having read the medical literature and from my own personal experience and having met plenty of cut guys whose performance in bed was clearly unimpaired (indeed, better than many uncut ones) I have undergone a complete reversal of opinion.

Mr Lee should note the following medical facts: 1 Penile carcinoma is almost unheard of in circumcised men. 2 Circumcised boys are 10 to 20 times less prone to urinary tract and bladder infections than their uncut peers (*Pediatrics*, 1987, 79 (3), p.338-342). 3 Circumcision is associated with a 50-90 per cent reduction in transmission of HIV (*Nature*,

1994, 367, p.212). (Similar findings apply to other venereal diseases).

It is true that it is currently fashionable for doctors to argue against circumcision, but their arguments tend to be emotional and reminiscent of the anti-vaccination fad between the World Wars. Fortunately, the anti-vaccination crusade passed and we still vaccinate infants without their consent. The foreskin has as much use as the appendix and when Jews and Muslims remove it one can argue it is simply a case of doing the right thing for the wrong reasons.

STEPHEN MORETON
Warrington



Preferably short and clearly-typed letters for publication should be sent to The Editor, The Freethinker, 24 Alder Avenue, Silcoates Park, Wakefield WF2 0TZ. Please include name and address (not necessarily for publication) and a telephone number.

Trekkin' on

I HAVE just watched "The Way to Eden" (*Star Trek*, March 2) after reading "Ill-Starred," the letter from Keith Ackermann in *The Freethinker*, February.

An extremely distorting lens lies between this episode and his view of it. He has used this episode as ammunition to shoot *Star Trek* down. But it explodes in his face. The last thing Spock says is: "I sincerely hope you do not give up your search for Eden. I am sure you will find it, or make it." The last thing Chekhov says is: "Be more correct," to which the reply is: "Occasionally," followed by a kiss. The leader of the group believes in his vision to the death; he dies eating poisonous fruit on the planet thought to be Eden; the search party from the *Enterprise* was going to beam him up for medical treatment because he had walked barefoot on the grass, which was acidic.

Star Trek does not claim to support any val-

ues so it is unfair to judge it as if it did. Individual characters may, however. In this episode, Kirk's orders were "extreme tolerance" and he displayed this throughout. Spock was playing the Vulcan harp in a session. Chekhov was almost falling in love again.

Keith Ackermann criticises *Star Trek* because it has any orders at all, because a US Navy vessel resembles the *Enterprise* and because "enterprise" has been corrupted by a nearly prehistoric Earthling. What does he want - perfection?

ERIC YAFFEY
Bradford

I REFER to the correspondence about *Star Trek* in *The Freethinker*, February and March.

I am deeply concerned that such letters should be published in what I consider to be one of the few publications that accurately voices my own opinions without any effort on my part.

Having been a *Star Trek* fan for as long as anyone can remember, I find it somewhat unsettling that some otherwise sensible people are taking the 20-odd-year-old repeats seriously.

Now come on, guys! *Star Trek* is as much a fantasy as the Bible, the Koran (whoops! perhaps I shouldn't have said that; move over, Salman) and the other books adhered to by similarly fanatical devotees. In fact, it has to be stated that there is as much truth in *Star Trek* scripts as there is in one of your average Ministerial speeches (cf. William Waldegrave).

It could be said, however, that the programme's following is every bit as devoted as the undoubtedly sincere gentlemen who showed Bradford what honesty and religious tolerance is all about by burning Mr R's book in public, *a la* Hitler's Germany, rather than doing it in secret like those nasty Communists (well done, guys - another blow for freedom).

Trekkies all over the world wear their *USS Enterprise* badges and prosthetic pointy ears with pride and proclaim to the world "I watch *Star Trek*," and some can go on TV game-shows and correctly answer questions about the Ferengi (the most nauseating race we have yet encountered)...but they do it for fun!

Ultimately, the point is that it is OK to take oneself seriously, but it helps one's credibility with the outside world if one makes it a serious subject on which to take oneself.

Quite seriously, thanks to *The Freethinker* for a balanced and sensible view of the world (except for the *Star Trek* letters!) and keep up the good work.

MIKE BREAREY
Leicester

Hellish

YOUR Up Front column in January says there are many proofs in the New Testament that Jesus believed in Hell. This ignores the fact that

YOU'RE TELLING US!

➔ From Page 61

the Gospels were written many years after Jesus died, were based on the many legends that had grown up around him, and were subject to later amendments and additions by various writers. We cannot conclusively attribute any action or belief to Jesus. A third-hand report is not proof.

So "allowing Christians to pluck the relatively sane bits from their teachings and reject the hellish" seems reasonable. The hellish bits, and maybe even some sane bits, were often spurious additions by later fanatics keen to cow the public into submission. It may be that later authorities have accepted Hell as part of Christian dogma, but that dogma needs to be revised in the light of modern scholarship (see *The Unauthorised Version* by Robin Lane Fox, Viking 1991).

Christianity would be somewhat more tolerable if shorn of its supernatural and ritualistic trimmings and accepted for what it probably is – a set of teachings (often contradictory and confused, but basically well-intentioned) by a self-appointed moralist (and/or his followers).

Intelligent Christians should be encouraged to sift through the morass and select what is credible and of value in today's world. There might then be a basis for discussion, as there obviously wasn't in the Moreland-Melsen encounter reviewed in the same issue.

However, though Dr Jenkins gained a reputation as a revisionist, he has recently denied that he ever rejected the Virgin Birth, miracles and the Resurrection. Now he has sunk back into that morass and become almost as uninteresting as any other cleric. He believes in Hell, but not in eternal damnation. That really is having it both ways!

For showing at least that much compassion, I suppose the Bishop will be privileged to rot in Heaven for ever.

DAVID SIMPSON
Lusaka

Green light for op

A COURT has given the okay for a young Aucklander to have a life-saving operation, even though his Jehovah's Witness parents disagree with blood transfusions.

The three-year-old boy has been made a ward of the court for three days, allowing doctors to carry out the heart surgery deemed necessary to save his life.

The boy has a hole in the heart, but the transfusion will only be given if absolutely necessary.—*New Zealand News*, December 22, 1993.

Born-again

I HAVE now been a subscriber to *The Free-thinker* for about a year and have always found it most interesting. I am an ex-Christian who suffered for years, on and off, from anxiety and other problems caused by religion.

Having heard Barbara Smoker on the radio one day (talking about the pagan origins of Christmas), I came to hear of the National Secular Society and of Secular Humanist ideas.

I then devoured all the literature on the subject that I could find – especially Chapman Cohen, whose *Pamphlets for the People* were particularly helpful – and my life has been changed.

As a joke, I often now describe myself as a "born-again Humanist."

I would very much like to see more of CC's writings re-published and a biography of him written.

Christianity, like all religions, continues to do what it has always done – that is, to poison millions of people's lives, to set people against themselves and against others, to warp their minds. It can definitely be compared to fascism and other forms of totalitarianism.

How many people have been driven to madness or murder by religion? The religionists claim that it is only when religion is perverted or misused that these ills occur, but I believe that there is a kind of poison at the very heart of religion which needs an antidote – of reason and knowledge, and maybe the substitution of a better philosophy such as Humanism.

Congratulations on the new NSS premises and best wishes to you and all your readers.

JOHN PRIEST
London N12

Quite contrary

IF, as Mrs Whitehouse claims (Last Word, March), her campaigns have always been against gratuitous violence, not against sex, I assume that we have all misunderstood her motives in the famous criminal case instigated by her against *Gay News* for publishing a poem by James Kirkup.

Hitherto we had all supposed that her objections were to the centurion's thinking (yes, only thinking) about Jesus in a sexual way, to the explicit sexual language used, and to the fact, moreover, that the sex fantasy was a gay one. We had also suspected that, because of her hatred for the gay community, Mrs Whitehouse aimed to bankrupt *Gay News* with legal costs.

Now, however, we realise that it was only the violent aspect of the poem to which she objected: that is, its dwelling on the cruelty of a crucifixion.

BARBARA SMOKER
London SE6

B-to-B

IN your Up Front comment upon the Back to Basics fiasco (March), you surely hit upon an inappropriate target. You clearly imply that Mr Milligan perpetrated an immoral act. It appears he chose a form of recreation which did no harm to others and was carried out in private. In the view of most tolerant persons, I suggest, and, I would hope, all Humanists, this in no way represents a moral lapse. He was furthermore said to be a popular figure, and at his funeral it was declared that that "he had a keen sense of moral and spiritual values."

You also comment that B-to-B appears to have been stimulated by the suggestions of Dame Barbara Cartland. This lady plaintively broadcast the fact (*Daily Mail*, February 4, 1993) that she had made extensive efforts to find support for her "Campaign for Prayers in Schools," yet apparently to little effect. Perhaps ultimately she did hit the jackpot!

KEITH AHLQUIST
Heaton Mersey

Major evil?

TONY Akkermans (January) refers to Barbara Cartland's message to the electorate regarding Neil Kinnock's Atheism. She told us how evil it would be with an Atheist Prime Minister.

She may be right – as we appear to have one! On a recent Radio 4 *Call Nick Ross*, a Catholic caller questioned John Major's suitability as Prime Minister on this count. The caller read from the *Catholic Herald* a quote from Mr Major, stating his non-belief.

The article does not appear to have been repudiated by Downing Street.

I cannot as yet make up my mind as to whether John Major's brand of Atheism is, or is not, a good advertisement for Secularism!

ALAN STUART
Reading

Man-made

THE Church Commissioners lost £800 million on their property investments. How come an omnipotent God allowed this to happen to one of his own main institutions?

Or is it that he does not possess the power his followers attribute to him? Or that he does not exist, and has been created in the imagination of men?

Whatever the answers, one thing is now clear – that churches and, for that matter, all religious institutions, are man-made in the same way as Chambers of Commerce, trade unions, political parties and the like.

So why does our society give special recognition to religious institutions? If we claim that we are people of reason, is it not time that all special privileges for religious organisations were withdrawn?

K P SHAH
London NW5

Help us to do your bit!

THERE'S more to *The Freethinker* fund than its (vital) bill-paying role in the day-to-day production of the paper.

It helps to finance our postal targeting of likely readers – especially young people, members of ethnic minorities and those who have said or written something which accords with the Secular Humanist view of the world but who may not know that *The Freethinker* exists.

We also send copies to religionists and others whose public statements demand a Secularist reply.

Readers who contribute to the Fund are helping us to take on the dissemination of ideas in which they believe but which – for reasons of age or infirmity, family or employer prejudice, simple lack of time – they are unable personally to work at spreading. Simply by giving, such readers become active Secular Humanists.

Noting the new address, please send cheques, POs stamps to: G W Foote & Co, Bradlaugh House, 47 Theobald's Road, London WC1X 8SP.

Many thanks to: A Nicholls, 50p; C Barr, G Broady, D Easton, D J Holdstock, J James, G M Lejeune, H M Merrill, G Shepherd and M Sommer-Gard, £2 each; A Adler, J Brooks, J Caldwell, L Dawson, J Evans, W Harrison, J Jones, W Lewis, F Stevenson, N Toon and R Vickers, £3 each; Anonymous, A Ashton, R Baxter, H Bowman, V Bridge, R Brown, E Chandler, J Cass, B Cattermole, B Clark, I G Chandler, J H Charles, S Eadie, R S Eagle, N Gibbard, W Grainger, J Groom, D Hall, K Harris, R Harriss, E Hillman, S Lee, G Lewarton, C Lovett, J Lummis, C Marshall, V Mitchell, Norwich Humanist Group, A Oldham, M Perkins, F Pidgeon, C Pinel, R Raven, J Ryan, B Samuel, W Stuart, F Thompson, M Tolfree and D Wright, £5 each; C Glaser, G Huddart and N Meek, £6 each; M Henderson and A Woods, £8 each; A R Bailey, D Baker, D Bressan, M Davies, P Durrant, B Everett, F Fish, M Gough, B J Harrison, M Lea, H Madoc-Jones, G Mellor, J Morley, P Ponting-Barber, B Soole, R Torode, J Walsh and A J Wilson, £10 each; G R Verco, £13; D Baxter, Sir T Risk and I Williams, £15 each; Anonymous and W. Donovan, £20 each; J Joseph, £23; G Mepham and J Slowick, £25 each; V Brierley, £50.

Total for February: £681.50

Don't alter your mind – it's the world that's out of joint!

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Removal of penal measures of control?

The use of penal measures, involving searches and seizures, has the following consequences:

- 1 The cost to the users makes it essential for them to commit crimes in order to be able to obtain their fixes.
- 2 The simplest crime is low level "pushing" – expanding the market by finding new customers (in exchange for the higher level and more sophisticated dealer meeting the needs of the "out front" sales-persons).
- 3 Illegality means that the product is not controlled and hence cleanliness, degree of "cutting" (potency) result in unknown risks for users. Death and disease follow.
- 4 Those who would use "soft" but "prohibited" substances, of which the harm is in doubt, are forced into illicit contacts similar (if not the same as) those who sell the unquestionably damaging products.
- 5 The price to the user is a function mainly of the risk to the dealer and producer. The risk is a function of well-intentioned activity to reduce use by penal measures.
- 6 The original cost at production point is trivial, but at each node of transactions the price is raised and at some nodes the mark-up is extremely large.

Those who would argue for the retention (or extension) of penal measures as a means of control of drug abuse should provide a satisfactory refutation (not mere denials) of the above points.

An assertion that addicts or potential addicts benefit by the current controls is surely impossible to sustain. For them, the present situation involves the threat of sudden death, requires hassling (criminal activity to sustain habit), and forces would-be purchasers of socially acceptable substances to resort to the same dealers as those who peddle very dangerous mixes.

If it is claimed that such measures prevent or inhibit new recruits into the drug abuse habit, the data suggest the contrary; users must also be small-time sellers. If it is thought that crime is reduced, again all the evidence is to the con-

trary. Resort is usually had to the idea that while the present situation is bad, it would be worse if the penal measures were suspended. Worse, for whom?

Proposed action: British political institutions find radical change difficult. Strong as the case for suspending penal measures for control of all "illicit substances" may be, it is unlikely that quick, definitive action will be taken. Indeed, your author is sufficiently British to think that it might not be desirable (except in theory)!

What is perhaps within the range of practical politics, and highly desirable for a number of reasons indicated above, is the separation of "soft" drugs, where harmfulness is disputed, from main-line drug-taking. Perhaps, as a first step, action could be limited to marijuana, which, in any event, is almost universally accepted as a medically-desirable treatment in some illnesses. This should, forthwith and without question be made available on medical prescription without constraint as to the ailment for which it may be prescribed.

This action might begin to change the image of the product and enable further enlightened political remedies. Should marijuana be legalised? So far as I know, we have not legalised witchcraft, but witches are no longer burned! It may be possible to make a case for extending a benign neglect to marijuana (and perhaps some other "soft" drugs). Later, when the public has come to accept the evidence as to the relative health risks of various products (including those currently not illegal, such as tobacco and alcoholic beverages), controlled outlets might be licensed.

It does not follow that if the Government were to licence the sale of recreational drugs this would give them an image of moral acceptability. In Scandinavian countries, for example, the fact that alcoholic beverages are government-controlled and available only in government outlets is generally taken to indicate that these are not fully acceptable substances. The age restrictions on purchase also indicate that their unrestricted use is not sanctioned.

It is rumoured that tobacco companies are ready to take over the supply of marijuana.

Whether this is so or not, there would seem to be no reason why, in the near future, the Government should not invite submissions from private industry (including the tobacco and alcoholic drinks trades) setting out plans for the distribution of marijuana. Competitive bids for a franchise to produce, process and market this product might be solicited?

A precedent is afforded by the recent setting-up of the State Lottery. Gambling is not regarded as commendable behaviour, and it is doubtful whether the Government intends encouragement. It cannot be argued that a similar procedure for dealing with those "drugs" which are socially acceptable to a large percentage of the population would be wrong because it would confer legitimacy and indicate the desirability of their use. The involvement of government confers only a technical legitimacy – consider what other things governments do!

● For six months of 1982, Leslie T Wilkins was Distinguished Visiting Professor at the Center for Criminal Justice, Huntsville, Texas. At the State University of New York (1969-82) he was Research Professor in the Rockefeller School of Public Administration and one-time Chairman of the Faculty of Criminal Justice. He was Professor and Dean of the School of Criminology, University of California at Berkeley (1966-69). His varied and distinguished career has included a spell with the United Nations Asia and Far East Institute, Fuchu, Tokyo, where he was Senior Adviser (Technical Assistance Section UN). Earlier, he was with the British Civil Service as a statistician and as a research officer (1946-64). In 1957, he was given special leave from the Home Office to establish a research department for the State of California Youth Authority and Department of Corrections. In 1962-63 he had special leave from the Home Office to be attached to the Youth Commission set up by President Kennedy. He worked with the Department of Health and Welfare, and had a part-time appointment at Temple University. From September, 1979, to May, 1980, he was visiting professor at Simon Fraser University, Canada. While a full-time professor with the University of New York at Albany, he was permitted to carry out part-time consultation for the federal government in Washington. He was also a member of one or more committees of the Social Science Research Council. His several awards include the Francis Wood Prize of the Royal Statistical Society. Now living at Cambridge, Colchester-born Professor Wilkins is a writer, editor and consultant.

Religion: a cloak for evil motives

*There are no wars
of religion,
only civil wars.*

WHEN those words were written, four centuries ago, this idea was a commonplace. Wars are not caused by religion, but by greed. Religion is merely a cloak for mercenary motives.

As an example, consider the clearest example of a religious war – the Crusades. No other war has aroused more religious fervour. The word Crusade is even today used for any movement which aims at the improvement of morals. But recent writers on the Crusades have suggested other motives for the different groups involved.

The most important of these groups was the shock troops, the armoured knights. The 11th Century was a period of prosperity for the upper classes. The result was that families were larger, and there were a great many younger sons who had no chance of inheriting the family estates, and had to seek their fortunes elsewhere. Many of them found new estates in Scotland (1057), England (1066) and south Italy (1070). After this, they were left looking round for more worlds to conquer.

The proclamation of the First Crusade in 1096 provided the perfect answer. What could be more delightful than an estate among the riches of the East, justified by the Christianisation of God's Holy Land?

The Crusaders knew how to make a country Christian. You kill everyone who isn't a Christian. But there was a difficulty. A single Crusader arriving in Italy is God's gift to the Italians. They kidnap him, and sell him as a

LAST WORD

by C R Wason

slave to the Saracens. Only a well-armed force can appear in the Mediterranean area in safety; from then on they will be looked after by one of the main leaders, who will welcome this addition to his army.

So you must start with arms and armour, two war-horses (in case one gets punctured during a battle), baggage horses, half a dozen armed followers, and a pretty little girl to do your laundry and darn your socks.

All this costs a lot of money; and as a younger son you don't have much money. So you ask for a bank loan. Your banker is a Jew. Christians cannot be bankers, because a banker lends money at interest. This is the sin of usury, and when he dies a Christian usurer will go straight to Hell. Eventually, Christians realised that, while usury led to Hell, rejecting usury led to the workhouse, and chose the lesser of two evils.

The whole sea transport of the Fourth Crusade (1202) was financed by the Republic of Venice purely for the Glory of God, plus 50 per cent of the gross takings. But in previous Crusades the bankers were Jews. The prospec-

tive Crusader gets his loan and is able to provide his equipment.

But, before he leaves, his conscience begins to trouble him. He is setting off to free God's Holy Land from the wicked infidels, and is leaving his own dear country polluted by infidel feet. Before he leaves, he must cleanse his country by killing all the Jews in the neighbourhood. This means that there will be no one to whom he can pay back his loan. But the Crusader has a strong conscience, and he is not deterred by this inconvenience.

Before the Third Crusade most of the Crusaders in Scotland and northern England borrowed money from the York branch of Aaron of Lincoln's bank. The manager of the York branch was not an idiot. There had been two previous Crusades, and he knew what had happened to Jews who lent money to Crusaders. He took every precaution. Every borrower had to seal a bond acknowledging the debt, and the bonds were deposited in York Minster, in the strongest strong-room in the north, and under the protection of the Christian god.

Candles

It did not save them. Before they left, the Crusaders massacred every Jew in the North – man, woman, and child. Then they went to the strong-room, knocked off the doors with their battle axes, made a pile of their bonds on the chancel floor, and set fire to them with flames from the candles conveniently provided on the high altar. Then, with their consciences cleared, they were able to set forth to free God's Holy Land.

They did not quite get away with it. Medieval Jews have been compared to a sponge. They soaked up all the loose money in their district, and then the King squeezed them, and all that lovely money dripped into the royal treasury. For the next generation the lords of Scotland and northern England were being dunned by the English Crown for some repayment on account of Aaron of Lincoln's debts. It may at least have caused them some embarrassment.

Religion may sometimes strengthen individuals in a good cause. But it is an unreliable guide, and it devalues man by taking away Reason, the quality which raises man above other animals.

It is not religion which incites men to murder and robbery, but human greed. Religion is merely a cloak which hides evil motives even from the conscious mind of the criminal. This cloak must be stripped away before we can destroy the real causes of human suffering.

National Secular Society

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- Mike Howgate (founder of "APE" and London Student Skeptics).
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