

The Freethinker

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FROM THE STANDPOINT of Freethought and of Humanism, one of the most sinister actions of recent times has been the admission to the United Nations of the clerical-fascist dictatorship of Gen. Franco. To admit into what is ironically described as "the comity of civilised nations" a fascist dictatorship originally hoisted to power by the direct armed intervention of Hitler and Mussolini is in itself sufficiently disgraceful. Nor is this all. By the terms of the Concordat, concluded as recently as August 1953, between the Vatican and Franco, the course of Spanish history is abruptly turned back to the Middle Ages. The Charter of Human Rights officially endorsed by UNO is flouted all along the line by this Concordat, which virtually returns Spain to the status of a medieval country.

— VIEWS and OPINIONS —
Spain and UNO
 — By F. A. RIDLEY —

journal not previously read by the present writer. We quote from our French contemporary:

Two young Spanish sailors have just been condemned to what is in effect perpetual imprisonment. Their crime consisted in refusing to kneel at Mass, for which they have been sentenced to two years' imprisonment. The young men appealed to the Supreme Court in Madrid, which confirmed their sentence. After serving the two years they will have to serve two further years of military service. After that, if ordered to assist again at Mass, they refuse, they will again be punished by a further term of military service, and this

treatment can be prolonged indefinitely. In short, in 1956 anti-Catholicism is a crime in Spain punishable, if unrepentant, by a life sentence. Back to Torquemada! It only remains to restore the death penalty, the medieval Inquisition with its ceremonial *auto da fé*. Nor is this merely a hypothetical possibility. The Spanish Carlists are among Franco's most active supporters, and Mr. Gerald Brenan, in his brilliant book *Spanish Labyrinth*, quotes the Carlist description of the Inquisition: "That august tribunal which angels brought down from Heaven" — for the purpose, presumably, of peopling Hell with heretics.

Spain and UNO

Our contemporary continues to draw the moral from the appalling affair of the two sailors. *La Raison* continues:

Spain has recently been admitted to UNO as one of the 75 member states adhering to that organisation, as such it is bound to apply the universal declaration of the Rights of Man, of which Article 18 declares that "every-one has the right to complete liberty of thought, of conscience, and of religion". It is ridiculous to welcome as a "free nation" one which allows the Supreme Court of Madrid to pass sentences such as the above.

We think that all Freethinkers and liberal-minded people of whatever belief will endorse this considered opinion.

A Christian State

The twin principles of clerical absolutism and religious intolerance displayed in the case of the two Spanish sailors do not represent merely a Spanish idiosyncrasy. They are, and always have been, the logical conclusion of the traditional claim of the Church of Rome to be the "One True Church". Joseph McCabe, whose knowledge of Catholic dogma and history can rarely, if ever, have been surpassed, relates how the great T. H. Huxley, engaged in controversy with the R.C. theologian W. G. Ward, asked his opponent where he kept his stake for heretics amidst all his ruthless logic. That he should do so was a reasonable deduction from both logic and experience. Nor have such claims been left behind with the Middle Ages. In his Encyclical *On the Christian Constitution of States* at the end of the last century Leo XIII, usually regarded as the ablest and most

Shade of Thomas a'Becket

Broadly speaking, the terms of the 1953 agreement, which now form part of Spanish law, actually restore the Roman Catholic Church to a position which, even in Spain, she has not known since the abolition of the Inquisition by Napoleon in 1808; a *status quo* which the Catholic Church has not enjoyed outside Spain since the Reformation. The terms of this preposterous piece of unashamed medievalism are by now common property. Not only is the "One True Church" of Rome recognised as the national Church of Spain, and its theology and canon law recognised as part and parcel of the law of the land, but all non-Catholic Christian sects are virtually outlawed. Anti-Catholic propaganda is a criminal offence, non-Catholic worship is only permitted in registered premises and behind closed doors without public advertisement, whilst, as in medieval times, the Church has its own courts alongside those of the State, to try clerical crimes. In short, Spain in 1956 must bear a strong resemblance to the England of Thomas a'Becket and Cardinal Wolsey, and this is the Spain now admitted to the "United" Nations! It constitutes a gross violation of every ideological principle for which the anti-fascist nations were supposed to be fighting in the last war. A learned European contemporary who specialises in the crimes of dictatorships ranked the current regime of Franco third in the gruesome list, surpassed in deeds of cruelty only by Hitler and the (also Catholic) Croat dictator Pavelic, and well ahead of Mussolini. A truly valuable member of UNO with its Charter of Human Rights!

Back to Torquemada

Nor is religious, as well as political, intolerance wanting in contemporary Spain. Our valiant freethinking contemporary, *La Raison* (official organ of the French Freethought Union) quotes in its March issue a shocking case of religious intolerance which alone should procure the immediate expulsion from UNO of the regime responsible; that is, the Spain of Franco and the Vatican. *La Raison* quotes from an English Protestant paper, *The English Christian*, a

liberal of modern Popes, expressly declared religious toleration to be a practice only tolerated by the Vatican "until the return of happier times". In Spain these "happier times" have now arrived. Where Spain is today the rest of the world would be tomorrow were these happier times to become as universal as the Church!

UNO at the Crossroads

Spain was admitted to UNO almost unanimously, with only two dissentient voices, Belgium and Mexico, lands which know what clerical dictatorship is, since they only recently emerged from it themselves. The admission of the tyrannical and intolerant Spanish dictatorship to UNO certainly has nothing to do with the democratic principles so often, and so loudly, proclaimed in other connections. Nor had it anything to do with Clause 18 on Human Rights. It was purely and simply the result of power politics. The United States wanted Spanish air bases, and was prepared to trade Human Rights in return. This is the kind of shady politics which bids fair to ruin UNO as it ruined its predecessor, the League of Nations of unhappy memory. Today UNO is at the crossroads and the case of Franco represents a test case. Let us appeal to all people of good will to demand that UNO should live up to its own Charter and either compel Franco to release these two unfortunate sailors and put an end to religious persecution in Spain, or else expunge from the Charter the basic principles which he has so shamefully betrayed.

FACTS FOR FREETHINKERS — 9

Freethought Journals of the World

AMERICA

Truth Seeker. New York. Monthly, 2 dollars a year. 16 pages. Organ of the National Liberal League. Also connected with the American Association for the Advancement of Atheism, which circulated well-produced illustrated leaflets by the late Woolsey Teller and others. This journal is edited by the veteran Freethinker Charles Smith. Chief contributor is the Associate Editor, Marshall Gauvin, who was the League's delegate to the last conference of the World Union of Freethinkers. Mr. H. Cutner is also a frequent contributor. *Truth Seeker* is the oldest Freethought journal in the world, founded in 1873. (N.B.: THE FREETHINKER is the second oldest, but the oldest appearing every week.) *Truth Seeker* is anti-totalitarian and anti-Communist. It is extremely hard-hitting from the Freethought point of view rather than the "Rationalist" or "Humanist". It is published by the Truth Seeker Co. Inc. From the same office appears irregularly the publication, *The Atheist*.

Age of Reason. Monthly, 2 dollars a year. 16 pages. New York. Founded, owned and edited by the wealthy American Freethinker, Joseph Lewis. Its former title was also the name of another Paine book, *Common Sense*. It is the organ of the Freethinkers of America. Quotations from Thomas Paine top the title page. Notes and "snippets" form a large portion of the reading matter. The tone is extremely militant.

The Liberal of Philadelphia. Monthly. 1 dollar a year. 24 small pages. Organ of the Friendship Liberal League, Inc., president K. M. Whitten. Also avowedly anti-Communist and anti-totalitarian. Snippets and "shorts" form the major part of the reading matter. Like the N.S.S., it uses the emblem of the pansy (*pensée*, thought).

Progressive World. Published by the United Secularists of America, from New Jersey headquarters. Monthly. 30 cents a copy, 3 dollars a year. 64 pages. Founded by Wm. McCarthy. *P.W.* has been in existence 10 years. The late Joseph McCabe was employed as a contributor. Unlike other American freethinking journals, *P.W.* has a trend towards Socialism in politics. The size permits the publication of lengthy articles, and it is the most expensively produced of American Freethought magazines.

Voice of Freedom (Das Freie Wort). Half in English, half in German. Published monthly by the Freedom Association of Milwaukee. 12 small pages, 50 cents a year. Brief articles and notes.

Ripsaw. Duplicated for circulation by Virgil McClain, of Indiana. 10 pages. No price. The work of an enthusiastic "amateur".

Secular Subjects. Similarly duplicated for circulation. No price. 6 pages. Put out by the Rationalist Society of St. Louis "to maintain the separation of State and Church, to oppose supernaturalism and to promote the study of the sciences". The Society is affiliated to the American Rationalist Federation.

I learn from Mr. C. Bradlaugh Bonner that a new journal of a freethought character has appeared in Mexico. In South America there is a freethought paper, *Ateneo*, in Uruguay.

A spectator's view of American Freethought journals and associations presents a somewhat chaotic appearance, but we have to bear in mind the extent and diversity of the country. The separation into independent autonomous units is not merely a theoretical or nominal division but in practice a very real one. Co-operation and mutual aid are not yet adequately achieved. The retention of independence by the many associations and local groups is without doubt an advantage. It could be an even greater advantage if some unifying machinery could be evolved through which, for instance, pressure on a national scale could be brought to bear on the American press and on the radio system. A recent article by K. M. Whitten in *The Liberal* pursues this line of thought. He advocates more and more district groups with autonomy for their own propaganda policies and a Freethought Federation to unite them for common purposes and mutual aid. So far as it is possible to form an opinion, this side of the Atlantic, we should say that Mr. Whitten's lead in this direction is worthy of the earnest attention of our American comrades.

This view is encouraged by the fact that there is a great deal of useful common ground between all these American publications and societies. In the first place, they all exhibit a fervent admiration for Thomas Paine, the most quoted Freethinker in their pages. Secondly, without exception, they refuse to be sidetracked into political channels and keep their movements broad enough to maintain the support of all Freethinkers on the lines of science and freethought. Thirdly, without exception, they approach social problems from the freethought viewpoint as distinct from the less committal Rationalist or Humanist attitude.

On such bases we see no reason why American Freethought should not eventually present a formidable body of public opinion in that country.

G.H. TAYLOR

For Your Bookshelf

Bound Complete

THE FREETHINKER, 1955

Volume 75

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Charles Dickens and State Murders

By C. G. L. DU CANN

DURING the recent controversy about hanging as a punishment, in the House of Commons and elsewhere, no one seems to have referred to Charles Dickens, the great writer, as one of the earliest and strongest opponents of hanging. Mr. Montgomery Hyde, M.P., did quote Thackeray in the House in seconding Silverman's Bill. Strangely enough no one paid tribute to Dickens.

Now Dickens was one of the most amazing of men, both as a person and as a writer. He was an incorrigible sentimentalist in many respects. But let it not be thought that sentimentality was at the root of his objection to murder as a state-monopoly and state-virtue. Nothing of the kind. In many matters Dickens was as hard as Oliver Cromwell and his will was strong as steel. He might be sentimental but he was never soft or weak, especially not in the head.

His conclusion on the subject of hanging shows this clearly enough: "I beg to be understood as advocating the total abolition of the punishment of Death as a general principle, for the advantage of society, for the prevention of crime, and without the least reference to, or tenderness for, any individual malefactor whatsoever". Could anybody be plainer?

In three letters to the *Daily News* after he had relinquished its editorship to his friend, and later biographer, John Foster, Dickens has some trenchant and penetrating observations on the psychology of murderers. He knew them at first-hand, as I do. On murders of gain, or sudden rage or despairing affection, Dickens knew that the scaffold had no restraint. On murders for vengeance or notoriety-craving, the death-penalty was an added stimulus. Many recorded examples of death inflicted on the afterwards-proved innocent should make us who are "of finite judgement" hesitate to "inflict an infinite and irreparable punishment".

Now, in Dickens' day executions were public. Judges then, like judges today, argued that hanging deterred; but, they said, how could it deter if it was unseen and done in private? Combating this view, Dickens said that of 167 convicts sentenced to death, only three had not been present at a public execution.

In 1840 Charles Dickens attended the execution of Courvoisier. The crowd was terrific, and jammed around St. Sepulchre's Church. So tightly was it packed that women who fainted were wedged upright, and pickpockets could not move their hands. There was a tumult of bawling obscenities. Head and shoulders above the crowd stood Thackeray and Dickens saw him. The victim appeared feeble and agonised, wringing his hands and moving his lips as if praying, and the mob yelled execrations as the church bells struck eight and the wretched creature hung dangling.

This experience, "a ghastly sight in Hell with demons", deepened Charles Dickens' hatred of executions, but especially public executions.

In 1849, Dickens went to see the execution of the Mannings and wrote two letters to *The Times* protesting against what he saw. He caused a national sensation and started "a roaring sea of correspondence". He spoke of the wickedness and levity of the watching crowd, fighting, whistling, showing no pity or awe or seriousness. Boys and girls were there; thieves, prostitutes, ruffians, vagabonds, laughed when "the two miserable creatures were turned quivering into the air". Dickens said this publicity had a hardening and debasing influence and urged privacy within

prison-walls. He also criticised the Sunday newspapers serving up the sayings and doings of murderers.

But the judges of Dickens' day still argued that public executions were salutary and deterrent. It was not until 1868 that the reform so passionately demanded by Charles Dickens came about. He had declared that no heathen land under the sun could present such a degrading spectacle as these Christian executions.

Lord Macaulay, in a speech in the House of Commons, had flung the present-day taunt of "sentimentality" at the State-slaughter abolitionists. Dickens's answer was pretty devastating:

"Without staying to enquire what there may be which is specially manly and heroic in the advocacy of the gallows or to express my admiration for Mr. Calcraft, the hangman, as doubtless one of the most manly specimens now in existence, I would simply hint a doubt whether this be the true Macaulay way of meeting a great question."

About the same time, the great French writer Victor Hugo was condemning all executions, public or private. And, of course, long before he had witnessed the executions of Courvoisier and the Mannings. Dickens had seen enough of hanging to be able to describe the spectacle of Fagin's hanging most realistically.

It took about twenty years for the protests of Charles Dickens against public hangings to take practical effect. But he lived to see this cause triumph, for he died two years later in 1870. What a melancholy thing it is to think that 100 years have passed since Dickens first uttered his plea for the abolition of the death-penalty. Still our barbarous island cleaves to its blood-sport! State murders are still supposed to be the cure for private murders — and posterity will despise us for tolerating the crime of hanging.

Having much personal experience of murderers myself, I can testify that I never knew one that feared the gallows. Indeed, one bitterly reproached me for saving him from it; he resented being deprived of a heroic end and being merely relegated to Broadmoor by "the eloquence of my fool of a counsel who knew I wanted to be hanged". I can also testify that it was sound sense and not sentiment that moved the great Charles Dickens in this matter, as well as "his general retainer against all suffering and oppression".

Of course, the real objection to State-murder is that not only is it vicious to claim a murder-monopoly but Pharaसाic to claim that the only virtuous murders are State-murders. How negligent it was of the Old Testament God not to exempt states from his Sixth Commandment.

There exists a body known as Dickens Worshipers. But it seems to care more for Dickens's discarded cigar-cases (which it hoards) than for the causes he cleaved to. Its voice is not heard echoing the voice of the dead genius. It ought to be. Charles Dickens, if he were alive, might write something scathing about a lot of Pecksniff-followers who worship their Master in all ways — except in spirit and in truth. Their swords sleep in their hands; they have no desire to build a Dickensian Jerusalem in England's grey and unpleasant land — which that lunatic William Blake (justly punished by dying in poverty for the genius in his poems and pictures) declared to be green and pleasant, evidently confusing England with John Bull's Other Island.

It may be as difficult to convert some Dickensians to the doctrines of Dickens as to convert Christians to the doctrines of Christ.

This Believing World

That Jesus was the world's greatest medium is a commonplace among Spiritualists, but they are now beginning to allow Moses was almost his equal. According to *Psychic News*, we learn that the great Jewish prophet or "iniate" (as he is called) knew not only "spirit secrets" not yet revealed to anybody else, but he had a library of 37,000 "books filled with every branch of physical and religious science". We are not in the least surprised. Why should "our Lord" always have the glory? How long it took Moses to write those 37,000 books is not stated, nor how the "library" was carried about for forty years, in the desert. Perhaps it didn't get over the Red Sea in time, and was overwhelmed in the rush like Pharaoh. Or perhaps it was only a "spirit" library. One never knows these days.

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Advertising Jesus Christ just like cocoa or electric shavers are advertised in the daily press has for long been the star to which teams of advertising men have wanted to hitch their wagon; and it is good now and then to judge their success. The Roman Church has been advertising what Protestants call Popery for some years in the U.S.A., and it is now doing the same here in England, no doubt with similar success. We were pleased to see therefore the *Daily Express* printing some of America's finest religious headlines gathered from America by the famous film script writer, Mr. T. E. B. Clarke, under the alluring title of "This May Shock You".

★

For example, you are invited to come and hear Lloyd Heth, brilliant Chicago lawyer, "analyse" the trial of Jesus before Pilate. His qualifications are that he has "successfully" prosecuted some of the most notorious criminals of the gangster era". What is not so clear is, however, whether Mr. Heth means that, as Jesus was condemned, the prosecution was as justified in getting Jesus crucified as Mr. Heth was in getting *his* gangsters found guilty.

★

Some of the U.S.A.'s churches make a splash with a "Holy Ghost Rally" or a "Special Holy Ghost Night"; or proclaim Jesus as "The Man Upstairs". The very religious speakers advertise themselves, for example, as "God's Business Men" — they preach "Deliverance, Salvation, and Healing". And others will take as a subject, "Was Jesus Framed?" or call their organisation, "The Soul Clinic International". And what is the result of all this? Almost with triumph, Mr. Clarke tells us, "There are no empty pews in the churches". In other words, selling Jesus is no more difficult than selling jam.

★

But there is still another way of advertising "our Lord". You can do it with what used to be called the "Oxford Group", but is now better known as "Moral Re-Armament". In a full-page advertisement in the *Coventry Evening Telegraph* boosting up M.R.A. as an "Idea to Win the World", we were pained and shocked to find Christ Jesus completely absent, but with "God speaks" and "God acts", the name of Dr. Frank Buchman prominently and delightfully displayed. Just as one boost, for instance, we have the Hon. W. S. K. Hughes, the Chairman of the Organising Committee of this year's Olympic Games, unctuously telling us that "it will be a very great asset to Australia to have Dr. Frank Buchman and the M.R.A. force coming to Australia in Olympic Year".

★

With Mr. Hughes are Dr. Chancellor Adenaur, Robert Schuman, ex-Foreign Minister for France, His Highness

Adeniji, Oba of Lagos, Dr. Hassouna, Secretary General of the Arab League, Si Bekkai, Prime Minister of Morocco, Mr. Hatoyama, Prime Minister of Japan, Alderman E. C. Gooch, M.P., Chairman of the British Labour Party, and the Most Rev. Dr. Fuglsang-Damgaard, Primate of the Danish Church; and even Moscow is dragged in admitting that M.R.A. "has the power to capture radical, revolutionary minds". We hope our own readers are now suitably impressed that M.R.A. has thoroughly displaced "our Lord" as the real Saviour of Mankind.

★

No doubt that Moral Disarmament requires the powerful backing of all sorts and conditions of eminent men, but to "evangelise" Auckland, seven American "missionaries" recently came fully armed with business-like slogans to put over something called "Consumerism". Motor Car Ford appears to be one holy name by and through which some New Zealanders will be saved; and the heads of firms who make soap, hats, tea, gowns, and so on, are the other saintly names. To paraphrase Shakespeare — how sweet in religion or business are the uses of advertisement!

The Rising Generation

III — PROPHECY

YOU WILL FIND, if you are properly taught Christianity by all-believing teachers, that "prophecy" plays a big part in proving that Jesus Christ (who is always referred to as "our Lord") was the Messiah promised by their prophets to the Jews. The word Messiah simply meant for the Jews living in Palestine in the era we call "B.C.", a "deliverer". They were constantly attacked by more powerful nations and were — quite wrongly — hoping for some descendant of David to deliver them from their oppressors. As history has shown, their Messiah never came, though the followers of Jesus Christ insist that *he* was the veritable Messiah promised to the Jews in the Old Testament. The Jews deny this — hence the bitter hatred between them.

The Jews have always denied that there was any prophecy of Jesus in their own Bible. This was in the Hebrew language, and you all know it in English as the "Old Testament" in the Authorised Version. In many Bibles you will find headings and descriptions of chapters which are due *not* to the original Hebrew, but to the vivid imagination of the translators. Never forget this. Those headings are just blatant frauds.

But there are some "prophecies" in the *New Testament* which are, these days, heartily disliked by the most eminent Christians, who hate the trouble of explaining them. These prophecies relate to what is known as "the Second Advent" or the "Second Coming". In them, Jesus solemnly tells his followers, "Verily I say unto you, There be some standing here, which shall not taste of death, till they see the Son of Man coming in his Kingdom"; or "This generation shall not pass, till all these things be done", and similar assurances of the Second Advent. And because of these firm promises from the Son of God (or the Son of Man — you can take your choice) all the early Christians really believed Jesus would come a second time and prepared for the great event accordingly. Unfortunately something went wrong — perhaps the chronology of the sacred event went wrong and even when such dates as the year 1000 A.D., 1864 A.D., were worked out from Bible numbers, "our Lord" did not come. And he hasn't come yet.

The prophecies of "our Lord's" Second Advent are the most positive in the whole of the Bible. They are the most picturesque and the most-hoped for. And they have completely failed. In other words, there have been no failures in history than Bible prophecies.

THE FREETHINKER

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TO CORRESPONDENTS

Correspondents may like to note that when their letters are not printed or when they are abbreviated, the material in them may still be of use to "This Believing World", or to our spoken propaganda.

R. J. TRAVÉ.—You should find the following books on the Mexican Revolution useful: *President Obregon* by Dr. E. J. Dillon (Hutchinson, 1923) and *Portrait of Mexico* by Bertram D. Wolfe, illustrated by D. Rivera (1937). *Positivism* by Frederick Harrison (1901) is a recognised English exposition of Comte, but it may be out of print. Ask at your library.

Lecture Notices, Etc.

OUTDOOR

Manchester Branch N.S.S. (Deansgate Blitzed Site).—Every weekday, 1 p.m.: G. A. WOODCOCK.
Nottingham Branch N.S.S. (Old Market Square).—Friday, 1 p.m.: T. M. MOSLEY. Sunday, 11 a.m.: R. MORRELL and R. POWE.
North London Branch N.S.S. (White Stone Pond, Hampstead).—Every Sunday, noon: L. EBURY and A. ARTHUR.
West London Branch N.S.S.—Every Sunday at the Marble Arch from 4 p.m.: Various speakers.

INDOOR

Birmingham Branch N.S.S. (Satis Café, 40 Cannon Street).—Sunday, April 22nd, 7 p.m.: E. MARKLEY, "Should the Church be Disestablished?"
South Place Ethical Society (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1).—Sunday, April 22nd, 11 a.m.: LORD CHORLEY, "Moral Code and Penal Code".
West Ham Branch N.S.S. (Wanstead Community Centre).—Thursday, April 26th, 7.45 p.m.: P. TURNER, "Rules and Regulations—are they necessary?"

Notes and News

As briefly mentioned last week, the 1956 Annual Conference of the N.S.S. will be held in Liverpool, the Merseyside Branch acting as hosts. The Saturday evening reception (May 19th) and Sunday morning and afternoon sessions of the Conference (Whit Sunday, May 20th) will be held in the Stork Hotel, 1 Queen Square, Liverpool, 1. It is intended to organise an outdoor demonstration on the Sunday evening (weather permitting) and an outing on Whit Monday. More information on these matters will be given later. Meanwhile, enquiries regarding accommodation, etc., should be addressed either to the Local Secretary, Mr. W. C. Parry, 476 Mill Street, Liverpool, 8, or to the General Secretary, 41 Gray's Inn Road, London, W.C.1.

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The *Indian Rationalist*, thanking the N.S.S. for its donation and letter of encouragement in its financial difficulties, says, in its latest issue:

"This is high praise for our humble services from the leading militant Freethought organisation in Britain, which was founded by the great Charles Bradlaugh, the champion of freedom for all peoples and the special friend of India. They have remitted £20 to us but the goodwill expressed in the letter is worth twenty millions. Now that the Indian Rationalist movement and its journal have gained recognition by sister organisations in the rest of the world, we have confidence that this journal will not die

and help will come from somewhere whenever it gets into difficulties. But this is no reason for our own members to relax their efforts to gather financial help for the running of the journal. We beg to express the sincerest thanks of all the members of the Indian Rationalist Association to the Executive Committee of the National Secular Society of Great Britain for their generosity and fraternal feeling. We further give them the assurance that we shall endeavour to our utmost capacity to continue to serve the best of causes".

★

WE NOW have confirmation of the French National Federation's invitation to all members of the World Union of Freethinkers to join them in the Voltaire celebrations at Geneva on Saturday, August 18th, 1956. The French party will be driving over from Bourg (about three hours away) just for the day, but Mr. C. Bradlaugh Bonner, President of the World Union, who is one of the speakers, will be staying on in Geneva, and he has expressed his willingness to arrange an additional programme for British visitors who may wish to do likewise. Visits to Ferney and to places associated with Shelley, Byron and Gibbon, and trips on the Lake are among the attractions, but accommodation is scarce in this international centre. British Freethinkers who wish to make the trip should therefore write, quickly, to Mr. C. B. Bonner, 23 Streatbourne Road, London, S.W.17, stating their requirements, length of stay, etc. May 1st is the deadline date.

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WE wish to thank Herr Otto Rieck of Fredeburg, Germany for indicating an error in "Facts for Freethinkers" (page 34, February 3rd, 1956). In the list of Popes, "John XXII (1316-1334)" should read "John XXIII (1410-1415)"; and in the descriptive matter immediately following, "In May 1316, Pope Alexander died..." should read "In May 1410, Pope Alexander died...".

★

LONELINESS is the cause of much human misery, and Secularists—concerned as they are with human affairs here and now—welcome every effort to lessen its effects. In response to an article entitled "Big City Loneliness", *Picture Post* received many suggestions for doing this. One letter, from a lady in Merthyr Tydfil, "most earnestly" urged all sufferers from loneliness to "Join a church", and an editorial footnote stated that many other people had written suggesting that a local church might hold the answer to this very real human problem. Evidence to the contrary came from a man in Wimbledon. "I have attended the same local church for a matter of forty-three years", he said, and "After all that time there is only one household in the neighbourhood that I may occasionally visit". "I frequently go for several weeks on end without having enjoyed as much as five minutes' conversation with any human being", he continued, "often feeling that I would gladly have paid to be spoken to". No wonder he thinks that the problem of loneliness "might have been much more vigorously tackled by the Church"! In fact, of course, the problem is an immense one, involving many psychological as well as social factors. The latter are the more easily treated. Their answer lies, surely, in more and more community centres, and a greater emphasis on communal training in our schools. The treatment should begin forthwith, and it might well remove many—though not all—of the psychological difficulties, too.

NEXT WEEK

A REVIEW OF PETER WILDEBLOOD'S BOOK
"AGAINST THE LAW"

by REV. J. L. BROOM, M.A.

The Wrath of God

By COLIN MCCALL

IT IS NOT accurately known how many people were killed in the Lisbon earthquake of November 1st, 1755. Factual reporting of natural calamities is difficult enough today; two hundred years ago it was well-nigh impossible. Three shocks in ten minutes brought buildings tumbling and filled the air with a fog of dust; a tidal wave and a fire that burned for nearly a week completed the havoc. Terrified survivors fled to the open country, clutching crucifixes and other icons. In such conditions it is scarcely surprising that many "eye-witness" accounts should be exaggerated. Voltaire believed that 100,000 had perished; probably 15,000 is a better estimate. But, whatever the death-roll, it was a terrible disaster that deeply affected the civilised world.

The extent of its influence upon contemporaries in Portugal and elsewhere can be seen from Sir Thomas Kendrick's new book, *The Lisbon Earthquake* (Methuen, 21s.). In a compact but comprehensive form, the Director of the Museum has remarkably captured the mood of the time: remote yet fascinating, and important to the understanding of European thought. He has done so in a creditably impartial way; paying tribute where due both to cleric and anti-cleric; making due allowance for human failings and ignorance; and permitting himself just a few satirical touches not unworthy of Voltaire himself.

Where is one to begin a study of this kind? Sir Thomas selects London in 1750, which suffered minor shocks in February and March. In the first, desks lurched, chairs shook, doors slammed, windows rattled and a few chimneys fell; the second was slightly worse. A few scientists speculated on the natural causes of earth tremors, but to Thomas Sherlock, Bishop of London, they were a divine warning to renounce sin. To William Whiston (editor of *Josephus*) they were intimations of the end of the world. For most of the clergy they provided arguments against the dangerous deistic philosophy of the period. For most Londoners they were evidence of the wrath of God.

If such were the effects of two slight shocks, one can imagine the alarm with which news of the Lisbon disaster was received. The richest and most thickly populated district of this "staggeringly rich" city had become "a charred desert of smoking ruins with the dead bodies of hundreds of the inhabitants lying beneath the ashes and cinders of their homes". God had been wrathful indeed! But why had He chosen Lisbon with its "swarming population of monks, friars and nuns"? Why had He selected All Saints' Day, when attendances at church were extra high? Why had He destroyed over twenty parish churches, several convents, and the home of the Inquisition? These are some of the questions which needed answering.

To a Jansenist like Laurent-Etienne Rondet, they were easily answered. God was striking at the enemies of the faith, and particularly at the Jesuits. Had not all seven houses of the Jesuits in the city been devastated? Sir Thomas Kendrick tells us no, but a detail like that would hardly have discouraged the ingenious Rondet, eager for the kill. That God in His anger had destroyed Lisbon was, writes Sir Thomas, "a constant theme in sermons, tracts, and moralising poetry, throughout all Europe". In Lisbon itself, "frantic preaching and exhortations began almost at once after the earthquake", and sermons and pamphlets reminded the inhabitants of "their wickedness and of the Justice of the city's fate". Penitential processions took place on November 16th and December 13th. Lisbon "had been a very sinful city indeed" — "greedy, devoted to

material wealth, immoral, licentious, and irreverent" (with images of Saints everywhere!) — it was even "understandable that God should not only have destroyed His own churches, but have spared a street full of brothels . . ."

At least, it was understandable to some. But by no means to all. Francisco de Pina e Mello, a strictly orthodox poet, was driven to question the justice of God in the style of Job. To another poet, Faria Cordeiro, the earthquake indicated that the world was cruel: it was not true that everything happens for the best, that whatever is, is right. So we come to Voltaire, whose noble human protest is inseparably linked in our minds with the Lisbon disaster.

Voltaire was sixty-one on November 21st, 1755. A week later he wrote a letter to M. Bertrand (Pastor of the Free Church at Berne) referring to the earthquake and asking "If Pope had been at Lisbon would he have dared to say that All is well?" The first draft of his famous poem mentioned in a letter three weeks later, but it underwent several alterations before appearing in print. Bertrand thought that the original ending — "Men must and too silently submit, worship, and die" — was hurtful and too violently expressed; "hope" was accordingly inserted between "worship" and "die", and "silently" was omitted. Still regarded as too strong, the last two lines (including the above) were dropped and a good deal of extra matter was added. The last lines as we know them now, contain the prayer of the Caliph:

"To thee, sole and all-powerful king, I bear
What thou dost lack in thy immensity —
Evil and ignorance, distress and sin."

and culminate in the controversial:

He might have added — hope.

Sir Thomas suggests that Voltaire felt he had conceded too much to orthodox thought, because a copy exists, corrected by the poet himself, turning the final line into the question:

Might he have added hope?

But two biographers of Voltaire (Condorcet and Mr. Alfred Noyes) have interpreted the poem as "sublime homage" to God, mainly on the strength of the word "hope". This does not seem to have been the general verdict of the time, and certain passages were censored when the poem was printed in the *Journal Encyclopédique* in April 1756. Certainly it was not Rousseau's interpretation. For him the poem was much too pessimistic and the final word "hope" was too vague; for him, God was kind, all was for the best. "Rousseau was absolutely sure", says Sir Thomas. Others, however, were not, and Voltaire's poem "obtained its hearing, because it dealt directly with the perplexity filling the minds of its readers, and because it is movingly inspired by sorrow for the people of Lisbon". This, I think, will still be appreciated by the modern reader; the poem is the cry of humanity.

A sympathetic humanity is evident in Sir Thomas Kendrick's book. There are tales of desperate flight but also of "great bravery and resignation"; of priests moving among the wounded giving absolution (for "no horror was greater than the supreme terror of dying unconfessed and unforgiven"); and of the Portuguese people responding to the realistic administration of the Marquês de Pombal. Inevitably some priests exploited the earthquake in an "alarmed and anti-social manner"; it was these who hindered Pombal's efforts to restore order out of the existing chaos and forced him into certain anti-clerical measures. For the most part, though, he was staunchly supported in his firm

ling of an appalling situation. And the new Lisbon, built to a master-plan, is a fitting memorial to him: it is, in Sir Thomas's words, "Pombal's most magnificent achievement".

But it is back in London that the book ends. And it is gratifying to read that Britain's first reaction to the earthquake was warmhearted and charitable. An English M.P. might declare that the world was paying for its neglect of the teaching of Moses, some Protestants might heap reproaches on the citizens of Lisbon, but the general response was condolent. Even those who denounced the sinfulness of Portugal accused the British of greater sins ("Except ye repent, ye shall likewise perish") and when John Wesley "piled on the horror", the Archbishop of Canterbury (Thomas Herring) deplored such "frights and fervors". The wrath of God, it seems, can be exaggerated!

About the turn of the century the Lisbon earthquake becomes forgotten history. But in literature Voltaire has ensured that we shall never forget it. And now the Director of the British Museum has used it to recreate the mental climate of two centuries ago in a most absorbing and handsome book.

Freethought and Religion

By JOHN BOWDEN

(Concluded from page 114)

In the pre-scientific age the supernatural was seen everywhere. Such a phenomenon as the appearance of a comet was regarded with superstitious terror. It was an omen of Divine wrath. A doggerel rhyme of mediæval times ran:

Eight things there be a comet brings,

When it on high doth horrid range;

Wind, Famine, Plague and Death to Kings;
War, Earthquake, Floods and Direful Change.

The domain of the supernatural has steadily receded under the impact of modern science. In astronomy, in physics, in chemistry and cognate sciences the concept of natural causation reigns supreme. Supernaturalism still retains a lingering hold in the fields of biology and psychology, chiefly owing to the great complexity of the phenomena of life and mind. But year by year that hold is growing weaker. The task the Freethinker has taken upon himself is to hasten the day when the supernatural will be eliminated from every department of human thought.

In our own land, Christianity is the dominant creed. The doctrines of Christianity are based upon the Bible. Recently the Bible has undergone drastic revision in which, we are told, many thousands of errors were brought to light—a fact which, by the way, completely disposes of the doctrine of Inspiration. We have been told that the Bible hasn't really been changed; that "with the aid of the oldest manuscripts yet known and with a new knowledge of Greek and Hebrew vocabularies, we have really been recovering it. In that sense, this new Bible is really the oldest". The Christian is left with the comforting assurance that at last he has before him the authentic Word of God.

Unfortunately he has no guarantee of this; in fact, such a guarantee can never be given. Even in its revised versions the Bible gives evidence of its human origin. The astronomical knowledge of the writers of the Bible was of the crudest kind. They represented one Bible hero, Joshua, as making the sun stand still in the heavens to enable him to complete the rout of his enemies. On another occasion the shadow of the sundial was made to move backwards. Such stoppages and reversals of the earth's motion would cause the entire globe to disintegrate. To the scientifically trained mind, stories of this kind belong to the childhood of the race.

Other stories which betray the human origin of the Bible are those which represent the Deity as a monster who orders the indiscriminate massacre of men, women and

children. In one instance an admittedly harmless people were exterminated. I ask the Christian reader: do you believe such stories—*really* believe them?

There are so many things in the Bible repulsive to the moral sense. The Freethinker holds that the cause of morality can never be promoted by such barbarous stories and that it would be better for all concerned if passages which give revolting conceptions of deity were expunged from a book which is put before children as a guide to conduct. They tend to degrade rather than elevate.

Morality, the Freethinker avers, can best be promoted by encouraging the expression of sentiments of sympathy and kindness. An enlightened self-interest, together with a developed social consciousness, will foster the development of character in the individual. International amity and concord can be attained by emphasising to the full the essential oneness of humanity and the value of human co-operation.

Freethought is essentially a doctrine of this world. Of another world we know nothing; but if there be such then we shall all get there whether we will or not. And the best possible preparation for any world beyond surely is a life well spent here.

[Adapted with the collaboration of the author from an article in *New Zealand Rationalist*.—Ed.]

New Zealand Calling

By ARTHUR O'HALLORAN

Vice-President, N.Z. Rationalist Association (Inc.)

Bible in School: Planners Move into Action

With plans obviously consummated some time last year, the proponents for the Bible in schools got off to a flying start in 1956 with a national broadcast over the State-owned radio. This occurred several days before the opening of the State Public Schools. It was stated that a handbook and "agreed syllabus" had been prepared by the Council for Christian Education, and that this was "the same statement as that approved by the Joint Conference of Anglicans and Free Churchmen in Great Britain". I did not hear the broadcast but it was apparently full of "uplift", for the salvation, temporal and eternal, of the youngsters of New Zealand once they get religious instruction. The clashes of dogmas meant nothing to the broadcaster, or at all events he carefully disguised the difficulty. Instead, he trotted out a story of how, in a country town, the local Catholic priest, a Protestant minister and the local school teacher drive off together in a "handy chariot" and proceed to hymn singing, Bible reading and "questions" from the children, the Catholics with the priest in a separate room and the non-Catholics (who would probably make up 80 per cent. of the children) in another room. What we want to know is why these religionists get permission to have a National Hook-up talk on the *People's Radio*—and this free of charge, whilst Rationalists are denied the opportunity to challenge the statements, or even, in a general way, to air Freethought. We are, of course, taking the matter up with the broadcasting authorities.

The Mayors of Auckland, Christchurch and other towns have joined in sending an invitation to Dr. Buchman, of Moral Re-armament "fame", to visit New Zealand. The Mayor of Auckland a year or so ago made salute to the efficacy of prayer, saying "It would solve all our troubles" if only we had enough of it. I wonder if he has read Geoffrey Williamson's *Inside Buchmanism* or the strictures on Buchmanism passed by the late Dr. Cyril Garbett, or Dr. Fisher's in the debate at Church House, Westminster? Not that it would make much difference, I suppose. Any-

one who can get a big enough following talking on God, Jesus, the glories of the next world, and the sins of materialism and secularism seems assured of the red carpet being rolled out, with mayoral receptions and newspaper headlines.

Catholic Church: New Technique in Action

Last year the Roman Catholic Archbishop in New Zealand, stung by futile requests to the Government for State Aid to Catholic schools, made the threat about "Catholics and the next war". It proved a bad blunder on the Archbishop's part; there was immediate criticism, in some cases sharp and unqualified, in which the leading daily newspapers participated editorially. Now comes a new move, this time from the Holy Name Society, who intend to press for a rebate, or allowance, to individual taxpayers to meet the costs of sending their children to private and denominational schools. There is an element of shrewdness behind the move—for Protestants are invited to join in and do likewise.

Abolition of Hanging

The campaign for abolition of hanging is making headway and consolidation of groups opposed to capital punishment is proceeding. Some weekly papers are giving useful help and the daily papers are throwing their correspondence columns open fairly widely in the issue. Altogether, it is good publicity, and organisational work has already been done.

BRANCH LINE WEST LONDON

THE West London Branch of the N.S.S. brought a highly successful indoor season to a close on Sunday, April 1st, when the evening was devoted to the playing of the eight gramophone records made by Mr. Robert H. Scott of California entitled "An Atheist Speaks". These were the talks which Scott gave on the Californian Radio Station in 1948 and caused such a sensation at the time. For once the different churches united in a howl to stop the broadcast, but Scott insisted that the contract should be honoured. The hall at the Laurie Arms was well filled and an appreciative audience listened with interest and obvious pleasure to Scott's able presentation of the case for atheism. At the end a motion was unanimously carried to send a message of thanks and appreciation to Mr. Scott. It was suggested that the records should form part of an evening's programme in other N.S.S. branches. The members expressed their best thanks to the Hon. Secretary, Mr. Cleaver, who has worked so hard for several years to make the West London Branch a forum for the expression of all sorts of advanced opinions, where no subject is barred and where full and free discussion in the best Free-thought tradition is still to be found. Now the Branch turns its activities to outdoor propaganda in Hyde Park.

CORRESPONDENCE

CENTRAL LONDON BRANCH

On behalf of the Central London Branch of the N.S.S., in reply to the letter by Mr. Cotes re the "curious affair of the Cohen-McCabe Memorial Meeting", we too are very curious as to his attitude to the secular movement, and as to the reason for THE FREETHINKER publishing such a letter. Here we had a very successful meeting, the largest held for a number of years by the N.S.S. in London. We had an eminent M.P., Sydney Silverman; Avro Manhattan, the brilliant author of books exposing the R.C. Church; the editor of *The Library Guide*, and our own General Secretary, all together on an N.S.S. platform to honour the two great past leaders of the secular movement. That Mr. Silverman dealt with Capital Punishment, Mr. Manhattan with the Catholic Church, and Mr. Hawton with Joseph McCabe, and Mr. McCall with Chapman Cohen, was all pre-arranged. The chairman was instructed to point out at the onset that while we were concerned with honouring the two great men, we were not going to spend an evening merely eulogising them. The Branch considered the best way to honour them was to *carry on with the work to which they had devoted their lives*. The meeting was organised to do just that and nothing more.

For the longwindedness of the chairman we can only apologise if

that were so, but for the studied insult that the platform lacked the warmth of affection and admiration for the two men we ask Mr. Cotes to withdraw such an unworthy accusation. Had the Branch no admiration or affection for our late leaders we should not have organised the meeting in the way we did.

We suggest that Mr. Cotes has had two years in which he and his friends could have organised a meeting more to their desire, but they have not done so. Why is it that on the one occasion when the Central London Branch (only four months old) organised such an event he rushes to condemn those who at their own expense and at great personal inconvenience do get on with the job?

We should be pleased to welcome Mr. Cotes into our Branch, where he would find plenty of opportunity of honouring the memory of Chapman Cohen with hard, thankless toil for free-thought, instead of acting as an armchair critic. The N.S.S. reached out to a large number of people that evening who had scarcely seen the society in action before. That was our aim; it proved most successful. The enthusiastic audience responded to the spirit of the meeting with a collection amply covering the expenses.

S. SALTER (Branch Chairman).
J. M. ALEXANDER (Branch Secretary).

A REPLY TO MR. CUTNER

In his article "Some Questions Answered" (February 10th), Mr. Cutner calls me a Dutch scientific humanist who seems unable to read English and who consequently has misread a previous article of his on November 4th.

First I must strongly protest against the insulting way in which he generally attacks his fellow-partisans. We Dutch Freethinkers never deal with opinions with which we disagree in a similar offending manner in our publications.

Secondly, Mr. Cutner has read into my article something I did not say. I neither said I was a Humanist nor that Mr. Cutner was against Humanism.

I only wished to give an explanation of the word Humanist as it is understood generally by members of the Dutch Humanist League, of which I am not a member. Of course Humanism is something that only Rationalists can legitimately claim, but I did not say it was. It is true that believing people, according to the examples given by Mr. Cutner, occasionally display acts of humanism—motivated by their own essential humanity—though they do not call themselves Humanists. Such behaviour has no relevance for Christianity or any other creed. All decent people should do what they can to rescue a drowning person without stopping to ask what his religion is. I would simply point out, as in my former reply, that in general a religious creed requires its followers to do good in the hope of a reward after death, and the specially favoured recipients of their good deeds are usually their fellow-believers.

For your guidance I may add that in my country the Christians regard Humanists as inferior people, to say nothing of Rationalists and Freethinkers, and they do all they can to oppose the Humanist Movement. In their eyes, a Humanist is a godless and therefore despicable being who tries to take the innocent Christians to hell.

J. LIEDERSMA

TURN JESU'S FACE TO THE WALL, ALBERT!

Re the article on the Secular Hall of Leicester, I have often wondered why the figure of Jesus is allowed to deface it. Surely Mr. Hassell and his friends must see that it is incongruous. Is it not a public concession to the enemy?

M. HEATON

OBITUARY WILLIAM THOMAS COLYER

IT is with great regret that I announce the death of William Thomas Colyer on March 31st, at the age of 72. The crematorium took place at Golders Green on April 6th.

Tom Colyer was a member of South London Branch N.S.S. and a regular reader of THE FREETHINKER, to the Correspondence column of which he occasionally contributed. He was widely known in both Britain and the U.S.A. for his work in the Labour movement, for his long connection with the National Council of Labour Colleges, and for his writings on economic and social questions in *Plebs*, the *Socialist Leader*, and in book form.

In conveying our deep sympathy to his widow and daughter, the present writer wishes to add his personal tribute to an old friend and valued friend.

P. A. J.

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