

# The Freethinker

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## THE MYTH OF CHRISTMAS

By H. GUTNER

IT MUST HAVE CAUSED a severe shock to most Christians when they heard of the archaeological discoveries surrounding the Persian and Roman God Mithras in London a year or two ago. For they soon found out that one of the outstanding facts about him was that, like Jesus Christ himself, he was born on Christmas Day — on December 25th. Had they investigated a little further, they would have made the remarkable discovery that quite a number of other famous gods were also born on December 25th.

Actually, of course, there is not a scrap of historical evidence that any of them were born at all. None of them is a real person — they are nothing but "personifications." And Jesus is no exception whatever. We have no evidence of any kind as to the year or the day of the month when he was born, as has been said so ably by the Rev. Dr. Giles in his *Hebrew and Christian Records*. Even that very reverent biographer of Jesus, the Rev. Dr. Geikie, admits that "the whole subject is very uncertain"; and Canon Farrar, in one of the most popular and widely-read lives of Christ ever published, says that "the date of Christ's birth cannot be fixed with absolute certainty."

### Bethlehem or Nazareth?

Another point of interest is the *place* of "our Lord's birth." Nobody can tell us. There has always been a discussion why Jesus of Nazareth should be so called if he were really born in Bethlehem, especially as there is no evidence that such a place as Nazareth existed in his day. That problem still subsists. But even more uncertain is — was Jesus born in a *stable* or in a *cave*? Matthew certainly implies that he was born in a *house*, but most Christian artists find this not very picturesque; so he is nearly always shown with his mother in a "manger" or a stable (as Luke says), cows and horses looking reverently and sympathetically on. It is Luke who disagrees with Matthew, but what do the other Gospels say — the so-called Apocryphal ones? Most of them say it was neither in a stable nor in a house that Jesus was born but in a *cave*.

Why was the date of the birth of Jesus fixed on December 25th, and the place a *cave*? The answer is very simple. We are not dealing here with any historical fact, but with a myth.

The Hindu God Krishna was born in a cave. Bacchus, the Greek God of wine, was born in a cave. So were Apollo, Adonis, Mithras, Hermes and Attys; and even Abraham, the first of the patriarchs, was born in a cave. As in the case of the Old Testament (which is based on records from other nations and made to apply to the Jewish "race") so in the New Testament; the editors of those parts finally admitted into the Canon searched for all kinds of stories, and from Jewish and pagan myths, for the details of the story of Jesus. The only "invention" in these stories is their clever adaptation.

### A Universal Date

When we come to December 25th, we find the same tale. Osiris the Egyptian God was born on that day; so were Buddha, Bacchus, Adonis, Hercules and Mithras, among others. In fact, as was pointed out in that learned work on Gnosticism — *The Gnostics and Their Remains* by G. W. King — "The ancient festival held on the 25th of December in honour of the birthday of the 'Invincible One' was afterwards transferred to the commemoration of the birth of Christ, the precise date of which many of the Fathers confess was then unknown." Even Gibbon, in his immortal work, pointed out that "the Roman Christians, ignorant of the real date of Christ's birth, fixed the solemn festival to the 25th of December, the Brumalia, or Winter solstice, when the Pagans annually celebrated the birth of Sol."

So here we have it on the authority of one of the greatest of historians that December 25th was really the birthday of *Sol*, that is, the Sun. And so it is, for right up to that day — more or less — the days get shorter and shorter, and then begin just about December 25th, to get longer and longer. In other words, the sun is *born* — born of the Queen of Heaven, the Celestial Virgin symbolised by Isis, the Egyptian Goddess, and, of course, by Mary, the Virgin Mary, taken bodily over by the Christian Church, not only from Isis, but from the other Virgin-mothers of paganism, like Maya, the mother of Buddha, Devaki, the mother of Krishna, Mylitta, the mother of Tammuz the Saviour, and a number of others.

### The Sun-Myth

This Sun-myth theory was well known to the Freethinkers of the 19th century, and they exploited it as far as possible. But to the great relief of all good Christians, it is not so well known these days simply because the books in which the details were carefully worked out are no longer in print, and so few of our younger generation can learn what it really signified.

The great French writer, C. F. Dupuis, called the Sun-myth, the *origin* of all religions, and wrote a wonderful book in proof of his theory. Volney, in his famous *Ruins of Empires*, was in full agreement; and the theory is elaborately worked out in Robert Taylor's *Devil's Pulpit*. But it is not unfair to say that the theory is almost unknown in its details these days, and some at least of our very reverent rationalists take good care to sneer at it in their determination to keep the Man Jesus as their ideal at all costs.

Now, while I agree that Christianity, in inventing the story of Jesus, added other elements — like phallic worship — it cannot be too strongly urged that it is the imaginary adventures of the Sun — and Stars also — in the heavens, as well as the conflict between Day and Night, between Winter and Summer, between Light and Darkness, which is at the base of all religions with a Saviour. The Saviour

is the *Sun*, no matter what he is called, and his Virgin mother is the Heavens.

So certain is this that I have never been able to get from any Christian or reverent rationalist why, if the theory is wrong, Jesus should call himself the "Light of the World"? (I do not mean that there was a Jesus who really used these words. What I mean is that this and other sayings were attributed to Jesus by the Gospel writers.) Jesus said also that he was "a light to lighten the Gentiles," and that he came as "a light unto the world that whosoever should believe in him should not abide in darkness."

And, of course, at the Crucifixion, when Jesus died, "there was darkness all over the land." When the Sun "died," there had to be "darkness."

### A Pagan Feast

Almost everything about Christmas has been borrowed from paganism. St. Augustine himself admitted that "the thing which is now called the Christian Religion existed among the ancients. They have begun to call Christian the true religion which existed before." Why do we call Christmas, Yule-tide? Before it was celebrated by the Germanic races centuries before Jesus was heard of, at the same time as Christmas. They called it the Yule-feast in honour of Freyer, the son of Odin, the Great God, and Frigga. It was even celebrated by the ancient Druids on December 25th with mistletoe as their typical plant. In Brand's

*Popular Antiquities*, the author remarks: "There is perhaps no word of which there are so many and such different etymologies as Yule; or which nothing seems certain but that it means Christmas." And Yule is pagan through and through. In his *Northern Antiquities*, Mallet says: "All the Celtic nations have been accustomed to the worship of the Sun either as distinguished from Thor, or considered as a symbol. It was a custom that everywhere prevailed in ancient times, to celebrate a Feast at the Winter Solstice, by which men testified their joy at seeing this great luminary return again to this part of the heavens. They called it Yole or Yuul from the word Hiaul and Houll, which even at this day, signifies the Sun in the languages of Bass-Bretagne and Cornwall."

In any case, the feasting at Christmas, the Christmas Tree, the kissing under the mistletoe, the Christmas pudding, the games — one of which used to be the exchange of clothes between the sexes — and other customs in many country parts all over Europe, have no more to do with the birth of Christ than with the Suez Canal.

Which is one reason why Freethinkers can enjoy all the pagan festivities as heartily as the most faithful Christian.

Why shouldn't we enjoy and celebrate the turn of a new year, with its longer days and its promise of more and warmer sunshine? The pagans showed their good sense in celebrating the happy day or days, and we can do nothing better than emulate them.

## A Mind in Bondage

(A REPLY TO A THEOLOGICAL STUDENT)

By E. J. BARRETT

(Concluded from page 398)

"It is instinctive in a human being to believe in God." This is an old argument of the Christian apologist and, as in the case of the familiar argument from "Design," it is utterly baseless. For example, the Yahgans of Terra del Fuego, the wild Beddhas of Ceylon, and the Australian aboriginals do not believe in God, nor did the extinct Tasmanian aboriginals have such a belief. Surely a belief which is claimed to be "instinctive" should be shared by *all* human beings, without exception. Moreover, the fact that the Christian Church came into existence (and has employed refined instruments of torture) to "impress" this belief on human beings, a belief which, according to his statement, they already possessed "instinctively," certainly does serve to highlight the criminality of this institution. Anthropologists have clearly and amply demonstrated the fact that polytheistic and monotheistic beliefs take shape in the mind of primitive man through the medium of personification, and vanish as his store of knowledge increases. In other words, belief in the gods is but an expression of man's intellectual relationship to Nature — the more primitive this relationship is the more primitive will be his whole conception of Nature — and of the gods, friendly and hostile, which he feels are so important to his existence. But to confuse theism and idealism with the worship of Mammon is getting things thoroughly mixed up. Of course, Mammon is the object of worship and of supplication on a world-wide scale by Christians and others, but his claim to Divinity is a spurious one. He is merely a material god — invoked in terms of a purely selfish, sordid, human aspiration. Mammon's niche in the Hierarchy of the Gods was fittingly expressed by the poet Robert Buchanan, thus:

"A wondrous God! most fit for those  
Who cheat on 'Change, then creep to prayer;  
Blood on his heavenly altar flows;  
Hell's burning incense fills the air,  
And death attests in street and lane  
The hideous glory of his reign."

Truly, from the dawn of history, the reign of the gods, of whatever vintage, has been the crowning tragedy of human life. As for the story concerning Huxley, in which this famous man of science "was reported to have said that he would have given his right hand if he could only share the religious experiences of a Christian, who was afraid to debate with him because he would be beaten on scientific grounds," poor unfortunate Christian, not to have been prepared for this encounter by the faith that can move mountains! But where was this story reported? The source is invariably found in crude religious publications — never in the writings of those who are supposed to be the authors of them.

But let Huxley speak for himself on so important a subject. Writing to Charles Kingsley, he says:

"My convictions, positive and negative, on all the matters of which you speak are of long and slow growth and are firmly rooted. But the great blow which fell upon me [this was a *son's* bereavement—ED.] seemed to stir them to their foundation. And had I lived a couple of centuries earlier I could have imaged a devil scoffing at me and them — and asking me what profit it was to have stripped myself of the hopes and consolations of the mass of mankind? To which my only reply was and is — Oh, devil! truth is better than much profit. I have searched over the grounds of my belief, and if wife and child and name and fame were all to be lost to me one after the other as the penalty, still I will not lie." (*Life and Letters*, Vol. I; p. 313.)

Does that sound like the voice of a man who would sacrifice his right hand to believe that which his vigorous intellect rejected? That should dispose of the Huxley story.

For him who is in earnest in the search for truth, Reason will prove the most fruitful guide. "Blind faith" as a substitute is just a miserable subterfuge. As expressed by that distinguished thinker and noble humanitarian, the late Mr. Chapman Cohen:

"The only faith consistent with the dignity of civilised human beings is faith in themselves, in the potentialities of their nature, and in the world in which they live."

This is the philosophy of Commonsense — of Sanity — of Emancipation and Progress. And, in this perturbed and perilous age of ours, it is the only philosophy of survival.

## Joseph Turmel (1859-1949)

By F. A. RIDLEY

ADVANCED ORGANISATIONS have recently celebrated the centenary of that great scholar and versatile publicist, J. M. Robertson, perhaps the greatest intellect of which the English-speaking rationalist movement can boast.

To read through the list of his works in the monumental catalogue at the British Museum is an impressive experience, indeed an awe-inspiring one. Expert on religion, politics and economics, publicist on history and political theorist, defender of Shakespeare and denier of Jesus Christ! What a stupendous range the man had! He did not, however, apparently concur in the estimate of his many admirers who regarded him as the greatest scholar of his age. This distinction he reserved for his French contemporary and fellow freethinker Joseph Turmel. He thus demonstrated wisdom equally with modesty, for if there was one contemporary scholar whose stupendous output rivalled — it could hardly surpass — Robertson's, it was Turmel, "priest and historian of dogmas," as he has been aptly called. Robertson described Turmel as the greatest European scholar since the Renaissance. In his own special field, the evolution of Catholic dogma, this description was probably justified; it is unlikely that anyone has ever possessed Turmel's knowledge of Catholic dogma with its innumerable variations and subtle shades. From the standpoint of sheer erudition only his arch-admirer Robertson had a comparable claim. Of these two intellectual giants Robertson had a wider field and wrote on more subjects, but I do not believe anyone ever knew as much about his single subject as did Turmel, or displayed the erudition of his monumental masterpiece, the *History of Dogmas* in six volumes.

Robertson and Turmel were the two greatest scholars in their contemporary international freethought movement, but there the comparison ends. Their lives were entirely different. Robertson was a man of the world, a militant propagandist and an active politician, an M.P. and a Privy Councillor. Joseph Turmel, contrarily, spent his long life entirely in the cloister and in his library in clashes with an obscurantist ecclesiastical authority outraged by the heretical conclusions to his researches. Turmel was born in Rennes of poverty-stricken working class parents in 1859. Of precocious mental attainments, he entered the Church and devoted himself to lifelong study in theology; his external life was quite uneventful, save for his periodic clashes with theological authority, which would have been more frequent had not Turmel taken the precaution of writing the innumerable products of his vast erudition under a variety of pseudonyms, of which he had at one time no less than 14 in current circulation. The *History of Dogmas* was, however, written under his own name and after his final breach with the Church in 1930. Of his "minor" works, *The Life of the Devil* is by "Louis Coulanges" and is probably his best known work in English, while learned French periodicals are cluttered up with the innumerable productions of Turmel and his creations, Coulanges, Lagarde, Delafosse, etc., etc. There is unfortunately no English translation of the *History of Dogmas*.

The life of Turmel was concurrent with the spectacular rise and fall of the Modernist movement in the French Church, sponsored by a group of learned, chiefly French, priests, aiming at revising the medieval structure of Catholic theology so as to reconcile it with evolutionary science and biblical research. Turmel was not one of the active proponents of the Modernist movement as was his

fellow scholar Loisy, but he remained one of the "back room boys" of the movement whose learned researches, which demonstrated how often the "infallible" Church had been wrong in the past and how often the immutable creeds had been changed, provided the Modernist critique with potent ammunition. But even this mole-like burrowing did not always escape the vigilant eyes of ecclesiastical authority. Twice, in 1892 and again in 1908 Turmel was suspended from his clerical functions, and only a humiliating submission and formal recantation of his heretical opinions enabled him to return to his duties as a priest and his occupation as a scholar. His notebooks were burned and he himself was practically put on bread and water. On the second occasion the nature of his recantation raises grave problems of ethics, for he not only then professed an orthodoxy which his later writings plainly indicated fraudulent, but he formally stated in set terms that he was not identical with two of his pseudonyms. This was plain lying on the part of the great heretic. How far can it be justified? Himself a master of theological casuistry, he would no doubt have pleaded that the end justified the means — and he could have added that in his case the end was sheer self-preservation. The lot of a priest and a theological specialist, particularly one so unworldly as Turmel, turned adrift on the hard competitive surface of French society half a century ago, would not have been enviable.

However, the old adage, "Words are made to conceal thought," is perhaps truer of theologians than of anyone. Turmel formally retracted his heresies, but he persisted in them and continued to pour out learned and heterodox treatises under pen-names old and new. However, this prolonged game of intellectual double dealing could not go on for ever; it is surprising that it lasted as long as it did. But the blow finally fell. The infallible Church finally penetrated the numerous literary disguises of its most learned theologian. On November 8th, 1930, the most eminent and Reverend Cardinals of the Holy Office of Rome solemnly pronounced Joseph Turmel to be a heretic and an apostate, and excommunicated him with the greater excommunication as a man whom all the Faithful must henceforth avoid and shun as a moral leper. Posterity, or at least that minute portion of the reading public which is capable of assimilating bulky volumes of theological criticism, benefited by the Decree! Their attention was by this means drawn to the heretical priest, and a publisher was secured for his great work, the *History of Dogmas*, which is, one might say, to the spiritual empire of Rome what Gibbon's was to its secular counterpart. Turmel himself, with an irony not unworthy of Voltaire, dedicated it to the Holy Office of Rome, whose condemnation alone had made possible its publication. Like Loisy, Turmel broke altogether with Christianity in his final phase.

His last years were spent in his native city of Rennes, where he died in 1943. The local freethinkers recently raised a monument in his honour. His biographer lists 155 articles and 21 books under his own or other names, the articles being mostly lengthy treatises touching every aspect of the vast structure of Catholic theology. In the annals of French freethought Turmel ranks with the greatest. If he lacked the wit of Voltaire and the eloquence of Renan he probably knew more theology and Church history than anyone who ever lived, certainly more than any Doctor of the Church. He ranks amongst the greatest freethinkers of modern times.

## This Believing World

Anyone who doubts the reality of "survival" after reading our convincing proof should now disappear in shame. The "well-known" medium, Mrs. Helen Hughes, conjured up from Summerland the famous "Prime Minister of Mirth, George Robey," at a recent *Psychic News* demonstration. There could be no possible doubt whatever about it, for Mrs. Hughes first called him "George Robb," and then "tried to imitate Robey's gesture, slapping his thigh and exclaiming 'I'm damned if I knew I lived.'" This is the most convincing proof of George Robey's resurrection from the dread enemy we have ever read; and it proves that he must now be organising superbly funny variety shows for all the spooks in his district. Or so all Spiritualists now believe.

★

The coming of Christmas with its birth of Christ on December 25th, also brings with it the "Massacre of the Innocents"—as silly a story as the ones about Jesus and the Devil. Yet in one of our most distinguished Sunday journals, we have a reviewer of the *Life of Herod* by Stewart Perowne telling us that Herod the Great "is remembered for the Massacre of the Innocents." This reviewer actually believes the story! No doubt he also believes in Jesus and the Devil.

★

As a treat from too much "light" stuff, the Light BBC put on "The Floor is Yours" programme in which the Bishop of Coventry, with infinite courage, smilingly met the terrific onslaught of Messrs. Percy Cudlip, Walter James, and Francis Williams on what is called "the effectiveness of the Church." It seems a waste of time to comment on the fact that though we were told one of these gentlemen was an "unbeliever," all the questions were so beautifully and reverently put, that the good Bishop with a wave of his magic crook, disposed of them as easily as if he were "our Lord" himself. Believers and unbeliever alike accepted the Church exactly as did Calvin and Knox. Hardly a breath of heresy tainted the questions, and we have no doubt the Bishop felt that he had annihilated all horrid opposition to the Christian Gospel.

★

So long as we follow "our Lord's" teaching, surrender ourselves completely to Christ, and bring into the fold all erring and lost sheep—the Church, which is God Almighty's Divine Instrument, cannot fail, especially with our many stalwart Bishops at the head. And the piffing objections of blatant materialists can never, never obstruct the work of such a Church, which so happily brings grace and beauty to everyone, irrespective of creed or colour. That is why we have Bishops.

★

The BBC in its determination to let us know what religion is really like—as if we didn't know—obtained the services of Professor John Macmurray, who teaches moral philosophy in the University of Edinburgh, and who (we believe) shares with the Dean of Canterbury the honour of being both a Communist and a Christian, to tell us all about it. And if words and words and words go for anything, then he was an admirable choice. Of course, Christianity is a religion, but religion embraces much bigger fields; and he did his utmost to tell us what they were—though for some of us it may be better to accept religion forthwith without a struggle than to try and disentangle all his words and words. We await with impatience, all the same, where stands what it all must lead to—Christianity; for, whatever religion in the bulk may

be, the only true religion must be that of Paul and Jesus, or Jesus and Paul, whichever is the true way of putting it.

★

According to the Editor of the *Leicester Evening Mail*, Werner Keller's *The Bible as History* is perhaps the most important and remarkable book "published this century." No doubt at all that it is far more important even than the Bible itself—which has, incidentally, been published in many forms and versions since 1900. We are given statistics of the numbers published in various languages, and we are told that Dr. Keller is "an unusual combination of historian and scientist." Insofar as he quotes other scientists, he is a "scientist," but as an "historian" . . . good Lord! He has produced no evidence whatever that any of the events in the Bible are "historical" in the proper meaning of the word. We could ask him a thousand questions on this point—for instance, what is the historical evidence for Elijah flying up to Heaven in a fiery chariot?

## Drop in Attendance

THE CINEMA—as we all know—has had to fight hard to keep its place at the top of the entertainment table, and to attract the large attendances that go with that position. Now, whilst still struggling desperately against the challenge of television, it must prepare to resist a determined effort by another competitor—the Church, or, more exactly, Sheffield Church.

With the improvement of TV's performances, the cinema's crowds have dwindled; ominous open spaces are visible where there was formerly barely standing room. But young people of both sexes have remained faithful till now, regularly filling the darker recesses at the rear, rather more interested in each other, perhaps, than in the performance, but valued supporters nevertheless. It is possible that they may be lost to a rival that the cinema had long ceased to take seriously.

Leading the opposition is the Rev. David Jenkins, of Christ Church, Heeley, who has indicated (*Sunday Pictorial*, 18/11/56) that he is going all out for increased gates—avowedly at the cinema's expense.

"Some of the youngsters stop coming to church when they fall in love," he said. "They prefer going to the cinema, where they can be more affectionate than in church."

Then he went on to announce a relaxation of restrictions in the pews. "But they might be more enthusiastic about churchgoing if they know they can hold hands."

It seems that his remaining few veteran supporters have consented to these mollifications, and might even take advantage of them themselves. In fact, some old stalwarts went so far as to admit that they had already secretly defied the ban and had actually held hands with their wives!

Can we assess the likely result of the forthcoming struggle? Will the Rev. D. Jenkins and his team succeed in disaffecting the cinema's faithful young supporters? We do not think so. Though the cinema's showings have been very uneven, they are generally far superior to those in the pulpit. The cinema's main danger will still be television. The Church may even be relegated.

C.M.C.

—NEXT WEEK—

## Atheism in America

By R. H. SCOTT

# THE FREETHINKER

41 Gray's Inn Road, London, W.C.1.  
Telephone: Holborn 2601.

THE FREETHINKER will be forwarded direct from the Publishing Office at the following rates (Home and Abroad): One year, £1 10s. (in U.S.A., \$4.25); half-year, 15s.; three months, 7s. 6d. Orders for literature should be sent to the Business Manager of the Pioneer Press, 41 Gray's Inn Road, London, W.C.1.

## 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.

D.W.—From Hell there is no return, hence the propaganda value of Purgatory; the R.C. Church has made untold money getting people out of Purgatory!

S. and D. AYRES.—According to an article in the *Western Evening Herald*, thousands still believe in witchcraft.

## Lecture Notices, Etc.

### OUTDOOR

Edinburgh Branch N.S.S. (The Mound).—Every Sunday afternoon and evening: Messrs. CRONAN, MURRAY and SLEMEN.

Manchester Branch N.S.S. (Deansgate Blitzed Site).—Every weekday, 1 p.m.: Messrs. WOODCOCK, SMITH, CORSAIR and FINKEL. Sundays, 7.15 p.m.: Messrs. MILLS, WOODCOCK, and SMITH.

Merseyside Branch N.S.S. (Pierhead).—Meetings most evenings of the week (often afternoons): Messrs. THOMPSON, SALISBURY, HOGAN, PARRY, HENRY and others.

North London Branch N.S.S. (White Stone Pond, Hampstead).—Every Sunday, noon: L. EBURY and A. ARTHUR.

Nottingham Branch N.S.S. (Old Market Square).—Thursday, 1 p.m.: R. POWE. Friday, 1 p.m.: R. POWE. Sunday, 11 a.m.: R. MORRELL and R. POWE.

West London Branch N.S.S.—Every Sunday, at the Marble Arch, from 4 p.m.: Messrs. ARTHUR and EBURY.

### INDOOR

Bradford Branch N.S.S. (Mechanics' Institute).—Sunday, December 23rd, 6.45 p.m.: I. DENNY, "Human Relations in Industry."

Leicester Secular Society (Humberstone Gate).—Sunday, December 23rd, 6.30 p.m.: R. MORRELL, "Enemy of Liberty—the Vatican."

Nottingham Cosmopolitan Debating Society (Co-operative Hall, Parliament Street).—Sunday, December 23rd, 2.30 p.m.: L. R. ENFIELD, "A Universal Faith."

## Notes and News

A RECENT *Daily Mirror* picture showed a factory workshop where a service was being conducted, with a priest and factory workers, praying to lift a "death hoodoo" from the works after four sudden deaths in the firm. The workers were convinced that an evil force was hanging over them. Canon Bennett, Industrial Chaplain of Coventry Diocese, offered this prayer: "If there is any hoodoo in any part of this factory, as some say, we ask God to drive it away." We have no doubt that future immunity will be attributed to the efficacy of the prayer!

In Clacton, Essex, is a blind people's social club which has eighty members and meets in a Methodist memorial hall, where they sing, play games, and have refreshments. To raise funds these blind people, not overburdened with wealth, have been in the habit of running a raffle, 1½d. a ticket, with prizes of garden produce and small articles made by themselves. Unfortunately, their raffle has now been banned by the Methodist Minister, the Rev. G. Sanders, because "Gambling and games of chance" may not

## The Freethinker Sustentation Fund

PREVIOUSLY acknowledged, £137 15s. 8d.; A. Hancock, 1s.; A. W. Harris, 2s. 6d.; A. E. Stringer, £5; C. England, 5s.; A. Stephenson, £1; R. Hartley, £1; A. H. Briancourt, 10s.; W. T. Hawks (South Africa), 10s. 6d.; F. E. Papps, 5s.; A. H. Deacon, 10s.; F. Baker, 5s.—Total to date, December 14th, 1956, £147 4s. 8d.

be held on Methodist Church premises. Obviously, there's Methodism in this madness.

THE Russian Post Office is commemorating the 39th anniversary of the October Revolution in 1917 by issuing portrait stamps, on one of which will appear George Bernard Shaw. For October Revolution commemoration issues this is an innovation as previously only Russian personalities have been portrayed. This is only the second time for a British writer to appear on a Soviet stamp, Robert Burns (on a 40-kopec stamp in October) being the first.

IN Australia a controversy rages on state aid to denominational schools. This follows an offer by the Federal Government to pay the interest on building loans for Church schools. *Voice*, the Australian Labour monthly, asks very pertinently "why government funds should not also be used to assist the Liberal Party, the Communists, the Labor Party and trade unions to establish their own schools if they wish."

LEICESTER freethinkers have for some time enjoyed hitting that Aunt Sally of the local *Evening Mail*, "The Padre," though not all their letters have been allowed to get into print. With his hopelessly unscientific mind and obsolete Christian pleading he seemed excellently adapted to the average level of newspaper religion, though it was always necessary to protect him from too much secularist attack. Possibly, however, he has not satisfied the more enlightened elements in the Christian camp; at any rate, his column is to be discontinued.

WRITING a sort of obituary on the Padre's column, Canon Eaton fervently hopes the *Evening Mail* will now give its space generously to *religious news*. Well, we suggest that for a start the *Mail* might give some attention to those matters concerning the London Diocesan Fund which have recently been the subject of comment in THE FREETHINKER and in *Reynolds News*.

THE *Evening Mail* is also serialising Dr. Keller's "Bible as History." When the announcement of this series was made, the *Evening Mail* was straightway supplied with Mr. C. T. Salisbury's FREETHINKER article refuting Keller and the use made of him. We suggest the *Mail* should reproduce Mr. Salisbury's article and then open up some fair controversy.

JOSEPH LEWIS, President of the Freethinkers of America, has announced that the organisation will undertake an effort to bring to court the government's addition of the words "under God" in the pledge of allegiance to the flag, as unconstitutional. Funds are being collected as it is expected that it may reach higher courts and take considerable money.

### HERETIC

Folk tell me I'm a heretic  
And much inclined to scoff.  
'Tis true, and so I'll carry on  
Until I'm carried off.

C.E.R.

## Our Maltese Marksman

By COLIN McCALL

"IT IS NOT THE FIRST TIME I have read bitter comments against the Maltese clergy — in which the spleen and venom dished out verges on the ridiculous — but the report from Malta by a special correspondent which appeared in a recent issue of THE FREETHINKER takes pride of place for distortion."

That is the opening sentence of a long article in the Maltese paper, *The Bulletin*, of November 29th, under the bold three-column headline, "Attack on the Maltese Clergy." It refers to the first of the two reports from Malta (November 16th). Possibly the second may evoke a similar response. Certainly THE FREETHINKER seems to have caused something of a disturbance on George Cross Island. It is because I regard disturbances of this kind as beneficial that I should like to devote some attention to the *Bulletin* article.

Though the first paragraph continues "Actually I cannot expect anything better from THE FREETHINKER, whose columns are filled with the most nauseating attacks and sarcasm on everything that we Catholics hold sacred"; and although it accuses our correspondent of "going out of his way to deliver in an almost inimitable style low punches against the Catholic clergy in Malta," the next sentence is the most significant: "*Obviously he was well informed*" (my italics).

Having made this all-important admission, *The Bulletin* proceeds to display the "spleen and venom" that it imputes to our writer, and its venom is like that of a spitting cobra that has been cornered. Like the cobra, the Roman Church is — we need hardly remind readers — a dangerous antagonist. It may strike suddenly and quickly and one may never know where. We are dealing with an institution merciless to its enemies when it has the power. It was therefore decided not to print the name of the Special Correspondent of THE FREETHINKER. But we printed the facts he gave us. Hence the shower of venom.

Have his facts been contested? One tiny slip alone has been indicated: Father Coppola, who is in charge of the organisation of Maltese emigrants in London, is not a Jesuit. For the rest: well, the correspondent of THE FREETHINKER was "well informed" — on the admission of the Catholic *Bulletin* of Malta. We are told by the *Bulletin* that his "perversion . . . knows no bounds," but that is because "the loyalty and sense of affection which we all feel for all the saints and in particular for the patron saint of our village comes in under the vitriolic pen." Let him "wallow in the trough of anti-clericalism," says *The Bulletin* in another choice phrase; "only a perverse pen could scribble the most lying of untruths"; "he dishes the vile accusation . . ."; "the odium and malice of the special correspondent goes further." From such examples it will be seen that, however much it may protest that our correspondent's ideas are "returned with thanks, without anger or offence, without foam or rage," this is quite the reverse of the truth. As Hamlet remarked, one can protest too much: this is patently the case here.

*The Bulletin* considers that "one can easily gauge the mentality of the special correspondent." Insofar as this refers to his plainly stated opinions no remarkable powers of deduction are required. Of course, our correspondent would like Maltese parents to practise birth control and to keep their children away from Catholic Action; of course he ridiculed the call for "Mary-like" dresses which was launched last summer. To *The Bulletin* this last implies

that "he would also like to have our maidens expose their nude bodies for public display." Does the writer not realise there is such a thing as a happy — and healthy — medium? Whether he does or not, the Maltese maidens must surely do so soon.

What is "really hurting" THE FREETHINKER correspondent, is literary censorship. Here *The Bulletin* reveals unusual perspicacity. It is absolutely right: literary suppression does hurt him, as it hurts every freethinker and, indeed, every libertarian. *The Bulletin* may be unaware that some of the noblest minds in Europe have fought for the free expression of ideas through the spoken and written word. It may not know that England's greatest epic poet also wrote a prose masterpiece demanding freedom of publication. Milton, as an anti-Papist, is no doubt little known in Malta. Perhaps the *Areopagitica* would be confiscated there as likely "to poison the minds of the young men and women of Malta." I should be interested to know from *The Bulletin* whether this would happen, for it is *The Bulletin* which, with a typical Romanist twist, accuses anti-Catholics of wanting "to catch them [the Maltese] young." Not "catch" them, sir, but save them from being caught!

Who is fooling whom? *The Bulletin* thinks our Special Correspondent is fooling us; it requests that he "pour out the vials of his wrath where it is suited." "That place," it adds, "is certainly not the Catholic clergy, in Malta or elsewhere."

Whether or not our correspondent wrote in wrath is for readers to judge. Assuredly he wrote with conviction, and *The Bulletin* admits that he was well informed. These are two admirable qualities in a correspondent; qualities prized by THE FREETHINKER. Apart from the minor slip of calling Fr. Coppola a Jesuit, the Special Correspondent was extremely accurate in his aim, and the explosion in *The Bulletin* proves that he hit the right target — the Catholic Church.

[THE FREETHINKER is not to be deterred by Catholic wrath in Malta or anywhere else, so in our next issue we shall publish an appeal from our Maltese correspondent to the Islanders urging them to throw off the yoke of the Catholic Church.—ED.]

## The Blessing of a New Train

HUNDREDS of people of all classes arrived to view the spectacle, some on horseback, some on foot, others, as a penance, on their knees. Last of all our bishop, nearly an hour late, stepped out of his grand Cadillac, dressed in his robes of office, the sun striking on his adornments of gold and old lace. Before he began his holy work, he graciously explained to us the meaning of the ceremony:

"As original sin," he said, "not only exists in man but in all things made by man; as human beings are evil when they come from the wombs of their mothers, so are steel and iron evil when they come from the womb of their earth, also such things are often possessed by the devil and must be exorcised and blessed before being used." After much casting of Latin into the furnace and shaking of Holy Water over the engine, our new train, exorcised and blessed, gaily puffed, then lightly sped on her way, surely feeling happy at the thought that she was now washed of her sins and free of devils!

N.F. (Portugal)

## Who is Santa Claus?

By A. R. WILLIAMS

HAVING BUILT up on the floor a castle of wooden blocks, Teddy sent the structure into ruins with one blow of his fist. Turning to his sister, he said "I'm getting too big for bricks."

"Hm," murmured Julie, curled up on the couch, absorbed in a girl's magazine.

Teddy raised his voice to declare: "I'm too old for bricks or wooden toys of any sort."

Julie laid down her magazine and looked at her seven-year-old brother.

He went on "I want a gun, or an airplane that really flies, or a space suit."

Julie smiled as she asked, "D'you think you'll get 'em?"

"Well. It isn't long till Christmas, so I'm going to ask Santa Claus for 'em."

"Santa Claus! Father Christmas," repeated the girl.

Something about her tone drew the boy's slightly puzzled attention. He knelt up on the hearthrug and stared at her. She pronounced: "I've told mother what I want for Christmas."

"What's that?"

"A nursing outfit and a cooking set. Dolls're nothing to me. I want something real I can work with."

The boy asked: "Why did you tell mother?"

"Who else is there to tell, only father, and mother'll tell him?"

"Santa Claus," suggested Teddy.

The glances of him and his sister turned toward the fireplace. Teddy went to it and peered up. It was a modern grate with a flue only a few inches in area.

"Are you going to call up it and tell Santa Claus what you want?" asked Julie playfully.

Her brother stood irresolute and slightly shamefaced.

She continued: "Look at the size of the chimney and think if Father Christmas could come down that."

Teddy peeped up again and shook his head.

"Besides," added Julie, with the superior knowledge of 12 years, "think of the thousands and thousands of chimneys he has to come down in one night. He couldn't do it in the time."

"God could," declared Teddy, brightly.

"That's a different thing. He might, but he never does. I'll tell you now, because you ought to know. Santa Claus is our father and mother. They bring the gifts and place 'em by our beds late at night after we're asleep."

"I'll lie awake and see for sure myself this Christmas Eve," exclaimed Teddy.

His sister laughed, saying "I thought I would, but couldn't. You'll go fast asleep and wake up in the morning to enjoy the surprise."

"I shall. Even though you say it's only daddy and mummy who bring our presents."

"It is."

"And there's no Santa Claus?"

"No." The negative was emphatic.

The boy stood gazing at his sister, digesting what she told him. At length he uttered the impact of the doubts she had sown in his mind, saying: "You'll be telling me next there's no God."

"Very likely I shall when I'm a few years older and know more than I do now. When I ask grown-up people questions they can't answer they say it's God, just to cover up their ignorance. So when I'm grown-up I shall find out for myself."

She picked up the magazine again, while Teddy sat down on the floor to think.

## Gluttony and Godliness

By MIMNERMUS SECUNDUS

WE HAVE now arrived at the annual orgy of gluttony and foolishness, the merry birthday of the Man of Sorrows, which placates the orthodox superstition only at the price of exposing the pagan origins of our national faith. Christmas, undeterred by recent events in which the world has walked the precipice between war and peace, is the realisation of an alderman's dream in the way of eating and drinking.

Thomas Carlyle wrote in his diary: "On looking out of the window this morning I noticed that my neighbours were more drunk than usual, and I remembered that it was the birthday of their Redeemer."

It was in competition with the feast of Saturnalia, one of the chief festivals of Ancient and Pagan Rome, that Christmas Day had its date fixed in December. The anniversary of the god Saturn, and his wife, was held from December 17th to 24th, and the Emperor Caligula generously added another day of public rejoicing. On these festal days of Ancient Rome, prior to the birth of Christianity, the schools were closed, no punishment was inflicted, the toga was replaced by an undress garment, distinctions of rank were laid aside, servants sat at the same table with their employers, and all classes of people, rich and poor alike, exchanged gifts. The natural propensity of converts from the older paganism to cling to custom proved invincible, and the wily Christian ecclesiastics bent before the opposition. If these apostates, and their money, were to be retained in the fold of the new superstition, it became very necessary to incorporate the old under the mask of the new. The struggle with paganism did not end here. As in ancient Rome, so in Britain. In the far-off centuries, white-robed Druid priests cut the sacred mistletoe with a golden sickle, and chanted their hymns to the frosty air. These Druidic features were absorbed in their turn, and the sacred mistletoe and the carol-singing still play their minor, if amusing, parts in the celebration of the birthday of the "God" of the Christian Religion.

This is the simple explanation why "God's birthday" is associated with feasting and merriment. Why "God," who is described as eternal, should have a birthday at all is a matter for Christian theologians to settle among themselves in their ample leisure. Non-Christians, who form the majority of the world's inhabitants, regard Jesus Christ as a purely mythical personage, like all the other saviours and sun-gods of antiquity, who were generally born miraculously of virgin-mothers, and whose careers, like that of Christ, were marked with the most marvellous happenings. Whether there was an actual man called Jesus, who lived and preached in Galilee, is a matter of microscopic importance. Christians of all denominations worship the non-human figure portrayed in the four Gospels, and not the Galilean carpenter, and have done so for near two thousand years.

Indeed, "God's birthday" was not observed regularly until many generations after the alleged date of the birth of Jesus Christ. When first observed, it was held on varying dates. The precise time of his birth, like that of James de la Pluche, was "wropt in mystery," but it was certainly not in December, even according to the romantic priestly legends. The reasons why innocent Christian people observe Christmas Day on December 25th is a capital piece of Christian evidence, and exposes one of the cleverest tricks of the Christian priests, who always have proved themselves the finest showmen in the world. Christmastide has as many diverse ingredients as a Christmas pudding, and is even more indigestible.

This legendary Eastern story of "God's birthday" is pretence and make-believe, and its hypocritical priestly confessions of peace and goodwill are discounted by the very priests themselves, who christen battleships and bless the regimental flags. It is the paradox of paradoxes that the Christian world today has all the horrible apparatus of wholesale murder, and yet professes to worship a deity who commanded his followers not to kill, and to obey his commands of non-resistance and forgiveness until seventy-times seven. To such a sorry pass, after two thousand years of the Christian Superstition has the Western world come. The merry birthday of the "Man of Sorrows" is an organised priestly hypocrisy, a fitting ironic celebration of an event that never happened.

## Freethought Abroad

### BRAZIL

Brazil is one of the few places where positivism is still organised. This "Religion of Humanity," founded by Comte, rejects Christianity and the supernatural, but attempts to build a religion round some prominent human figures of history, such as Socrates, Newton, etc. In the apparent absence of any freethought body in Brazil the existence of a positivist movement may be regarded as at least a step in the freethought direction.

Latest figures show that 93.7% of people in Brazil are Roman Catholic (nominally at any rate), 3.4% Protestant, 1.6% Spiritualist, 0.8% of other religions and 0.5% with no religion.

### GERMANY

Curt Ganswindt, editor of the *Monthly Review (Monatschau)* writes:

"We have just opened our new Freethought Hall, which should become a source of monetary, as well as cultural, profit. At the moment we are engaged in a difficult fight here in Berlin against the power of the Catholic clergy. Over 60% of Berlin's business capital is in Catholic hands. They also govern the press and radio, so that articles and broadcasts from us and our supporters are not permitted. Religious broadcasts are, of course, given — without right of reply from the freethought side. In spite of this, only about 12% of Berliners are Catholics, and of those many are lapsed. In the Evangelical Church only about one in ten members (i.e. those *born* into this Church) can be considered Christians."

The new Freethought Hall referred to by Herr Ganswindt is being used for lectures and for such social occasions as weddings and birth ceremonies. Another correspondent, Gertrud Schultz, gives us a graphic description of the first wedding in the hall.

### JAPAN

In 1955 a Humanist Association was formed, consisting of about fifty intellectuals under the presidency of Ichiro Hara, who describes himself as "a religious liberal." The Association have produced a *Course in Modern Humanism* (four volumes), and will participate in the 1957 Humanist Congress in London. There is no militant freethought body in Japan as yet.

### LUXEMBURG

Pierre Becker, secretary to the Luxemburg Freethinkers, reports that a small body of 350 members has now been reassembled after the war, the Luxemburgische Freidenkerbund. No publication is yet issued but there is a monthly circular, *Mitteilungsblatt*.

### SWEDEN

Dr. Paul Marcus, our correspondent in Sweden, informs us of the existence of a "Society for Religious Freedom" in Finland, which does not suggest any militant anti-clerical character, though in Sweden the fight is conceivably against superstition in general rather than against clerical power. The activities of this body seem more or less confined to Stockholm district. Its journal is *Fri Tanke (Freethought)*.

## CORRESPONDENCE

### CHURCH PROPERTY

I notice in *Reynolds News* for December 2nd that Mr. Parkin, the M.P. for Paddington North, has tabled questions in the House on the stepping up of certain rents in his constituency by the Church Commissioners. Certainly, on the facts as stated, the rise seems harsh and steep, whilst there is apparently no allowance made for hardship. I am left wondering what the elderly and devout Bishop of London, in whose diocese the incident has occurred, thinks about it. It is to be hoped that he will take the side of the tenants, but perhaps this is to expect too much. Within a democracy, the Church must be told that its social oppressiveness is going to be tolerated no longer. Separation of Church and State with a concurrent disendowment has been long overdue, whilst an approach to the problems of housing from the standpoint of social justice would prevent incidents of the type concerning which Mr. Parkin complains. Certainly, there seems no reason why a body which represents in practice a tiny minority of the population should be allowed to oppress the lives of the people at large in any direction, and it is high time that the bishops were told so in no uncertain terms.

ANDREW PEARSE

### N.S.S. EXECUTIVE MEETING

WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 12TH.—Present: Messrs. F. A. Ridley (Chairman), Alexander, Arthur, Barker, Cleaver, Ebury, Hornbrook, Johnson, Shepherd, Taylor, Tiley, Mrs. Venton, the Treasurer (Mr. Griffiths) and the Secretary. Apologies from Messrs. Draper and Gordon. New members were admitted to Birmingham, Central London, Glasgow, Manchester, North London, Wales and Western and Parent Branches (13 in all). Reports of meetings and correspondence were received from various branches. Mr. Arthur agreed to continue sending reports to Wales and Western Branch. A member's success in obtaining the right to hold secular services in Bournemouth was commended; solicitor's advice on literature sales in Bristol, and barrister's agreement to investigate blasphemy laws in West Indies were reported; dinner arrangements were considered. It was agreed to publicise the spread of rating exemption for parsonages and the like, and to approach ITV with recommendation for a programme. Rules Committee's proposals for Standing Orders were largely approved. The sensation caused in Malta by reports in *THE FREETHINKER* was noted with satisfaction. Mr. J. Tiley announced his resignation from the E.C. Thanks were expressed for his past services. The next meeting was fixed for Wednesday, January 16th, 1957.

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