

The Freethinker

Vol. LXXVLL — No. 18

Founded 1881 by G. W. Foote

Price Fivepence

A FEW DAYS AGO (at the time that these lines are written) Sir Ian Jacob the former British General whom an ironical destiny has now elevated to the rank of Director-General of the BBC — in effect, the British "Minister of Propaganda" — announced to the press new and dramatic changes in the future of sound-radio. Soon after, the press announced the arrival of a "radio revolution" on the air. Actually, since the creation by a Tory government of a "free enterprise" of ATV commercial television — it appears that both the sound radio and television services of the BBC are hard put to it to hold their own — and their subscribers. So the "blessed law of competition" as the Liberal economists of the Victorian era used to call it has now extended its empire to the air! In practice this seems to mean that the intellectual level of the BBC will tend to get lower and lower as is usually the case in an economic set up in which *real* values and money values tend to be in inverse proportion to each other. The BBC pursuant upon the competitive principle must now seek to meet ATV on its own nakedly commercial principles into which intellectual, artistic and/or ethical considerations are at best, only incidental. We have often criticised the BBC in the past, but at present it looks as if we shall soon have to lament the passing of the good old times. For "the shape of things to come" of the forthcoming radio revolution as announced already in the press does not sound very promising to *thinkers* of any kind — and in particular to *Freethinkers*. The emphasis we are told is henceforth to be on "light" that is, on the Light Programme which is to become—Heaven help us (but it won't)—even lighter than in the past. The hardly high-brow Home Programme is it appears to play a less considerable role in proportion to its Light colleague; and though a gallant last minute whip-round by its small but devoted band of regular listeners, has for the time being at least, saved the high-brow Third from complete obliteration; it is apparently to be cut pretty drastically in both time and space: or, in deference to a pretty gloomy future for rational radio fans not to mention the "noble army of viewers." To paraphrase the great poet of "The Age of Reason", Alexander Pope:

"Thy hand, great Anarch, bids the curtain fall,
And universal darkness buries all."

The Robot Age

Perhaps the most significant expression coined during the last generation was the term, "Robot", by the Czech dramatist, Capek. On account of its striking congruity with the mechanical tendencies of our age, the word has transcended the play, *R.U.R.*, in which it first appeared. By the term, one understands the use of the machine as a substitute for human thought and activity. The marvellous technical progress of our time has raised to the level of actual possibility, the frightening prospect of a world worked, run and eventually ruled, by machines. One aspect already darkens

the life of mankind: the appalling visa of collective suicide. The military reforms announced by the present British Government take us a long step from war by hand — by, so to speak, manual labour — to the mechanised, non-human wars of the future, with propulsive rockets, pilotless planes, and inhuman — and non-human — death-rays.

Early in the present century, Anatole France foresaw the time when the "army" would consist of a few old men who, by merely pressing levers, could launch destruction upon cities and desolation upon continents. The H bomb has turned terrible fiction into yet more

— VIEWS and OPINIONS —

Freethought and the Radio

By F. A. RIDLEY

terrible fact.

The Television Age

The institution of war, however, is perhaps a special case. But human life, as it continues, will still be submerged beneath the impact of the machine age. Perhaps this tendency is best exemplified at present by the rapidly growing diffusion of television, the most sensational expansion of the past decade, the ultimate influence of which will be, perhaps, greater and more ubiquitous than any mechanical device so far discovered. Our age may be almost described as the age of television: its formidable influence must be taken into account in any rational estimate of the future. From the angle of Free — that is independent — thought, this new medium of the age of robots is, perhaps, the most disquieting of all.

The Individual in the Present Age

At a recent memorial meeting to those two eminent Freethinkers, Chapman Cohen and Joseph McCabe, the present writer remarked that the appearance of such rare and original thinkers as these, would be far more difficult nowadays than it was in their own age. For the nineteenth century, despite the harsh economic conditions which characterised the lives of the great majority, was undeniably favourable to outstanding individuals. It was, in fact, an age, preeminently, of great individuals. There were giants on the earth in those days! I have no patience with the pygmies who turn debunking into a recognised and lucrative profession, but the arch individuals — and individualists — of that age; a Charles Bradlaugh or a Herbert Spencer, for example, would find life vastly more difficult today. And so would their younger contemporaries, a Cohen or a McCabe! they would be snowed under by the current dead weight of mediocrity. For society is now organised, more and more, on a fixed pattern, and great originality does not thrive in — or on — patterns set by other people.

Free Thought in a Mechanised Age

What has all this to do with Freethought — or THE FREETHINKER? In the present writer's opinion, a great deal. For any thought that is genuinely free is getting more and more difficult: more and more submerged beneath the weight

of mediocre propaganda which, thanks to TV and radio is now all but universal. It would, I suggest, be quite an arguable proposition that TV represents as great a danger to free thought as the Roman Catholic Church — and I do not think I am likely to be accused of underestimating *that* particular danger. In point of fact, the two dangers are not unconnected: the Catholic Church is an adept at mass organisation. We recall the remark of the old German general that there were only three perfectly organised institutions in the world: the German Army, Standard Oil Company, and the Roman Catholic Church! The church

which invented propaganda, knows how to use the new methods of radio and TV. Contrarily, the free thinker, gets no opportunity to do so. No longer, as in the days of Bradlaugh and Paine, are the same avenues of propaganda open to the orthodox majority and to the heretical minority. Today, it is TV versus the soap box which alone remains the radical propagandist. But the soap box, despite its long and honourable past, when matched against the mass propaganda of screen and radio, represents a tomahawk in the hand of a redskin warrior against the tanks and jet planes of modern war. Truly, a sinister prospect.

Towards an Ideal World Order

By E. G. MACFARLANE

THE RECENT important exchange of views on Hungary in the columns of THE FREETHINKER produced the following significant sentences from Colin McCall: "Where I differ from Mr. Varney and his sympathisers is in believing that mankind is not limited to the choice between Catholicism and Communism. I think there is a third way — the way of the 'open society,' democratic radicalism."

I hope that most Freethinkers agree with Mr. McCall in those sentiments but only provided — and I think this is a vital requisite — they also have cosmopolitan sympathies rather than local patriotic sympathies.

We are so deeply in the throes of a tangle of ideological inspirations that it is vital that we should adopt a principle which will eliminate the strongest competitors for the loyalties of men from the very outset of our endeavour.

What we must realise is that neither Catholicism nor Communism (which are only representatives of a very numerous band of aspiring groups with dictatorial ambitions) have been able to withstand the onslaughts of local nationalism. Local nationalism has proved itself to have superior powers over the great majority of individual minds by the mere fact that international wars have resulted in Roman Catholics killing other Roman Catholics and Communists killing other Communists at the behests of conflicting nationalisms. I have no doubt that there have been exceptions to that sort of thing. But the number of individuals who were able to put their loyalty to their faith above their loyalty to their "country" must be insignificant compared with those who put their "country" first.

Here we have a psychological fact of prime significance to all who believe it possible for rational intelligence and will-power to provide a solution for the most urgent problems facing the human race. As scientific thinkers we must assume that it is possible for us to manipulate the factors which result in the present chaos of competitive war-making and war-preparation — even where the factors are of a psychological nature.

We may be able to appreciate that some Catholics and some Communists have been inspired by cosmopolitan ideals in the past. The fact remains that those with cosmopolitan ideals must have failed to carry conviction to the minds of most of their fellows when those who preferred to try to exploit local nationalism rather than exorcise it became leaders. However, time has proved the dangers of supporting the principle of local nationalism and consequently the wrongness of it. We all know how Tito (Yugoslav nationalist) broke with the Cominform and how the Stalinist principle of retaining local nationalisms has led to divisions in the front which Communism has presented to the rest of the world. No doubt similar instances could be given from the history of the Roman Catholic movement as in Poland. These divisions provide us — the democratic radicalists — with our great opportunity. Can we

lead mankind out of the frustrations of international competition into a golden age of general human co-operation and at the same time kill the dangerous weeds of dictatorship which tend to flourish in an atmosphere of war-making?

I think we can. I think that a movement dedicated to a cosmopolitan democratic radicalism is the fundamental necessity.

I cannot agree with Mr. McCall that the movement in India led by Nehru is on the right lines. It has exploited local patriotism instead of extirpating it. The evidence is in the emotional singing of "Bande Mataram" and the fruits are to be seen in the viciously selfish national policy which has been pursued in Goa and Kashmir as well as with the reintroduction of Hindustani as a "national language" and the encouragement of anti-white sentiments inside India.

A true cosmopolitanism will attack racism and patriotism of a restricted or local type whenever it can and a democratic radicalism will attack any and every intention to establish any form of dogmatism except that of freedom to seek the truth. Am I not correct in asserting that herein lies the essence of the ideal world order which should inspire and unite Freethinkers all over the world?

Out of Evil . . .

MANY YEARS AGO I made a call on the Director of Education in the town where I lived. "I wish to take advantage of the Secular Education Act," I informed him, "and will you please refrain from giving my son any religious instruction?" I thought the man would have had a fit. "Atheists, are you?" he shouted. "Yes," I replied. "What about it?" "I thought you were," he said, "because you did not take off your hat when you entered my office."

"I never remove my hat," I told him, "except in the presence of the Devil," and I immediately removed my hat and placed it on his desk.

The Director was speechless, and the two clerks seemed delighted. I wished the Director good day, and departed. Soon afterwards I went to sea, and was away for about 12 months. Then one evening upon my return, my son came into the kitchen with a book under his arm. "What book is that, son?" I asked. "The Holy Bible, Dad," he replied. "I won first prize at school for scripture." So any reader can see what notice the education authorities took of an Act of Parliament and the parent's demand.

However, my son is now grown up and is an Atheist, and in a sense I am glad he won the Bible, for whenever I am writing to the press and I cannot lay my hand on the *Bible Handbook* to find out what Moses, Joshua, Elijah, or any of the other Bible Beauties said, I simply ask my son, and he has all the answers. And so, out of evil there came good after all.

PAUL VARNEY.

A Convert Remembers

[A review of *Memory to Memory* by Arnold Lunn]

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

SOME TIME AGO I contributed a critical article on Sir Arnold Lunn's apologia for his conversion to Roman Catholicism, *Now I See*. His latest work is primarily of a biographical nature but in describing his life's adventures he makes, in his customary dogmatic manner, many controversial religious statements.

There are few strictly theological arguments (in the technical sense) in *Memory to Memory*, but when Sir Arnold does enter into this field he as usual goes far astray. "There is," he writes, "a dignity and breeding common to those who are more interested in the next world than in this." This is the kind of vague generalisation so frequently indulged in by woolly-headed religious thinkers of this type. It would be just as true (and as pointless) to say that there is a dignity and breeding common to those who reject the idea of a next world, Bertrand Russell and Dr. Bronowski being conspicuous modern examples. Sir Arnold's understanding of the secular attitude to the belief in immortality is curious. Thus he writes that "if it is untrue it is harmless, and if true consoling." On the contrary, a man who holds that there is a future state where the injustices of this world will be straightened out will be much more likely to refrain from rectifying the world than he who maintains that this present life is the be-all and end-all. Moreover, any righteous behaviour practised by the former will, consciously or unconsciously, have an ulterior motive, the hope of bliss to come. Apart from the irresistible logical arguments, that is the chief moral consideration against the idea of a future life.

Sir Arnold, of course has a very firm belief in the dogma of "original sin." But one suspects that such natural instincts, uncontaminated by Catholic immoral sanctions, which he retains, at times revolt against this repellent doctrine. It is true he violently attacks the nineteenth century campaign for free love, which he says "was in effect the search for carefree lust." (Perhaps incidentally Sir Arnold will explain what distinguishes love between a man and a woman from normal love between those of the same sex, if it is not lust!) Nevertheless, he writes — rather wistfully it seems — that Norman Douglas, "who had as little sense of sexual sin as the Greeks," was "a charming and impenitent old sinner," who, he hopes, "has scraped into heaven on the plea of invincible Hellenism." It may be surmised that in his heart of hearts Sir Arnold realises what appalling tedium would prevail in the heaven envisaged by Catholic theologians.

One of Sir Arnold's favourite contentions is that religion and culture are coincident so that "culture declines as secularism advances." Thus he quotes with approval Monk Gibbon's assertion that a civilisation collapses "when that essential reverence for absolute values that religion gives disappears." This is an even grosser distortion of the plain facts of history than Catholics usually perpetrate. Clive Bell in his famous book *Civilisation*, points out that the most highly civilised eras of culture have been fifth century B.C. Athens, fifteenth century Italy and eighteenth century France. Now every one of those periods was characterised by a revolt against orthodoxy and a flowering of scepticism expressed by such heretics as Protagoras, Socrates, Aristophanes, the Renaissance Humanists, Voltaire and the Encyclopedists. On the other hand, the total absence of any civilised values and the triumph of ignorance and superstition during the Dark Ages when the Church was supreme

must be apparent to everyone not blinded by theological dogmatism.

A proof of the coincidence of terrorism and atheism is thought by Sir Arnold to be seen in the cases of Communism and Nazism, both of which he avers are godless philosophies. In fact, however, the spirit of these ideologies is identical with that of Catholicism, even though they may nominally renounce belief in a personal Deity. They have their priesthood, their sacred books, their heretics. Above all, they are totalitarian in character, tolerating no expression of opposition to their views so long as they have the power to prevent it.

Sir Arnold's attempts to deny the obvious parallels between Catholicism and Communism in particular are, to say the least, extremely unconvincing. He claims that Catholics often disobey the Pope's edicts if these conflict with social customs or national loyalties. Even if this was written before the large-scale revolt of Communists following the Khrushchev revelations, the highly independent line of Tito in defiance of Moscow cannot have escaped Sir Arnold's notice. In recent months, of course, the defection of Gomulka from orthodox Sovietism in favour of "social customs" and "national loyalties" makes Sir Arnold's distinction quite nugatory. Indeed, since the dissolution of the Cominform it can be argued that Communism is less totalitarian than Catholicism since there are no Kremlin *ex cathedra* pronouncements. Unquestionably, the subservient cast of mind displayed by the Communist and the Catholic is identical. That is why ex-Communists such as Douglas Hyde and Louis Budenz find no difficulty in adjusting themselves to the service of Rome. It is simply a case of the exchange of one set of symbols for another.

As a good Catholic, Sir Arnold is a firm believer in the occasional legitimacy of war in settling international disputes. One of his criteria for establishing the superiority of Toryism over Socialism is that many more Tory than Socialist M.P.s served in the last war. In other words, more Tories than Socialists indulged in the anti-Sermon-on-the-Mount practice of returning evil for evil. Even more nauseating than this line of argument is Sir Arnold's repeated attempts to whitewash the Franco Government. He states, for example, that "Spanish Protestants enjoy complete liberty to practise their religion." Yet Article Six of the infamous Concordat of August 1953 between Franco and the Vatican (which Sir Arnold, of course, never so much as mentions) explicitly states that "no public display or propaganda of any other religion than the Roman Catholic one will henceforth be permitted." If this is Sir Arnold's idea of "complete religious liberty" it goes a long way towards explaining why he has submitted himself to the totalitarianism of the Roman Catholic faith.

FATIMA

LAST year (1956) the October 13th Fatima celebrations (prostrations) were marked by an unusual event. This was the inauguration of the H.Q. of the Blue Army, a Catholic legion pledged to convert Russia by means of prayers and the worship of Our Lady of Fatima.

This Believing World

In the good old days before World War 1, it was the Turks, then occupying Palestine, who prevented the various sects of Christians at Easter from flying at each other's throats, so much they loved one another. This year, machine guns are mounted on two sides in Jerusalem, with "gaps" and barbed wire; and God Almighty, Jesus, and Allah must be having a wonderful time preventing Jews, Christians and Arabs from slaughtering each other — helped of course by the aforesaid machine guns. Somehow or other, in this "Holy Land" religion is about the last thing which would prevent wholesale murder.

★

Both the "Daily Mail" and "News Chronicle" dealt with religion just before Easter and they made no secret of the fact that as such it was in a pretty bad way all over England. It is true that the Churches are jubilant — but that is because they have captured the BBC, TV and ITV, and thus can boast of millions of viewers and listeners for their religious programmes. In many cases, however, the show is kept on, not because people are really concerned for Christ and his Church, but because it's a bore to turn it off, especially if Wyatt Earp or any good Western, or even a musical item, follows.

★

In addition, viewers are always intrigued with a pipe-smoking parson, breezy and boisterous, who has discovered the Saviour once for all, and who really imagines because he has, everybody else should do so. As for the people who support him — clerks, engineers, factory workers, with a good sprinkling of unglamorous ladies from similar walks of life — they certainly provide a feast of entertainment in proving how supremely silly a "cross section" of the public can be.

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The real point to note is that the most indifferent Christian and church-goer, even if he admits he is not much of a believer, rarely questions the Bible. That much discussed Book is God's Holy Word, and when a parson tells us that Jesus said this or that, or did something or other — it would hardly ever be questioned by the people who surround the genial Man of God. Never would he be told that the four Gospels, packed with stories of miracles as they are, were unknown before about the year 150 AD, and are nothing but a re-hash of legends and mythical tales.

★

Our very religious BBC and ITV provided a magnificent treat of crude religion over the Easter holidays. Between them they provided viewers with nearly a dozen Divine items on Good Friday alone, while on sound radio listeners were given also about a dozen services, etc., packed with Fundamentalism of the type which must have gladdened the heart of the most ignorant member of the Salvation Army. It was an emotional feast of course in the main — but we wonder how many people are these days really impressed with representations of Jesus on the Cross couched in language reminiscent of the narrowest Victorian Protestantism?

★

If they have not got yet what they want, Spiritualists did manage to get some "psychic photographs" shown on television recently by the BBC. One of these in particular is about the most blatant "psychic" fraud ever perpetrated — a photograph showing Sir William Crookes arm-in-arm with "the materialised spirit of Katie King". The "medium" was Florence Cook, one of the classic imposters in the history of spiritualism, who had very little difficulty in bamboozling Crookes to the utmost. The "materialised spirit" was herself, and poor Crookes had the greatest difficulty in

getting anyone except deluded Spiritualists to believe in Florrie's "materialisations". But after all, people who believe in the "miracles" of Christ without a spark of evidence, can always be trusted to believe in "materialisations" — especially those which are performed "under test conditions". The test conditions are always imposed by the Spiritualists themselves.

The Fairy Tale Stage of Humanity

By LEONARD MARTIN

PROBABLY most, if not all, of us revelled in fairy tales when we were very young. We could not get enough of them.

And then there came a time when slowly they lost their appeal. Finally, we would not read, or listen to, them any more. Those of us who were avid readers turned to crude adventure tales instead, and even these lost their attractions as adulthood at length approached, although for some they always continued to satisfy some need.

It may be possible that some learned and patient investigator has found out what are the average ages when boys and girls are in the fairy-tale stage, when in the adventure and scientific-serial stage, and when they desert them, and prefer fact.

My own view is that the fairy-tale period roughly corresponds to that of childhood, that is, the years well before puberty; the adventure-tale stage corresponds to puberty, and the matter-of-fact stage to adulthood.

Another matter that I would like to see investigated is whether we really *believed* those fairy tales of our first ten or so years. Some undoubtedly did. Others did not question them, they were too young for that, yet did not quite accept them as they did their approaching birthdays or Christmas, or anything else that was, at all events, a sure thing.

It will be seen that what has been said about fairy tales applies equally well to so-called religion and the history of humanity — its credulous early years, the first stages of maturity, the latter stages, and, finally, full maturity, or the ability to decide what is fact and what fancy; and, what is equally important, the ability and the will to reject what is not in accordance with fact as we see it.

People in the first stage undoubtedly believe what they are told without the idea ever arising of questioning or doubting it. There is, again, a large class who *believe* they believe.

And then there are the really mature people who, if they think any belief or statement a fairy tale, or just nonsense, are not fearful of saying so. Generally, as things are, it requires some will power or courage even today to do so.

The Freethinker is the only mature adult, one who accepts only what by test has been proved to be no fairy tale.

QUIZ

1. What is the Roman Catholic attitude to the claims made for Spiritualist phenomena?
2. Which man of science (a) had a comet named after him, (b) founded logarithms, (c) found *canali* on Mars, (d) harnessed X-rays, (e) first split the atom, (f) first used chloroform, (g) made "laughing gas."
3. When Adam delved and Evé span
Who was then the gentleman?
(a) Who gave this message to whom? (b) what is its meaning? (c) What famous uprising did it help to bring about?
4. The philosopher Descartes regarded the soul as having a definite physical location in the body. Which organ did he propose for its lodgment?

(Answers on page 144)

THE FREETHINKER

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All Articles and Correspondence should be addressed to THE EDITOR at the above address and not to individuals.

THE FREETHINKER can be obtained through any newsagent or 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.

Details of membership of the National Secular Society may be obtained from the General Secretary, 41 Gray's Inn Road, London, W.C.1. Members and visitors are always welcome at the Office.

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.

S. HOWE.—A good account of Mithraic practices is in Willoughby's *Pagan Regeneration* (p. 143 et seq.).

F. BULLOCK.—Christians do not like to be reminded of their religion's persecution of witches. Witchcraft was regarded as a rival magic.

W. POND asks "What would happen if all people disbelieved in God?" Well, they would continue to exist. But God wouldn't.

WM. DAVIDSON.—Very little help can be expected for Free thought from politicians, whatever their party colour. The way to make them sit up and take notice is to make more Freethinkers.

TREVOR HENDERSON.—Bertrand Russell's position may be judged from the following words of his: "The whole conception of God is derived from the ancient oriental despotisms. It is a conception quite unworthy of free men." (*Why I am not a Christian.*)

J. R. HOWES.—See motion on Disendowment on N.S.S. Conference Agenda.

H.R.J.—You are supported in the following quotation from Briffault's *Sin and Sex* (p. 89): "The system of Christian morality has poisoned life at its source, so that the whole Western outlook on sex is distorted, deformed and diseased. . . [for] the poisoning of the sexual life at puberty Christianity merits, on that account alone, the detestation of the world it has infected."

Lecture Notices, Etc.

OUTDOOR

Bradford Branch N.S.S. (Broadway Car Park).—Every Sunday, 7.30 p.m.: Messrs. DAY, NEWTON, and SHEPPARD.

Edinburgh Branch N.S.S. (The Mound).—Every Sunday afternoon and evening: W. CRONAN.

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.

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

INDOOR

Merseyside Branch N.S.S. (Stork Hotel, Liverpool).—Sunday, May 5th, 7.15 p.m.: E. CAINE, "The Logic of Superstition."

South Place Ethical Society (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1).—Sunday, May 5th, 11 a.m.: J. HUTTON HYND, "James-town and Plymouth: Two Traditions of U.S.A."

NEXT WEEK

THE AGA KHAN'S RELIGION
By C. G. L. DU CANN

The Freethinker Sustentation Fund

PREVIOUSLY acknowledged, £212 11s. 8d.; Miss J. Glyde, 10s.; A. Hancock, 2s.; W. Perkins, 10s.; P. Turner, £1.—Total to date, April 26th, 1957, £214 13s. 8d.

Notes and News

MRS. H. F. PERRETT, of Copnor, Portsmouth, celebrated her 99th birthday on April 24th. Mrs. Perrett—a widow for 44 years—used to attend dances at the Hall of Science with her husband; and William Ramsey, the printer of THE FREETHINKER who was imprisoned for blasphemy at the same time as G. W. Foote, was a frequent visitor to her home. We send our best wishes to Mrs. Perrett and her daughter, Mrs. E. Cockram.

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EVERYTHING happens to the "Mad Major." After being headlined in the national newspapers for his exploit in collecting his post-war credit by plane instead of by post, in which escapade he was accompanied by his 94-year-old aunt, he appeared as one of the competitors in the Bob Monkhouse show on ITV (Tuesday, April 23rd). Out of five competitors his luck came up to the tune of £103. The Major strolled nonchalantly to collect his winnings as though such things were of daily occurrence. Major Draper is, as most readers will know, an NSS member and a speaker for NSS branches.

★

THE bi-monthly magazine *Portugal* (an official Government publication) gives an interesting description of the scene at FATIMA, where "thousands upon thousands" of pilgrims flock on the 13th of every month. Following a complete night of prayer and singing by an enormous choir of "scores or even hundreds of thousands of voices" and a candle-light procession, at daybreak they begin to sing masses in the open air. At noon follows the Mass for the Sick, when one of the "most moving, extraordinary and striking sights possible" can be perceived. This is when thousands of voices pray and cry out in hope for a miracle: "O Lord, make me walk! O Lord give me sight!" This is, we are informed, "a climax which brings tears to every eye, a fervent prayer to all lips and the flames of a burning faith to all hearts!"

★

WHAT monsters are these vile ecclesiastics who cash in on the delusions, hopes and fears of these pitiable, superstition-ridden peasants! And what fools the peasantry, paying for their praying to their Almighty God. A god they beseech to remove the physical disability, which He, presumably, has imposed!

★

SINCE THE truncation of Indo-China, the American satellite of South Viet Nam (North Viet Nam, beyond the 17th Parallel, is a Russian satellite) has witnessed a strong attempt by the Asian Catholic Hierarchy to take over the country, scholastic indoctrination being a primary objective in their plans for domination. After a little string-pulling by the Papal puppeteers the educational authorities are now restricting the opportunities open to non-Catholics to open new schools, special privileges being reserved for "private religious schools of higher education, of foreign private schools". In other words, American and Vatican-backed Catholic schools.

The Virgin Birth

FOR AGES the question of the Virgin Birth has occupied the thoughts and attention of theologians. Thousands and thousands of books have been written upon the subject. Every clue has been followed and every manuscript has been scrutinized in an endeavour to throw more light upon the problem. Every possible phase of the question has been investigated. Clergymen and ministers even in our own time have quite vehemently debated the question, and I therefore do not think it improper, under the circumstances, for me to discuss it.

I do not, however, intend to discuss the Virgin Birth from the point of view of a Saviour, or a Messiah, or a God, nor from any of the abstract angles of theology. I intend to discuss the Virgin Birth from the evidence as recorded in the book which theologians claim is one of divine authority, and was written under the direct inspiration of him who performed the duty of the male parent in the birth of his only child and offspring on the body of a woman "who had not known man".

Sir James J. Frazer, the eminent English author, and one of the world's foremost anthropologists, makes this pertinent statement: "The belief that a virgin can conceive and bring forth a son is one of the last lingering relics of primitive savagery".

And the pages of history are well crowded with "Virgin Births" that antedate the advent of Jesus Christ. And of particular interest is that of Perseus, who is said to have been born of a virgin, hundreds of years before B.C. 4, but which Justin Martyr, the 2nd century Christian Divine, stigmatized as the work of the Devil, who knowing that Christ would subsequently be born of a virgin, counterfeited the miracle before it really took place!

Even Plato's mother was supposed to be a virgin, who conceived him immaculately by the God, Apollo.

Reverend W. L. Pettingill said: "Only those who believe in Christ as God, in His Virgin Birth and in His Resurrection in the body — the irreducible minimum of the Christian faith — will go to heaven. Those who deny any or all of these tenets will be lost — they will go to hell. . . . These things do not permit of interpretation. There is no altering the words written. Either the Virgin Birth is true, or two things must be — the Bible must be false in regard to this or Jesus of Nazareth was a bastard. Either Jesus was God or a hideous impostor."

In discussing the Virgin Birth mention should be made of what is scientifically known as parthenogenesis. Parthenogenesis is a biological fact dealing with the lower forms of life, in which the female produces and develops the germ of reproduction without the direct aid of the male. In quite a number of the lower, or rather the simpler forms of life, parthenogenesis has been observed to be the principle of reproduction. But this does not prove the possibility of the virgin birth of a human any more than the fact that a codfish lays 8,000,000 eggs at one time proves that a woman can give birth to 8,000,000 children simultaneously!

St. Matthew, Chapter 1, Verse 19:

18. Then Joseph, her husband, being a just man and not willing to make her a public example, was minded to put her away privily.

It is quite evident from the narrative that Joseph bore a great love for Mary and was willing to marry her despite the fact that she had slipped from the path of virtue even after her betrothal to him.

But despite his great love for Mary and despite her "slight alteration," Joseph began to have his doubts about

the Holy Ghost version of her condition, as the narrative continues.

St. Matthew, Chapter 1, Verse 20.

20. But while he thought on these things, behold, the Angel of the Lord appeared unto him in a dream, saying, Joseph, thou son of David, fear not to take unto thee Mary thy wife: for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Ghost.

That the story of Christ and his so-called virgin birth is a pure fabrication and myth, and was invented by the deluded and superstitious believers of that time, is attested by the following verses of the narrative.

St. Matthew, Chapter 1, Verses 21-25.

21. And she shall bring forth a son, and thou shalt call his name JESUS; for he shall save his people from their sins.

22. Now all this was done, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken of the Lord by the prophet, saying,

23. Behold, a virgin shall be with child, and shall bring forth a son, and they shall call his name Emmanuel, which being interpreted, is God with us.

24. Then Joseph being raised from sleep did as the Angel of the Lord had bidden him, and took unto him his wife:

25. And knew her not till she had brought forth her first born son: and he called his name JESUS.

It is unnecessary for me to show the falsity of the prophecy, "now all this was done, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken of the Lord by the prophet saying:

"Behold, a virgin shall be with child, and shall bring forth a son, and they shall call his name Emmanuel; which being interpreted is, God with us." Because Thomas Paine has already so admirably unmasked this monstrous lie, in his *The Age of Reason*.

I quote the Gospel according to St. Luke, Chapter 1, Verses 26-28.

26. And in the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God unto a city of Galilee, named Nazareth.

27. To a virgin espoused to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David; and the virgin's name was Mary.

28. And the angel came in unto her, and said, Hail, *Thou that art* highly favoured, the Lord is with thee; blessed *art* thou among women.

One difference already noted between the narrative of St. Matthew and St. Luke regarding Mary and the conception of her child, is that in St. Matthew it is the Holy Ghost who is responsible for her pregnant condition but in St. Luke the angel Gabriel is mentioned.

But it occurs to me that if Jesus was to be immaculately conceived and God was to be his father, he should have chosen a different place of incubation than that of a woman's womb. It is in the womb that all of us mortals are conceived. The Bible's own testimony regarding this birth is rather disconcerting to those devout believers in the *miraculous birth* of Christ. If there were to be a really and truly miraculous birth, conception should have taken place in the ear, or arm, or leg, but in the womb — never!

It is quite probable that a story like the one just related, detailed in any other book than the Bible, would be construed as being of a highly spicy tone and condemned as being vicious in its moral conclusion. Surely, Mary would be looked upon as a girl whose character was not worthy of emulation. I wish for the moment to speak to the fathers and mothers of young girls, particularly those of the Chris-

tian faith. What would you say if your daughter came and told you that she was "with child by an angel"? What would the young man to whom she was engaged in marriage say about her condition? I am sure you would immediately make a thorough search for this angel and bring him to account. In certain parts of this country, this angel, if caught, would not be given much of an opportunity to explain himself. And if he said that he was "an angel of the Lord" you know how much weight that would have.

And now, you parents, you who are so anxious about the welfare of your daughters, and so mindful of their amusements and companions; if your daughter was reading a book, whose plot corresponded to the story of Mary, would you not admonish her that such a book was unfit to be read, that its example was vicious and detrimental, and that "nothing good" can come from such stories? Wouldn't you make an effort to discourage her interest in such literature? By what rule, then, does a story which is suggestive in any other book, become of high moral value when it is found in the Bible?

Let me repeat that the human race would have been spared its greatest calamity if Jesus, either in the flesh or in the imagination, had never been born!

JOSEPH LEWIS
(President of the American Freethinkers).

Y Golofn Gymreig

By D. SHIPPER

IN PONTYPOOL, Mon., the Church suffered yet another crushing defeat, when the Sunday Cinema plebiscite on 6/4/57 resulted:

For Sunday Cinemas	4,981
Against Sunday Cinemas	1,976

Majority 3,005

Maesteg (Glam.) chapel leaders have complained to the Home Office about the way they were defeated in the recent Sunday Cinema campaign and their charges are being investigated. The complaints are mainly based on "unfair publicity" and the cinema management using cars, despite petrol rationing.

Retaliating, local cinema impressario Jim Dooner replied that the cars belonged to friends of his and that the chapels had cars too. Further, said Mr. Dooner, "I accuse the churchmen of using a poster which borders on sacrilege. On top it said, 'This was His cross — He carried it for you'. Then there was a picture of the Cross of Calvary. Underneath it were the words 'This is your cross. You use it for Him'. Underneath that was a big X." The chapels are now using both crosses in a despairing effort to double-cross the electorate and meanwhile the opening of the five Maesteg Valley cinemas is held up.

Soon after the crushing defeat of the clergy in the Aber-tillery Sunday Cinema poll full Sunday freedom is being requested.

Following a letter from a tennis club, asking for a relaxation of the Council's Sunday tennis ban, the Council's parks committee have decided to recommend the Sunday opening of the tennis courts.

Rather shocked, a lady councillor said this was a serious matter, and if the recommendation were approved other sports organisations might apply to use the parks on the Sabbath. Obviously, this will never do and there is little doubt that the clergy, although a trifle dispirited by their recent Sunday Cinema dispute, will resist strenuously further attempts to "desecrate the Sabbath".

Mr. C. W. Beretta organised a *free* Sunday film show at his Rhosneigr cinema, making a collection for the Hungarian Relief Fund.

The secretary of the Welsh Free Church Council described the show with truly Christian charity, as, "the thin end of the wedge to by-pass the law and break the Sabbath in the name of charity and sentiment".

However, when Mr. Beretta applied for a licence to hold a similar show at his Holyhead cinema, there were no less than *nine* ministers in court to protest, and no doubt disconcerted by this cackle of clergymen, Mr. Beretta abandoned his proposal.

A startling innovation is reported at the Aberaman Y.M.C.A. in the Aberdare Valley: There, every Sunday night, an experiment is being tried to attract the local youngsters. After a service consisting of Bible reading, an address prayer and Benediction, a Rock 'n' Roll session is held, lasting until the Epilogue at 9.45 p.m.

The rumour that Welsh Baptist ministers must now qualify in jitterbug and jive has been officially denied.

Abergavenny Presbyterian Chapel have advanced the start of Sunday evening services by half-an-hour. This followed the admission by the Rev. H. Arfon Price, "We must admit that there is strong competition from Television".

One member of the congregation said: "If people put Television before their Church *it is hardly worth while coming at all.*" True!

Cardigan, in far-away West Wales, was recently invaded by 5,000 Catholics, including Irish peasant pilgrims, when the statue of Our Lady of the Taper was solemnly enthroned by Bishop Petit of Menevia, in the Church of Our Lady of Sorrows, beside the River Teifi.

The legend (or perhaps myth) of Our Lady of the Taper goes back to the 12th century when the Statue, it is alleged was found on the banks of the Teifi, carried four times into Cardigan Priory and was four times found back on the river-bank. After this, about 1160, a church was built on this spot.

According to the story the lighted taper in the statue's hand burned steadily for nine years, but then, sad to relate, was extinguished by act of sacrilege.

A Welshwoman was brought before the Ystrad magistrates for creating a disturbance in a Llwynypia school. This was because her child, after arriving late, was not admitted to the hall for prayers (a school rule). She was remanded for 14 days, pending a medical report. It is interesting to note that the magistrates considered such enthusiasm for prayer worthy of a medical examination. A diagnosis of advanced religiosity seems assured.

Report from Malta

By OUR SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

A LITTLE WHILE AGO, papers in Malta contained a heated correspondence and several articles regarding the action taken by the Labour Government in removing two masterpieces by Caravaggio from St. John's Co-Cathedral in Valletta. The Government had good reason for so acting, because these paintings have sustained almost irreparable damage in the past through dampness.

They were recently restored in Rome, at considerable cost, out of public funds. The Government therefore decided that the paintings should in future be installed in the public museum. The Archbishop, supported by a servile press, claimed that the paintings belong to the Church

and must be returned to their former place in the Cathedral. As the Government stood its ground, it is being accused of Secularism and disrespect for the Church.

Matters have gone far enough to warrant a decision by the Holy See in Rome. One may expect that the Archbishop will get the support he anticipates from that quarter; the Church is always content that public funds should be used to remedy damage caused by its own neglect.

In many circles Malta's Archbishop is regarded as a tyrant and certainly is a bigot. He is assuredly a dictator, not content with "spiritual" matters, but continually meddling in state affairs. He has consequently drawn upon himself the wrath of liberty-loving people on the island.

His censorship is none the less dangerous because it is sometimes ludicrous. Recently he banned the song "Garden of Eden" from the local relay service; he is doing his best to ban the British newspapers, *News of the World* and *The People*. How long the people of Malta can stand such interference with their rights is yet to be seen. He bids fair to make Malta a place where one is not allowed to use one's brain or to enjoy oneself without papal permission.

His pastoral letters and speeches are filled with venom against the present Government, because the latter is prepared to assert the state's priority over the Church on questions like birth-control. Birth-control, in fact, is essential to the future well-being of the island, and the Government recognises it. Clashes with the clergy thus become inevitable. It is the old but ever present struggle between secularism and religion — this world or the next?

ANSWERS TO QUIZ

1. Feasible but diabolical. 2. (a) Halley, (b) John Napier, (c) Schiaparelli, (d) Röntgen, (e) Rutherford, (f) Sir J. Y. Simpson, (g) Davy. 3. (a) The wandering priest John Ball to the peasants and craftsmen. (b) The artificiality of social distinctions. (c) The Peasants' Revolt of 1381. 4. The pineal gland.
G.H.T.

CORRESPONDENCE

HIGHBROW?

One of the more peculiar kinds of criticism levelled at THE FREETHINKER is that the paper is too "deep" for the masses; it is then timidly suggested that it ought to be made shallower. I am, of course, in agreement with Mr. F. H. Eastman that a simple way of expressing oneself creates far more interest for the reader than the use of an elaborate phraseology. Bright, clear and lively reading is possible with every subject. Moreover, THE FREETHINKER has never made the mistake of identifying solemnity with profundity, nor of offering obscurity as evidence of wisdom.

But it would not do to convert THE FREETHINKER into a kind of weekly *Tit-Bits* in order to attract a circle of empty-headed readers. Our aim should not be to write down to the most stupid section of the population; we cannot hope to compete with church or chapel in that respect. Mr. Eastman is impressed by the Catholic Church going out of its way to attract "even the most ignorant and badly educated people." For my part, the R.C. Church is welcome to them. A membership recruited from that class would not be of the slightest use to us, in any case. THE FREETHINKER is intended for those who have an average amount of intelligence and are not afraid to use it.

Finally, it must be remembered that the primary aim of this paper is not merely to sell a large number of copies, but to carry on a propaganda — to keep certain ideas and principles constantly before the people in the conviction that what we stand for is both true and useful. If the business managers of the paper were merely trying for mass sales, they have too much intelligence to waste their time in trying to make Freethought propaganda a paying proposition. THE FREETHINKER will never become shallow or mentally cheap on a promise of larger sales. By continuing to be THE FREETHINKER, by remaining true to the Cause it has served so nobly for over 75 years, it will achieve the purpose for which it was created.
JACK GORDON.

SUNDAY CINEMAS

The civic motto of Blackpool is "Progress," and it is ironical that the killjoys have again prevented the opening of the town's cinemas on Sundays from 2 p.m. during the season from Whit Monday until October 31st, in spite of the fact that the General Purposes Committee voted 17—9 in favour, this being reversed by a majority of 28—10 at a later meeting of the town council. Present Sunday hours of opening are 5 p.m. to 10.30 p.m. and the application was for afternoon cinema shows in the season. Nearly all the clergy and Sunday school teachers were protesting against the Sunday opening.

It was stated that the cinema industry throughout the country was going through an extremely difficult time, and cinema employers had recently discussed this situation with the trade unions. Such was the situation that the unions had no alternative but to agree to Sunday opening. The cinemas had to make sufficient revenue during the summer or they would be forced to close down during the winter months. Already two of the principal cinemas had closed for most of the winter. The people in the cinema industry were behind this application. Sunday schools won't be affected, they say.

A letter showing the mentality of one objector was received in which the writer said "that God would personally hold members responsible for the way they cast their votes." A councillor said "that he could not see the difference between people sitting at home and seeing films on television and seeing them at the cinema." Sideshows were open and such discrimination didn't make sense!
F. S. HOUGHTON.

BULGARIA

G.F. (February 22nd) alleges that Bulgaria "needs an anti-religious organisation as much as any other country." On the other hand, it is well known among students of religious history that the Bulgarian people are secular-minded. Not only this, but the Bulgarian Orthodox Church has always been a popular church, sympathising with the ordinary people's aspirations and siding with them in their struggle against Turkish rule. Many priests fell in this struggle, which extends as far back as the fifteenth century.

It is not to be wondered at that there is no need for anti-religious propaganda. If G.F. would give me the names of the authors of *Proofs that God does not Exist and Religious Pest*, I will consult the British Museum on them. If the journals and books did exist, perhaps no one bought them, in which case they would not need to be "suppressed."

The Bulgarian Constitution specifically states: "Art. 87. Bulgarian citizens have the right to form societies, associations and organisations provided they are not contrary to the State and public order established by the present Constitution.

"Art. 88. The citizens of the People's Republic are guaranteed freedom of the press, of speech, of assembly, of meetings and demonstrations."

And the result of the discussions that have gone on and will go on about religion is manifest to every visitor to Bulgaria. While religious notices are prominent even in Sofia's central Park of Liberty, where they are seen pinned to the trees, the fact is that only the old people go to Church, while the young are totally uninterested in religion. I challenge any reader to visit Bulgaria and deny this is so.
H. FRANKEL.

OBITUARY

OLDER Secularists in Merseyside area will regret to learn of the death of William James McKelvie, a former Branch Secretary and stalwart. He was 73. Patient during his ill-health, he never lost interest in his favourites, Shakespeare, Ingersoll, and Burns.

At his request a secular service was held at Carleton Crematorium, the undersigned officiating on April 17th. J. G. BURDEN.

ANTI-VACCINATION PUBLIC MEETING
THE ANNUAL PUBLIC MEETING of the
NATIONAL ANTI-VACCINATION LEAGUE
will be held from 2.30 to 4.20 p.m. at

ALLIANCE HALL
PALMER STREET, WESTMINSTER, S.W.1
on **THURSDAY MAY 9th**

Speakers: DR. GORDON LATRO (if free), DR. BERTRAND ALLINSON,
MR. C. R. HOUSON, M.P., and MISS L. LIND-AP-HAGEBY.
ALL are welcome **QUESTIONS invited**

For further information write to:—
National Anti-Vaccination League,
2nd Floor, 26/28 Warwick Way,
London, S.W.1