

The Freethinker

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THERE HAVE actually been quite a number of *Concordats* between Rome and Secular States since 1801, when Napoleon signed the first *Concordat* of the modern type with Cardinal Consalvi, the Pope's then representative. In the present century the two best known have been the Lateran Treaty negotiated by Pius XI and the Fascist régime of Mussolini in 1929; and the recent Spanish *Concordat* negotiated between the present Pope Pius XII (1939-?) and the contemporary Spanish régime of General Franco. Of these, the Lateran Treaty was, in general, more favourable to the Secular State, which received concessions as well as gave them, particularly in the educational sphere: the primary essential to a totalitarian one-party State, of the right to teach Fascist ideology in the schools even though that agreed only doubtfully with the concepts of Catholic Action and of Catholic sociology, was apparently fully conceded by the Vatican. From the clerical angle, the Lateran Treaty was in particular noteworthy as restoring in principle at least, the Temporal power of the Papacy, lapsed since the Italian occupation of Rome in 1870: that ever-memorable year in Roman annals, which simultaneously declared the Pope to be the "Infallible" Master of the Catholic Church by abolishing the last vestiges of constitutional government in the Church, whilst also witnessing the abolition of the ancient Papal Temporal Power: as a Catholic publicist writing at the time under the haughty pseudonym of *Civis Romanus sum*, proudly entitled his book *The Pope is King!* However, whilst the Lateran Treaty definitely infringed the essential principle of religious toleration by punishing criticism of the Vatican with the criminal law — as even today in post-Fascist Italy, Freethinkers periodically suffer under that law — nevertheless minority religious groups were not officially suppressed under that law. In which respect, as in other collated ones, the Lateran Treaty of 1929 was more favourable to the Secular State and did not put it so completely under the heel of the Church as did its Spanish anti-type. In the Lateran Treaty, Church and State were more or less *equal* partners: Mussolini had, after all, once been an atheist. The Lateran Treaty gave Rome wide concessions but the concessions were mutual. Mussolini, like Bismarck, did not "go to Canossa," at least, not unreservedly.

France "Goes to Canossa"

The same cannot be said of the more recent *Concordat* signed in Rome and Madrid on August 27th, 1953. In this *Concordat* between General Franco and the Vatican, the honours indisputably lay with the Vatican. One can even call this extremely one-sided agreement a modern 20th century version of the Medieval capitulation of the State to the Church in Canossa in 1077. Next to the Jesuit régime in Paraguay, the 1953 *Concordat* between the "most Catholic" Franco and Rome, represents the high watermark of Catholic influence in and over a modern

State in *Europe*, at least we should have to return to the Europe of Hildebrand and of Thomas à Becket to find a parallel case. For I do not recall any adequate parallel in any *modern* European State. For not only does Catholicism become the official State Church in Spain but it is explicitly recognised under the terms of the existing *Concordat* as the *sole* official religion of Spain and the Spanish people. The *Concordat* begins by stating "The Catholic, Apostolic and Roman religion continues to be the only religion of the Spanish nation." Its dogmas and rites acquire the protection of the *criminal* law against *any* kind of hostile criticism; and whilst the

—VIEWS and OPINIONS—

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—By F. A. RIDLEY—

principle of toleration is *verbally* recognised by the framers of the *Concordat*, in both theory and practice it is confined within the narrowest possible limits: *all* non-Catholic religions, including *all* forms of non-Catholic Christianity, are forbidden explicitly either to proselytise, to hold public demonstrations, and even to hold their confessional religious services anywhere except in buildings specially authorised by the Spanish State for this express purpose. Even in such places, no advertisement is permitted, nor must anything "offensive to the Catholic Faith" be uttered, as though the very existence of *any* non-Catholic confession were not in itself the most "offensive" thing in the eyes of the "One True Church," the totalitarian "ghost" of the Roman Empire. In Franco Spain, the shade of Torquemada surely walks again. The Inquisition and its *auto da fé* are surely just round the corner.

The Spanish Concordat and the UNO Charter

At this point I may interrupt this up to now mainly historical and theoretical disquisition to broach a current *practical* problem before this august assembly: Spain, the present Spanish régime of General Franco, is not only a signatory of the above *Concordat* with Rome, she is, *inter alia* also a signatory to the International Charter of UNO. That Charter explicitly and in terms of solemn assurance, itself recognises certain *fundamental* human *Rights* which belong to *every* civilised human being whatever be his or her confessional beliefs, or whatever be the political type of State to which he, or she belongs. Franco Spain, along with all other members of UNO has solemnly recognised these *Fundamental Rights* amongst which, is specifically included the right to worship or to refrain from worship in the individual citizen's own way. I ask this World Congress whether in its opinion or indeed in the opinion of any rational person, whether a State which, like that of Franco *explicitly* outlaws the World Union of Freethinkers or any kindred body by making all specifically anti-Catholic propaganda amenable to the *criminal* law, can be held to have signed this essential provision of the UNO Charter sincerely? I ask further how a State in which *one* Church, that of Rome *alone* is officially recognised and has official rights of propaganda and worship, again *alone*, a State in which not only is all anti-Catholic propa-

ganda, and therefore Freethought itself, illegal, but in which all non-Catholics, Protestant, Muslim and Jewish citizens are *ipso facto* "second-class citizens" deprived of what UNO itself regards as *essential*? How, I repeat, can such a State remain a *bona fide* member of UNO whose basic principles it so flagrantly and unequivocally rejects? If Franco Spain, after signing such a document, still remains a practising and recognised member of UNO, are we not entitled to make the further assumption that the Charter of UNO itself can no longer be said to be founded on a principled basis but to have completely capitulated to the opportunism of contemporary *power politics*? Here, I submit is an issue of *principle*; one of primary magnitude that extends far beyond the Pyrenees.

Rome and UNO

I must repeat that in the eyes of the Church of Rome, the *Concordat* of August 27th, 1953 which recalls the days and the Spain of Ferdinand and Isabella, if not of Torquemada yet! constitutes the high water mark of Catholic influence in, and over a modern European State. It is not for nothing that the wearer of the Triple Crown has recently denominated the Spanish signatory, Dictator Franco, as his "most beloved son." From the current fact that the Vatican unreservedly approves of this document which imposes such shameless deprivations upon non-Catholic Spanish minorities, is not this in itself a convincing demonstration that, however much Rome may prate about Democracy nowadays, she herself is completely anti-democratic in her fundamental world outlook and must now be ranked as

one of UNO'S most dangerous enemies? Not *all* Catholic States have yet reached the degrading level of Spain; but the *fundamental* principles of the Church to which they adhere must be regarded as incompatible with UNO'S Charter and, in particular, with its elementary principle of religious toleration. But since Rome is not Democratic but Fascist in her essential outlook, indeed the primeval ecclesiastical Fascism from which all its secular anti-types descend her essential incompatibility with the modern world represented by UNO, is surely demonstrated? The very conception of "The One True Church" which is that of Rome *ipso facto* intolerant of error, is assuredly an intolerable anachronism in our modern world, whilst such an intolerant spiritual despotism continues to exist; all *Concordats* as in the present-day Republic of Eire under the *camouflage* of Democracy cannot surely be more than necessary evils, at least implicitly subversive of UNO? The only permanent cure for the perennial problem represented by the Roman Catholic Church versus the modern State is that long ago pithily enunciated by Voltaire *Ecrasez l'Infâme*.

Until then, Rome will continue in her traditional vicious circle, to demand the right of toleration, whilst in a *minority* for herself on the ground that she possesses the Truth and, once in a majority, the right to suppress others because "error has no rights against Truth".

The above is the second part of Mr. F. A. Ridley's Paper to be given at the Paris Congress of the World Union of Freethinkers next September

To be continued

In Reply to Mr. Cutner

By G. I. BENNETT

In his remarks apropos of my article "Why be Militant?" it is evident that Mr. Cutner disagrees with me — as, of course, he is perfectly entitled to do. He speaks of the early days of the R.P.A. and the militant literature it was at that time not afraid to publish. Well, my memory doesn't go back as far as Mr. Cutner's. I do not doubt that the R.P.A. had its hard-hitting writers — Mr. Cutner in fact mentions three of them: Ingersoll, J. M. Robertson, and Joseph McCabe, But I think I am right in saying that its official policy was never aggressive. Rather did it aim, under its founder Charles Albert Watts, to provide a broad platform for the propagation of modern scientific and philosophical thought, with special reference to its impacts upon religion.

I never had the privilege of meeting C. A. Watts; but I did have a little correspondence with him, and it was plain to me that he placed his trust in the use of reason to combat and prove the falsity of theistic claims. C. A. Watts must have been a mild-mannered man, and he always preferred to call himself an agnostic rather than an atheist. I think this was the only point — a minor point, really — on which I demurred with him. I agreed with the R.P.A.'s tactical approach; and I would be a member of the R.P.A. still had it maintained its true course (as I conceived it) and avoided its present-day academic and nugatory role of discussing, under the name of humanism, ephemerally fashionable philosophies and contemporary literary trends — neither, so far as I can see, having sufficient substance to be worthy of much notice.

I am not by nature very demonstrative; but that apart, I do not consider pugnacious assertion of opinion is the most effective way of bringing others to the truth as we see it. On the contrary, I believe it may repel many thinking people who are open to conviction. A few acquaintances of

mine, to whom I have occasionally sent copies of THE FREETHINKER, have told me frankly that they are put off by the tone of some of the articles it has carried. They have complained to me of the "bad taste", and even dogmatic churlishness, of such articles. This has been to me somewhat disturbing — more especially as this kind of criticism has usually come from thoughtful people with little or no religious belief, and who are not unsympathetic with the rationalist or freethought position.

Mr. Cutner asks me how I would address believers in Hell and in the Devil. My short answer is that I wouldn't. I do not feel that fundamentalists are worth wasting breath on. One must not make the mistake of writing as though for "cultured university graduates"; but I believe that one should write for intelligent thinking people — who, alas, are always likely to constitute only a small proportion of the population! The masses, Mr. Cutner says, are indifferent. They are more than that — they are wilfully ignorant and happy in their ignorance.

I do not think, therefore, that the masses can be brought over to our side, adopt what course we will. But I do think that a less gibing, less truculent, less iconoclastic spirit would win us more readers and more freethought supporters.

The Catholic Church and the German Elections

Catholic voters may definitely not vote for Social Democratic candidates at the forthcoming West German general elections, the Bishop of Muenster declared on June 2nd. "A practising Catholic cannot reconcile with his conscience a vote for the Social Democratic Party," the Bishop stated, addressing a meeting of the Catholic Workers' Association in Rheinhausen. In preparation for the general elections, scheduled for September, pastoral letters have been read in many churches in the Catholic parts of West Germany urging all communicants to work and vote for the re-election of Chancellor Konrad Adenauer.

Democratic German Report, 21/6/57.

Animals and Christianity

By F. A. RIDLEY

The Status of Animals in the Christian Religion by C. W. Hume: published by the Universities Federation for Animal Welfare, 7a Lamb's Conduit Passage, W.C.1. 2/6d.

ONE OF THE more encouraging ethical developments of modern times is the current greater recognition of animal welfare displayed in theory and to a certain extent in practice. Despite two world wars and atomic preparations, not to mention such contemporary horrors as blood sports and gin traps for snaring animals, our age is marked by much selfless activity on behalf of animals, now embodied in a considerable and growing body of legislation in most civilized lands. Such spectacular brutalities as, say, bull fighting are now only found in backward lands like Spain: here, at least, we have travelled some distance since the era so inimitably characterised by Lord Macaulay when he described the Puritans as suppressing bear-baiting "not because it gave pain to the bear but because it gave pleasure to the spectators."

This real, though still incomplete, improvement in the treatment of animals must be ascribed to the pervasive influence of the theory of evolution which has insensibly but effectively modified human ideas in regard to the "lower animals", now expressly revealed as distant cousins in fur and feathers. Whilst modern evolutionary theory, unlike such ancient creeds as Buddhism and Hinduism, has never made a dogma of the sanctity of animal life, yet its indirect effect in humanising mankind's relationships with animals has been considerable. It was in part the early rationalistic champions of evolution, such as the Victorian freethinkers who founded the secularist movement, who were foremost in drawing humanitarian deductions from the new relationship popularly expressed in the striking but not wholly accurate statement: "Men are descended from monkeys!"

It can hardly be disputed, we suggest, that the coming of Christianity worsened the lot of the animal creation, in particular of those species of animals who were unfortunate enough to come into frequent contact with the masters of creation. The Church's *exclusive* insistence on *human* immortality and on the death of the Redeemer for the — again *exclusive* — sins of mankind, by drawing an impassable gulf between man and the "lower creation", probably encouraged the contemptuous attitude by man to his humble and mortal animal associates. Animals have had a bad time in Christian lands, both Catholic and Protestant. England during the 19th century was the home of fox-hunting, and such "sports" as cock-fighting, bear-baiting etc. The traditional Italian mule driver who, on being rebuked for beating his mule, justified himself with the saying, "He is not a Christian", no doubt reflected a widespread attitude. When the late Dr. Inge, a Liberal churchman with enlightened views on blood sports, once tried to interest his Roman Catholic friends in a Bill for their legal prohibition, he was, he tells us, greeted by the unanimous reply, "The animals are made for our use; we have no duties towards them."

A recent Christian writer, Major C. W. Hume, has devoted an erudite, if rather "fundamentalist", book to the problem of *The Status of Animals in the Christian Religion*. He writes as an animal lover who holds that they may have immortal souls. Without necessarily endorsing this metaphysical assumption we hope that if they have, the four-legged victims of such inhumanities as the steel gin will be awarded time off in purgatory as a post mortem

consolation! We will not add the victims of myxomatosis since that peculiar atrocity is, on any strict theory of creation, the work of God and not of man. However, insofar as Mr. Hume, who writes as an Anglican layman, urges a less ambiguous attitude to animal welfare upon his own church, we are entirely at one with him. In fact, we have previously drawn attention to the cautious refusal of His Grace of Canterbury to issue any ethical directive to his Church on the mutual relationship between the Anglican version of Christianity and the current practice of blood sports: one could even relevantly add that if, say, foxes have souls the clergy of the Church of England have not, to date, manifested much solicitude for them.

Most of the author's theological analysis deals with Roman Catholic theology, which remains today about the only logically consistent system of Christian theology. Here one observes a conflict between the rival views of the two major medieval orders of monks, the Dominicans and the Franciscans. Major Hume is no rationalist. He deplores the influx of what he calls "Greek Rationalism" on the Christian Church, in particular that of Aristotle. The Dominicans, he points out, were responsible for introducing Aristotelianism into Christian theology, in particular St. Thomas Aquinas whose Thomist theological system is now quasi-officially accepted in, and by, the Church of Rome. Both St. Thomas and his Pagan prototype were inimical to animal rights: from Aquinas comes the maxim that animals were made for our use and that we have no duties towards them. It is St. Thomas' modern Dominican and Jesuit disciples who are responsible for the currently hostile attitude amongst Catholics to the ethical recognition of animal rights. Contrarily St. Francis, who was no theologian like St. Thomas but who was a more attractive character with a feeling for nature quite unique among Christian saints, was a good friend to the animals. In a most interesting chapter Major Hume points out that the defence of animal rights in the Roman Catholic Church has usually been conducted by the Franciscan critics of St. Thomas. Rather daringly our author claims that the current contemptuous attitude to animals is Pagan and not Christian in origin, ultimately due, he tells us, to the Pagan Aristotle bowdlerised by St. Thomas, and to the Renaissance, a Pagan movement. The philosophy of Descartes, in particular, tended to regard animals as machines. The *real* Christianity is that of the Franciscans and of St. Francis who, as the medieval proverb went, "listens to those to whom God will not listen." — a convenient theory for a Christian apologist, but what about the Gadarene swine? It was not Aristotle who sent devils to propel the unfortunate beasts "down a steep place" into the water.

Have animals got souls? A knotty problem, but important, since they greatly outnumber men. Up to date no Church seems to have ventured to pronounce on this abstruse theme. Again the "infallible" Church of Rome and its present attitude represents a model of caution. Here it is:

The Reverend Father Jean Gautier, a Director of the Great Seminary at St. Sulpice, after describing the Aristotelian and Thomist doctrine (which denies that animals have either a soul or, indeed, any ethical status whatever) writes: "This is the doctrine commonly accepted in the Catholic Church. There are, however, some theologians belonging to the Franciscan school, and a small number

(Concluded on next page)

This Believing World

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A reader of the "Sunday Times" wants some information about haloes—"their history, origin, and earliest use." Well, it's one of the "symbols" pinched from Paganism by Christianity. Satan in Byzantine art was often given a halo, and even Devaki, the mother of Krishna, is credited with one. So are angels. But a halo is merely the representation or the symbol of the sun. Apollo as a Sun God has it often, and so has Jesus. As "our Lord" actually calls himself "the Light of the World," that is, the Sun, is it any wonder that he is so often portrayed with a halo?

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Every Christian must fervently believe in the marvellous story of the "Star in the East" which the "Magi" followed to lead them to the Babe of Bethlehem who later became known as Jesus of Nazareth. And now a new "star" has appeared in Nazareth — according to *News Chronicle* a "Red" Star — a pro-Communist mayor, aided by a Communist deputy mayor. The *News Chronicle* writer calls Nazareth the "cradle of Christianity", but this only shows his ignorance. According to both Luke and Matthew the "cradle" was in Bethlehem.

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In any case there is not a scrap of evidence that at that time there was a town or village called Nazareth. Canon Cheyne who goes into the question very fully in the *Encyclopedia Biblica*, points out that there is literally no mention of it anywhere for centuries. The most probable explanation is that "Nazareth" is a corrupted word not meaning a town at all. If Jesus was born in Bethlehem he could never have been called "of Nazareth".

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When Robert Blatchford decided to attack Christianity as the great enemy of Socialism, he stirred up more than a hornet's nest among his Christian Socialist followers. Something like it is taking place in the Socialist *Tribune* in which Mr. O. C. Drewitt (an ex-priest and contributor to THE FREETHINKER) attacked Christianity. To the rescue of that much publicised religion have come scores of Christians, particularly the champions of the Rev. D. Soper whose articles in the *Tribune*, we are told "stirs 'em up." His Christianity not only does this, but few things appear to anger him more than Premium Bonds and their success. They help in deteriorating our moral standards! We wonder whether Mr. Soper has met any of the lucky winners in the first two draws?

★

Some of the biggest supporters of the British-Israel drive have been service chiefs — admirals, generals and the like, so we must not be surprised that a Brigadier R. C. Firebrace, a stout defender of the spooks at Borley Rectory, is also a thorough believer in astrology. He challenges anyone making a serious study of the subject who will "remain unconvinced" after three months. A member of his audience admitted that on the face of it astrology "seems to be absolute bunk" in theory, but in practice, "exceedingly factual". Yet "in practice" it was agreed that the "newspaper astrological guides could scarcely be described as accurate." "Scarcely" is the operative word!

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Religion is not the only belief in this materialistic world. Magic, astrology, spiritualism, reincarnation, levitation, fortune-telling by cards or sand or the lines of the hand or tea leaves or coffee dregs—these and lots more have their adepts even among military men. Human folly is notorious, but the belief in the "occult" will take as long to die out as the belief in religion generally.

How very very bold some of our national Sunday journals can be — sometimes. Here we have *Reynolds News* throwing caution to the wind and bursting out in a tirade against the BBC, TV and ITV for not daring to allow any criticism of religion — "Why do they FUNK tackling religion?" asks Mr. Fred Cooke indignantly. He obviously hasn't heard of THE FREETHINKER which has almost single-handedly carried on a campaign for fair play ever since the Churches captured broadcasting. But if he has, why was he afraid of saying so?

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But perhaps it is not altogether the fault of broadcasting that Freethought is deliberately kept off the air. Perhaps it is because the various Churches know now how deadly are our arguments, and how impossible it is to find a parson or priest to meet a Freethinker in fair and open encounter. However, there is one thing for which Mr. Cook is grateful. It is, he says, the disappearance of "that dreadful by-product of the theological college — the pulpit voice." But may we be allowed to point out that theological nonsense is still nonsense no matter how pronounced? And it is this against which we so often protest.

ANIMALS AND CHRISTIANITY

(Concluded from page 219)

of our contemporaries like Mgr. Gay, who allow though on a purely hypothetical basis the survival of the souls of animals. They say that God does not destroy that which he has created in the case of beings which love, feel and act as animals do in various degrees. Although this hypothesis, he concludes, "which is in specific contradiction to the Thomist school, seems improbable to the majority of theologians, it has not been prohibited by the Church."

The Protestant Churches have so far kept complete silence on the point. It will be interesting to see how the growing acceptance of evolutionary theory in Christian circles reacts on this current attitude.

Evolution affects everything, including Christianity, and we wish Major Hume and his colleagues every success in their campaign against blood sports and similar horrors which have survived from the jungle and contradict the fundamental kinship between man and beast.

Jobs for the Boys

I have just been re-reading, after an interval of years, the *Legacy to Parsons* of William Cobbett, and I would like to commend to all interested in these matters the honest outburst of the famous radical against the ecclesiastical jerryandering of a century and a quarter ago. There were two matters which especially attracted my attention. Cobbett remarks upon the number of half-pay officers who were flooded into the Church after the Napoleonic wars, who lowered its intellectual standards and who were given well-paid posts to enjoy side by side with their pensions. He also spoke severely of the extent to which some of the clergy, despite the law engaged in financial trafficking, calling attention to two reverend gentlemen who had gone bankrupt as bankers and who were typical of others in these matters. During recent years, the Church seems again to have been flooded out with half-pay members of various professions, ex-civil servants, ex-officers and the like. Many of the abuses pinpointed by Cobbett are again coming to light. Pensions are again supplemented by ecclesiastical preferments, in some cases in Crown patronage. It all looks to us to be just as much a grab for "the loaves and the fishes" as it was in Cobbett's day! The time has come when entrance to another full-time profession should involve forfeiture of any professional pension paid by the Crown. We should then learn how many of these gentry are willing to turn their collars back to front for reasons purely spiritual! Again, we were interested at Cobbett's attacks upon clerical traders. But is there much moral difference between these things as done by individuals and as done by ecclesiastical corporations or dioceses?

JOHN HASTINGS.

THE FREETHINKER

41 GRAY'S INN ROAD, LONDON, W.C.1.
TELEPHONE: HOLBORN 2601.

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

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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.

WM. F. MELLOR.—If God makes your plants grow, why water them? Why not put one in a vacuum chamber and see what God can do without air?

CORRECTION.—On page 205 (June 28th issue) the word "stars" was printed instead of "electrons." The correct quotation is: "Nowadays we can count the electrons one by one on a Geiger counter. . ."

Lecture Notices, Etc.

OUTDOOR

- Bradford Branch N.S.S. (Broadway Car Park).—Every Sunday, 7.30 p.m.: Messrs DAY, CORINA, and SHEPPARD.
- Edinburgh Branch N.S.S. (The Mound).—Every Sunday afternoon and evening: Messrs. CRONAN, MURRAY and SLEMEN.
- Kingston Branch N.S.S. (Castle Street, Kingston, Surrey).—Every Sunday, 8 p.m.: Messrs. J. W. BARKER and E. MILLS.
- Manchester Branch N.S.S. (Deansgate Blitzed Site).—Every weekday, 1 p.m.: Messrs. WOODCOCK, FINKEL, SMITH or CORSAIR.
- Sunday, 3 p.m. (Platt Fields) Messrs. WOODCOCK, MILLS, etc.
- Sunday 8 p.m. (Deansgate Blitzed Site): Messrs. WOODCOCK, MILLS, SMITH or WOOD.
- Mercerside 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: Messrs. L. EBURY and A. ARTHUR.
- Nottingham Branch N.S.S. (Old Market Square) — Thursday, 1 p.m.: R. POWE. Friday, 1 p.m.: T. M. MOSLEY and R. POWE.
- Wales and Western Branch (The Downs, Bristol).—Sunday, 7 p.m.: D. SHUPPER, A Lecture.
- West London Branch N.S.S.—Every Sunday, at the Marble Arch, from 4 p.m.: Messrs. L. EBURY and A. ARTHUR.

INDOOR

- Orpington Humanist Group.—Sunday, July 14th, at Sherry's Restaurant, at 7 p.m.: F. E. LAMOND, "The Scandinavian Way of Life as an Example of the Interdependence of all Social Progress."
- South Place Ethical Society (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1).—Sunday, July 14th, 11 a.m.: Dr. W. E. SWINTON, "Man Against Death" (Sir Ronald Ross Centenary).

Notes and News

THE East German fortnightly *Democratic German Report* gives official statistics on membership of religious denominations based on a 1950 survey which excluded East Berlin. The Evangelical Christians, with 14 millions out of 17 millions listed, constitute an overwhelming majority. The only other classes of any size are Roman Catholics (nearly two millions) and people of No Religion (over a million). The latter figure suggests that a strong freethought association could be formed if such were permitted. The figure for the Jews (1,300) suggests liquidation under the Nazi régime.

IN 1955 in West Germany the Christian Trade Union Organisation was formed, the result of a breakaway from the General Federation of Labour. Left-wing fears that this would weaken the Labour movement have even been voiced by some Catholics, so that now the West German bishops have issued a statement declaring their support for the splinter group. Divide and Rule?

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MR. V. H. SUUTAR, leader of the Finnish Freethought Association, informs us that Finnish Freethinkers have commenced their biggest-ever campaign for the separation of Church and State. They have succeeded in getting a motion submitted to the Finnish Parliament for a thorough investigation into the relationship of Church and State, including Church taxes, Church registries (birth, marriage, death), burial grounds, etc. Although the Association is fully aware of the immensity of the task, Mr. Suutar expects much support in the Diet. However, whilst membership of our brother organisation increases from day to day, it is quite certain that the Church will not surrender its rights and prerogatives without a bitter struggle.

★

IN conjunction with the parliamentary attack, 60,000 copies of a striking circular have been printed and distributed to the public. Headlined *Veronmaksaja!* (Tax-payers!), the circular appeals strongly for support for disestablishment. It explains how the Church allots itself an unreasonably large percentage of the national income and shows in pictures how the Church keeps its power. One picture depicts a priest flogging a poor man inside a barrier, symbolical of the Church. Like the N.S.S., the Finns obviously favour a direct, not oblique attack! These words appear in the picture itself: "Do you cherish an ecclesiastical régime? Are you shackled by superstition and the Church? The way of the Church is a way of blood."

★

THE privilege of cheap workmen's fare in Stockport has now been abolished on Sundays. The reason? *Churchgoers* have been abusing the privilege. Which seems to prove quite conclusively the connection between religion and morality.

★

FOLLOWING a campaign to find volunteers to act as foster-parents, a spokesman for Lancashire County Council Children's Department (Preston) stressed that homes were especially needed for R.C. children. This, in spite of the fact that R.C.s constantly assert their moral outlook on family life!

★

WE regret that our notice of the Herbert Spencer meeting referred to Lord Boyd Orr as a Socialist. He sat in Parliament as an Independent. Since 1945 he has been an Honorary Associate of the R.P.A., which, incidentally, published some of Herbert Spencer's works in cheap editions.

"If some devil were to convince us that our dream of perpetual immortality is no dream, but a hard fact, such a shriek of despair would go up from the human race as no other conceivable horror could provoke . . . What man is capable of the insane self-conceit of believing that an eternity of himself would be tolerable even to himself?"—BERNARD SHAW.

NEXT WEEK

THE BIG BUSINESS OF RELIGION

By E. H. GROUT

The "Conversion" of Gilbert Murray

By COLIN McCALL

Now that the fog surrounding Professor Gilbert Murray's death has lifted, it is well we should take a clear look at his alleged death-bed conversion. For some of our newspapers seem to have stumbled about quite a lot in the mist — and we may be sure that many of their readers have followed them. Thus, Mr. Bromley Abbott (*Sunday Dispatch*, June 23rd) "learned a secret of his [Professor Murray's] private life, shared by only a handful of relatives and close friends, which is likely to cause a sharp lift of a good many eyebrows." Mr. Abbott headed his page 2 column, "The 'militant agnostic' who changed his mind". He proceeded to inform us that "on his deathbed" the Professor "found peace in the most rigid faith of all" — Roman Catholicism.

The following day, Mr. Bernard Hall of the *Daily Express* reported having seen Father John Crozier of Oxford, who said: "Last October I received a message to go to his home. I called several times, and Professor Murray and I had talks on matters of faith and conscience. On April 17 I went to his home and gave Extreme Unction. By that act he was received back into the Church. He had been a baptised Catholic, but since boyhood was not a practising Catholic." To the question: "At whose request had Extreme Unction been administered?" Father Crozier made the evasive reply: "It was administered as the result of talks I had had with Professor Murray, and in accordance with Canon Law."

On Tuesday, June 25th, the *Express* added further details. Mr. Stephen Murray, barrister son of the Professor, had expressed doubts about the "conversion" but, after seeing his Roman Catholic sister, said: "From what my sister has told me it appears that the priest in his relations with my father acting according to his rights was fully justified." Justified in what? That remained obscure.

On the same day the *Manchester Guardian* London Correspondent concluded that "In all but a most technical sense Murray 'died as he lived, a reverent agnostic.'" Father Crozier had visited him and after discussing trivial matters, had asked Murray: "Would you like to have the blessing of the Church into which you were baptised?" and "Do you truly repent of your sins?" In each case Murray had answered "Yes". There is little doubt — wrote the *Guardian* Correspondent — "that Murray would have given the same answer to these questions if they had been put to him at any time in the last fifty years." "To a Roman Catholic, however," he pointed out, "these questions have a special meaning."

On Wednesday, June 26th, the *Guardian* printed a letter from the parish priest, Father Crozier, correcting certain statements the London Correspondent had made. But the latter quite rightly replied that the "point of difference" was that the questions referred to were not put on March 22nd — "an early stage of Professor Murray's illness when he was able to give clear answers." "Father Crozier asserts that the questions were put during his last call, when . . . Professor Murray 'was not expected to last the night.'" The Correspondent ended by asking: "If the questions were asked in these circumstances of a man aged 91 on the point of death after a long illness (according to some reports he was unconscious at the time), what confidence should be placed in the answers?"

The final word — we hope! — came in a long letter from Mr. Stephen Murray to *The New Statesman and Nation* on June 29th. "The allegation that my father re-

entered the Roman Church appears to be untrue", wrote Mr. Murray. He died as for many years he had lived "a reverent agnostic". Professor Murray had apparently recently been troubled by thoughts of death, and the death of his wife had aggravated these. And in April, when his Roman Catholic daughter went to him at Oxford and found him seriously ill, she asked him "Would you like to have a blessing from that priest you know?" He said "Yes", so Mrs. Toynbee (his daughter) sent for Father Crozier, who arrived within the hour.

In Mr. Murray's own words, the priest "went over to the bed and said 'Do you know who I am?' Evidently he did, and the priest then asked 'Would you like to have the blessing of the Church into which you were baptised?' and my father clearly said 'Yes'; upon which the priest gave him a blessing. There followed some whispering by the priest, which my sister, who had withdrawn to the other side of the room did not try to listen to and did not hear, and then she saw the priest administering the sacrament of extreme unction, which involves the application of holy oil to the patient's forehead. The distinction between a blessing and a sacrament is that the former may be given to anyone, but the latter only to a member of the Church. As is well known, a Roman Catholic priest regards it as an extremely important duty to administer extreme unction to a dying person, and to fail to do so when it ought to be done is regarded as disastrous. Hence it may reasonably be supposed that a priest would consider it his duty to err in favour of presuming the patient to be a member of the Church. At no time, says Mrs. Toynbee, did my father ask for the sacrament as such; Fr. Crozier administered the sacrament at his own discretion, and my father was not in any condition to distinguish between a blessing and a sacrament."

Mrs. Toynbee adds — wrote Mr. Murray — "I thought it very uncertain indeed how conscious my father was and I would not have dreamed of making a public claim that he had re-entered the Church." To a Roman Catholic's private convictions, it could be that the events above described might constitute or provide evidence of a semi-miraculous provision of grace at the last minute; but she is emphatic that she and her Roman Catholic friends would look upon it as most improper to use these facts as founding a claim for a death-bed conversion."

Professor Murray did not, in fact, die that night, but "rallied and lasted for another five weeks." But he "never regained full consciousness, except for short intermittent spells . . . and he never again referred to this matter of the blessing and the visit of the priest." Mr. Murray concluded that "it would appear to be quite untrue to say that my father died in the Roman Catholic Church . . . my sister, her son Lawrence (who is also a Roman Catholic), and the priest, refuse to make any such allegation. Nor do the higher Roman Catholic authorities seek to make such a claim: nor did the latter raise any objection to the subsequent cremation."

Our own comments are few. We think that the *Manchester Guardian* Correspondent was right in emphasising Professor Murray's age. We are dealing, we should remember, with a man aged 91. We are dealing, too, with interference by Roman Catholics. Their "higher" authorities may not lay claim to "conversion"; almost certainly some of the "lower" authorities will! That Mrs. Toynbee's thoughts should turn towards Catholicism when

her father was dying; that she should pray for him and even propose sending for the priest, may be understandable. It savours, though, of misplaced zeal. That Father Crozier should administer the sacrament of extreme unction "at his own discretion" seems to us rather impertinent. We cannot help thinking of the situation reversed: a dying Catholic convert and a Rationalist daughter calling an official of the Rationalist Press Association or National Secular Society to his bedside; the latter then inducing the dying man to sign an application for membership. The affair would be condemned in the strongest terms. Yet Mr. Murray is prepared to accept it as a priest's "duty" to err in favour of presuming the patient to be a member of the Church when, in fact, he knew he wasn't.

The Rising Generation

JESUS AND KRISHNA

FOR CENTURIES in this country, very little was taught about other religions—Judaism and Christianity were always deemed sufficient for "sinners," as the people were always called. Not that Judaism was taught—it was only brought in because it was the religion which was superseded by Christianity. All the same, there were enquiring students who found out that there were plenty of other religions in the world—many making very much the same claims as Christianity. Among them was Hinduism which, strangely enough, had a Saviour called Krishna (often spelled Christna).

Just as Herod ordered the Slaughter of the Innocents to prevent Jesus from becoming the King of the Jews, so the reigning monarch of India, Kansa, tried to kill off the infant Krishna. And just as Joseph had to go to Egypt to save the life of Jesus, so had the father of Krishna to run away to a place called Gokool with his little son to save him from Kansa.

Krishna soon began his miraculous career by curing people—just like Jesus—one of his first cures being that of a leper. And again, like Jesus, he cured cripples and restored dead people to life.

His mother, Devaki, was, like Mary, a Virgin; and, just as Mary was saluted by "an angel of the Lord" with "Hail, Mary! the Lord is with you," so Devaki was saluted by "a chorus of Devatas" because she was chosen by the Lord to be the mother of Krishna—"all nature shall have cause to exult." The birth of Jesus was announced by a star; so was the birth of Krishna. And both babies were received with divine honours and gifts.

Both Jesus and Krishna were "crucified"—Krishna is represented with his arms extended, but not on a cross; Jesus, of course, with arms extended, on a cross. But both were "pierced," Jesus with a spear, and Krishna with an arrow. When dead, Jesus "descended into Hell." So did Krishna. Jesus rose from the dead; so did Krishna. Jesus is to come back again to earth—the "Second Advent." So is Krishna, who will appear "as an armed warrior on a white horse." Jesus will judge the dead on the "last" day—so will Krishna. And even when Jesus said he was the "Light of the World," Krishna capped it with "I am the light in the Sun and the Moon." In fact, quite a crowd of things which Christians associate with Jesus can be shown to be associated with Krishna. All the virtues, for example—justice, mercy, humanity, compassion, and so on, are all part of the religion called Hinduism. And Krishna lived centuries before Jesus.

In other words, there is nothing original with Christianity whatever. It is just a rehash of other and older religions.

H.C.

A Milestone of Science

By J. GORDON

[Guide to I.G.Y. Methuen, 2s. 6d.]

JULY 1ST 1957, ushered in the beginning of the greatest co-operative scientific enterprise ever undertaken. Known as the International Geophysical Year, it will last until December 1958. During this period, teams of scientists from over fifty nations will form a world-wide network of stations from which a large number of observations will be made in a dozen different but related fields of science.

In order to acquaint the public with the objects of the I.G.Y., the British National Committee have produced a half-crown booklet which sets forth in a series of short contributions the main fields in which a concerted effort will be made to find out more about the physical forces affecting our planet. These range from studies of solar activity to the measurement of the epicentres of earthquakes. A specially intensive study of cosmic rays is planned. Many branches of physics could forge ahead on the basis of new and wider knowledge of these powerful radiations. Also, the biologist might be able to assess the genetic damage that can result from known intensities of both natural and artificial sources of ionising radiation. This last possibility is perhaps more important than any other in view of the urgency which surrounds the question of how much radioactivity from H-bomb tests we can safely tolerate.

The scheme which has most caught the imagination of the public is the artificial satellite programme, itself a part of the I.G.Y. Both Russia and the U.S. will launch satellites by means of multi-stage rockets, using the most powerful rocket engines ever designed. These will project a metallic sphere some 20 inches in diameter into an orbit some 300 miles above the Earth's surface. Tracked visually and by radio, the satellite will transmit back to Earth the measurements made by built-in instruments of air density, temperature, ultra-violet radiation and as many other quantities as human ingenuity can devise. Not one or two, but several satellites will be required to satisfy the tremendous thirst for new knowledge.

The British National Committee for the I.G.Y. are to be congratulated on producing, within some 50 pages, a very readable account of this mighty scientific onslaught on some of the most puzzling problems of Nature.

For Secularists everywhere, the I.G.Y. will mark a milestone in real human progress. Out of this great endeavour will come, not some super weapon of destruction, but pure basic knowledge, the very lifeblood of science. And with it will come the means, if properly directed, of making *this* life on *this* world saner, brighter and better for everyone.

From Hong Kong

Among the miniature stamp-collection which arrives at my house every day, I was very pleased to find a letter with a Hong Kong stamp, the sender being Mr. Ruthee Wu, a field-representative of the IHEU, Mr. Wu, who describes himself as a Confucian Humanist, asserts that while empires and civilizations had come and gone, the old Chinese Civilization alone was able to withstand the vicissitudes of time and attributes this to the Rationalist teaching of Confucius, who, "over 25 centuries ago, rigorously taught against intolerance and bigotry". He affirms that it was due to the teachings of Confucius that China escaped the horrors of the religious persecutions and wars

during the Dark and Middle Ages.

Mr. Wu further asserts that unlike religions which appeal to their adherents to renounce this world, the Humanism of Confucius "postulates appreciation of human creativeness and achievement and the finding of happiness and satisfaction in historical existence without any supernatural background."

Today in Hong Kong, he reports, almost all the educational establishments are either controlled, or influenced, by dogmatic religious bodies.

The local radio stations suffer the same pressure and must share in the religious indoctrination. Freethinking parents have the choice of sending their children to religion-controlled schools or letting them manage without schooling.

Although Religious Freedom exists in principle, in practice pupils of Government grant-aided schools are invariably required to attend Bible and religious classes.

On the Chinese Mainland, says Ruthee Wu, the Communist Government is fundamentally against dogmatic religion, but in the emergency of the present situation the Communists are attempting to enlist the forces of religion to gain international goodwill, therefore they not only refrain from being militantly anti-religious, but actually encourage all creeds to take their own course — so long as the State is supported.

At the moment there are unfortunately no Freethought or Rationalist societies in Hong Kong.

DAVE SHIPPER

CORRESPONDENCE

HOW TO DISPROVE "GOD"

I must protest against the understatement of the case of *militant* Freethought by G. I. Bennett (*THE FREETHINKER* of London, April 19th). Recognising that monotheism, the very essence of higher religions, is the ultimate target of militant Freethought, he pens this misstatement of our intellectual status: "We may predicate that Deity does not exist... This may well be our conviction; but how can we demonstrate the truth of it? To do so presupposes the possession of final scientifically established facts of the evolution of the universe and all that is in it. This is a condition of knowledge that will probably never be realised by humanity. And in the absence of our being able to prove anything in respect of final and fundamental truth, etc." All this is simply a confusion unctuously masquerading as wisdom.

After the principle of evolution has been long ago recognised as true even by foremost biblical scholars for the evolution of Christian monotheism (rather: threegodism) out of the surrounding mythologies, it is ridiculous to suggest that the truth of evolution still needs a final establishment. Anyway, the disproof of monotheism has nothing to do with proving evolution, because the "philosophical" reasoning which led to monotheism was not a conclusion from evolutionary facts, but an abstract attempt to deduce fallaciously, from the mere belief in many gods, the existence of one god-in-general or a general god, as H. G. Wells called him. The self-contradiction here consisted in the simultaneous denial of all particular deities and of affirming one deity (-in-general), separable from the totality of them! This contradiction of dismissing gods and keeping their common quality 'godhood, i.e., 'God-head' or 'De-ity,' is ridiculously obvious if, instead of 'god,' we apply the very same reasoning, say, to elves: "The elves do not exist. The one and true Elf (-in-general), the Elfity, exists."

G. S. SMELTERS.

LOSSES BY THE R.C. CHURCH

We do not know accurately the position in Britain, but certainly in Holland the R.C. Church has been incurring gratifying losses. Over 50% have lapsed, and 150 extra priests have been drafted in to deal with the problem. The information is contained in *The Universe* of November 18th, 1955.

ANTI-VATICAN.

MATTER AND MIND

Mr. Cutner appears to have misunderstood my letter. I asked why he thought matter was in existence before mind; I did not assert that mind was in existence before matter. I tried to show that mind appears to be a function of all matter. The question is important to Freethinkers, since the Christian regards the creation

of a thinking man as an obvious miracle in a universe of "unthinking matter." Our case is stronger when we show that the most primitive forms of matter exhibit selective attraction and repulsion. As matter develops, so do these functions develop. The similarity between the thought shown by lowly forms of plants and that of man is, of course, striking.

HENRY MEULIN.

GOD IN THE ROCKIES

It was about 1906 when the pamphlet mentioned by Mr. G. H. Taylor was being circulated in Wales. We discovered that the same story as Reade's had been written some years before by an American evangelist named J. B. Wallingford and printed in a Yankee magazine. Musgrave Reade had stolen Wallingford's 'revelation.' Anyway, he must have made something out of the pamphlet. When other pamphlets were selling at one penny, his sold at threepence, and the Churches saw that it sold well. Any lie told by a Christian is a virtue in the sight of God.

PAUL VARNEY.

PAUL

I enjoyed Mr. Cutner's article on Pentecost very much. I always admire his articles. I note he says there is no evidence for the existence of Paul. I am not a classical scholar, but I'm sure I've read that an ancient romance described St. Paul as "bald-headed and bandy." I always thought that was a proof of Paul's existence anyway. Is this not true?

A. HIGGITT.

[Mr. Cutner writes: "Lucian (120-190 A.D.) refers to someone 'bandy-legged and bald,' but he never met him and there is no evidence it was Paul."]

OBITUARY

WE regret to announce the death of June 28th of Rowland Billing, member of the Manchester Branch N.S.S. for over 40 years. Mr. Billing was a former Branch Secretary and a Committee member until his death. He was an enthusiastic outdoor speaker for the Branch until his health broke down two years ago. Despite his ill-health, Mr. Billing persisted in attending Branch meetings, and it was after he had been to a lunchtime meeting at the Deansgate Blitzed Site during the heatwave that he was taken ill again and did not recover. A secular service was conducted by Mr. W. Collins at Manchester Crematorium on Thursday, July 4th.

We tender our deep sympathy to Mr. Billing's son and the family.

H. M. ROGALS

LAURENCE ROBERTS VENTON, who died suddenly on June 28th, at the age of 68, had been a member of the West Ham and District Branch N.S.S. for 35 years. Mr. Venton never sought the limelight, but worked quietly and hard behind the scenes. He was known and respected for his humanitarian principles and his social activities. He was the devoted husband of Mrs. E. Venton, of the N.S.S. Executive Committee, to whom we send our deepest sympathy.

A secular service was read by the General Secretary at the Crematorium, Southend-on-Sea, on Thursday, July 4th, when the President, Vice-President and Treasurer represented the Executive Committee.

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