

The Freethinker

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THE International Geophysical Year has started without any spectacular send-off by the Churches. Indeed, it would present a problem to put a specifically Christian blessing on a world-wide enterprise — the noblest on such a scale in the whole history of mankind and an effective answer to those who would call a halt to scientific advancement.

Instead of science the Great Ogre bending over the world with a perpetual threat to end it all with a Bang, science now becomes the greatest unifying force that mankind has to show, transcending nationality, creed and colour. I.G.Y. is too big for any Church blessing, too comprehensive to be patronised by any of the world's sects.

The Church in Decline

Yet it requires no great prognostic power to say that the Christian Churches, true to form, will wring whatever is possible from this greatest of all adventures. Let success attend it and we shall be reading next year in the Christian press: "Science reveals the glories of God." "Science proves an orderly universe: sign of an intelligent Creator."

Let some kind of mishap befall the I.G.Y. and we shall read: "Science baffled by Divine Mysteries." "Penalty for Probing the Beyond."

The basic attitude of Christianity to knowledge is not to be judged by this period of the comparative weakness of the Christian religion, but by the period of its strength.

What the Roman Catholic Church in particular would do if it could, is to be judged by what it has done when it could, and by the conditions in Catholic countries today.

The World of the Popes

The Popes controlled knowledge in Europe for over 1000 years. Sacred "learning," not scientific, was the pivotal position and anything new that did not conform to it was ruthlessly suppressed. The Popes became sovereigns and demanded revenues. The result was a continent largely composed of pathless forests dotted with towns and monasteries, with illiteracy keeping the people — or those who survived the frequently insanitary conditions — in a state of ignorance, superstition and therefore subjection. The Church's self-appointed role was credulously accepted and there was always the prospect of purgatory for those who strayed from the path. The amount of revenue yielded by the fear of purgatory can never be estimated. And with profitable political offices filled by the ecclesiastics and their nominees, and an inquisition ready to exterminate heresy, it was a crime even to think.

The Rivals

The period of the greatest strength of the Christian religion is, naturally, the low-water mark of science. This relationship holds throughout their history. For religion and science aim at covering the same territory. It is the fundamental cleavage between the natural and the supernatural. Eventu-

ally they cannot co-exist. They are rival explanations of the same facts. Says the one: the harvest is bad because some individual has offended the Lord. And the other: the harvest is bad because of unfavourable weather. It is the nature of science to advance, taking one bastion after another. It is the nature of the Churches to retreat and then claim that no conflict exists.

— VIEWS and OPINIONS — *The I.G.Y. and the CHURCHES* — By G. H. TAYLOR —

Freethought Opportunities

During the I.G.Y. it is for Freethought propagandists to point out to their hearers what the record of Christianity has been with regard to human knowledge. The Christian Fathers solidly set their face against any know-

ledge contrary to the Holy Word. There could be no Antipodes, said Augustine, because the Bible says nothing about it. "Is there anyone so senseless," asked Lactantius, "as to believe there are men whose footsteps are higher than their heads? That the trees grow downwards? That the rain and snow fall upwards?"

Truth Catches Up

This was still the mental climate when Copernicus put forward his discovery of the earth's movement. Astronomers were forbidden to hold the Copernican theory and were compelled to teach that the earth was stationary, while Copernicus' book was placed on the Index. In 1664 the Vatican condemned all books teaching the movement of the earth, and there were "learned theologians" ready to prove Copernicus wrong, (a learned theologian is one who writes religious nonsense in sophisticated language.). In 1835 the ban on Copernicus by Rome was finally withdrawn. The ordinary truth had at last become too big for Catholic Truth.

Science on the Leash

Nor were Catholics alone in their opposition to new knowledge. "Who will venture to place the authority of Copernicus above that of the Holy Spirit?" asked Calvin. "This fool Copernicus," exclaimed Luther, "wishes to reverse the entire science of astronomy, but sacred scripture tells us that Joshua commanded the sun to stand still and not the earth."

For hundreds of years scientists could only carry on their work under the eagle eye, sometimes called the "patronage," of the Church. Men like Kepler, Galileo, Bruno, Lyell, Darwin and even travellers like Columbus came under the ban of the Church and the names could be multiplied. An Academy of Science was founded at Naples in 1560 and suppressed by ecclesiastical authority. And again, such cases could be multiplied.

The Mental Climate

In such a cultural atmosphere the relations between cause and effect were so blurred that many kinds of odd beliefs prevailed, such as the belief in witchcraft. In face of the Biblical injunction, "Thou shalt not suffer a witch to live,"

John Wesley declared that to give up belief in witches was to give up the Bible. His explanation of earthquakes was that, apart from their natural causes, they were the result of human sin. Comets, too, gave rise to various supernatural fears, and in a Church-controlled, science-starved world, such instances could, again, be extended. Perhaps the best-known absurdity is the attempt made by several divines to state the exact time of the earth's beginning, and in the 17th century it was fixed by Dr. Lightfoot of Cambridge, after careful calculation, at 9 a.m. on the morning of the 23rd October, 4004 B.C. Even Franklin's lightning

conductor was objected to as an interference with God's intentions, bones of saints being preferred.

Towards the New World

The strong period of religion was the Age of Faith — faith in sacred bones, sacred words, holy relics, holy men, and the cost in human suffering and misery and degradation can never be counted.

This age when the I.G.Y. has become possible is burdened with a religious heritage, true, but its very character as a world team-effort shows, in contrast, religion receding as a petty geographical accident.

Where are the Atheists?

By H. CUTNER

OF THE many opponents of Atheism and Materialism we meet, the ones who always intrigue me are our Spiritualists. They are so very naive. As a rule, they know very little about Atheism or Materialism — that is, they do know the words, and they have a suspicion that an Atheist is someone who does not believe in a God. When a Spiritualist uses the word "God", and they almost all do, he always means the God of Christianity, the Father of Jesus, who is known in the Christian Church also as Jehovah or Elohim. He never means Allah or Vishnu or Osiris or any of the Gods of "native" races. The one true God is the Christian God who was, I may add in passing, "pinched" from the Jews. There was a tribal God in Palestine in the pre-Israelite era called El, and in the course of centuries he became known as Elohim, the God of Gods, with another name Jehovah — now sometimes spelled Yahveh. Elohim (or El) became Allah for the Mohammedans. And for any Spiritualist, if anyone does not believe in this Deity with his multitude of names, he is an Atheist. If he knew anything at all about Atheism, he would know that he also is an Atheist who does not believe in Quetzalcoatl, the Mexican God, who has as much right to be a Deity as El.

These preliminary observations occurred to me as I read what a well known Spiritualist, Mr. Horace Leaf, has to say about Atheism. He tells us in an article in *Psychic News* (not a recent article) that "Spiritualism has always proved too strong for the Atheist." I like the word "always" in this connection. It is so emphatic, so formidable. There is no reservation. We have "no better case against it than to ignore it."

Well, well. The idea that we Atheists of all people have ignored what we consider to be hopeless credulity and superstition is really a magnificent argument. But if Mr. Leaf knew anything at all of Atheism, and had informed himself as to what it is as assiduously as I, as an Atheist, have tried to learn something about Spiritualism, he would not have written ignorant nonsense.

But he goes further — he adds that the Atheist, "in view of accumulated facts, cannot prove it is wrong." I am sure that the readers of *Psychic News* will agree with every word here. Whatever else they may read, they never or very rarely read THE FREETHINKER — the only Atheistic weekly published. If they did they would find that over and over again have we referred to the fraudulent mediums, the "accumulated facts", the stupidity of so many scientists allowing themselves to be hoodwinked and bamboozled by astute mediums. In this very article, Mr. Leaf proudly names a number of scientists who have accepted Spiritualism; but he does not utter a word about the mediums they sat with who were nearly all convicted of fraud and humbug.

There is, for example, Sir William Crookes who was

completely convinced through Florrie Cook, as arrant a fraud as you could find anywhere. She was actually exposed by another Spiritualist! And he at least knew what he was doing.

There is Dr. Alfred Russel Wallace who was bamboozled by the clever "slate-writing spirits" called up for him by the late S. J. Davey, an amateur conjuror. Even when Davey told Wallace that all his "spirits" were clever sleight of hand, the eminent scientist refused to believe him!

There is Sir Oliver Lodge who sat with Mrs. Piper, the lady who ridiculed the idea that she called up any spirits. In any case, one of those with whom she talked was Adam Bede!

There is Dr. Crawford who was so utterly hoodwinked by some Irish girls that he committed suicide.

There is Baron Shrenck-Notzing who was a puppet in the hands of "Eva C." as big a fraudulent medium as has ever lived. And so on. I think his list of eminent scientists who have been convinced of Spiritualism contains the names of some of the biggest fools who have ever investigated it. In their own special fields of science, they no doubt fully justified their fame. But why should this have given them special powers in investigating spooks, poltergeists, apports, levitations, and all the other fraudulent phenomena?

Then Mr. Leaf tells us that one "seldom meets Atheists now, and certainly their decline has been very obvious since the advent of modern Spiritualism, but one does meet them occasionally." This is very rich. How many has Mr. Leaf met "occasionally"?

It has been my own good fortune to meet people who when told of my Atheism would look upon me with a pitying smile, and protest that I really meant that I was an Agnostic. Surely I don't actually deny God Almighty? It is wonderful how many of these people know better than I do what are my beliefs — or lack of them. Persons of Mr. Leaf's credulity would never believe that anybody could deny their God, however much he may be sceptical about it — or him.

Of course, the Atheists Mr. Leaf has met "are difficult to deal with from a mediumistic point of view", but "we do convert them." Now that is really interesting. Does Mr. Leaf claim that any genuine Atheists whom he has met have actually been converted to Spiritualism? Could he name a dozen of them?

And here I want it to be made clear that when I ask for the names of Atheists who have been converted, I do not mean some people who, after they have seen the light (or the spooks) say they used to be Atheists. I mean the real thing — people who know what is meant by Atheism, who can give a reasoned exposition of its philosophy, and who can then also confute it. I do not mean someone who

(Concluded on next page)

Problems of Church and State - 4

By F. A. RIDLEY

Non-dogmatic Religions and the State

By the above term "non-dogmatic," we imply those Oriental religions that do not involve belief in a single dogmatic creed and unique standard of truth; and which do not, accordingly, seek to invoke the secular arm to enforce conformity with the given standard of compulsory belief. The leading religions of this type are Hinduism in India, and Buddhism in Ceylon and Burma. In old China, Confucianism represented another example of non-dogmatic religion. In India, the vast majority adheres to Hinduism, yet India, under the leadership of that enlightened Humanist Pandit Nehru, remains a secular State despite considerable pressure not only from fanatical Hindu groups, but perhaps more directly from sectarian, minority groups of a dogmatic character. One, the aggressive Christian minority, the missionary activities of which — subversive in intention of the Secular State — have recently been the object of an Indian governmental report. This makes a notable contribution to the whole subject of the relations — not only in India — of Church and State. However, a Christian "Pakistan" has not, so far, materialised. Whilst both Hinduism and Buddhism have produced groups with political aims, in general, neither of these great Indian religions is sufficiently centralised in its organisation or dogmatic enough in its beliefs to threaten seriously the foundations of the Secular State in Bharat (India), Lanka (Ceylon) or Burma. Accordingly, already, despite their brief existence and backward economy, these newest additions to the family of Secular States appear firmly established and indeed put to shame older Western countries like England, Sweden and Spain, where more primitive medieval relationships still remain.

Islam, The Eastern "Rome"

Far other is the case with regard to the other major cosmopolitan oriental religion Islam. Here, the position is far more similar to the question of *concordats* vis-a-vis the "One True Church" of Rome with its exclusive dogmatic system and its "Infallible" Papacy. For Islam is Rome's opposite number, its "Hellish Twin", the opposite number in the East to the Roman Catholic Church in the West; that other great dogmatic religion. It is not without reason that a modern religious writer has saluted Rome and Mecca as "the two Gibraltars of the Human spirit" against the onrush of scepticism and the onslaughts of Atheism. Mecca is the Eastern "Rome", as Rome represents the Western "Mecca". For Islam is a dogmatic, a totalitarian creed which claims infallibility, not, like Rome, for a *man* — there is no Islamic "Papacy"—but for a book, the Koran, God's eternal Word: it is deeply significant in this respect that whilst there is a flourishing Rationalist movement in India, there is no such movement in Pakistan — "the land of the pure" — of the Muslim "True Believers", nor as far as we know, does any such movement exist *anywhere* in the far-flung lands adhering to the cosmopolitan Commonwealth of Islam from Morocco to the East Indies.

Church and State in Islam

The above caption is actually something of an anachronism. For really no such problem exists, or ever can exist in an integral Islamic culture based as every authentic Muslim culture is bound to be based, on the Koran and the authorised *Hadith*, or *Traditions* which form the canonical commentaries on the Infallible Revelation of Allah. We repeat, in an orthodox Muslim community there is no such thing as a *secular* State, nor is there any secular legal code independent of Divine Revelation and of its

authorised commentators, the theologians and canonists. However, the impact of the scientific revolution has already shaken the dogmatic foundations of Islam. "Modernist" movements in politics, as well as in theology, are beginning to make their appearance in the more advanced Muslim lands. In the sphere of Church and State with which we are here concerned, Mustapha Kemal Ataturk showed the way in Turkey by the creation of a *secular* law independent of the Holy Book, the Koran. As similar conditions reproduce themselves, we may expect other Muslim States to follow his example. Then, with the eventual creation of *secular* states in Muslim lands, the era of *Concordats* will surely begin. Here we will not anticipate their contents except to comment briefly that their general nature will probably come to resemble those in Catholic lands, since however bitter their traditional rivalry, both Rome and Mecca are essentially creeds of a similar generic character, intolerant, dogmatic in an *exclusive* sense, totalitarian in their essential outlook. Again, Mecca is the Eastern "Rome". Despite technical differences, Christ and Muhammed belong, if we may venture an irreverent metaphor, to the self-same stable. Like Moses, from whom they both derive — we have elsewhere termed Islam "Jewish Catholicism" viz. as Judaism raised from the tribal to the cosmopolitan level. It is with a whole family of "Jealous gods", Jehovah, Christ and Allah, all of Semitic genealogy, that the modern Secular State has still to deal!

The above is the fourth 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 concluded.)

WHERE ARE THE ATHEISTS?

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says he never really believed in God until he became a Spiritualist. Of course, anybody who denies a God is an Atheist; and as far as Osiris or Krishna is concerned, Mr. Leaf is as big an Atheist as I am. But I have a philosophy — a reasonable one in my opinion — which can meet not only the arguments of theists, but also any whatever that Mr. Leaf and his supporters can bring forth on Spiritualism.

As for arguments or "evidence" in favour of what I like to call spooks — I have seen none whatever. I am certain that we can be dogmatic about this. Whenever a medium has been properly investigated, he or she has been proved to be a fraud or a failure.

The late Harry Price spent a fortune and nearly forty years of his life in investigating the claims of mediums — and how many of them did he claim were absolutely genuine when he wrote his autobiography? As for Harry Houdini, he spent the last ten years of his life in exposing the utter fraud Spiritualism was surrounded with. He never met a single genuine medium in his life.

Mr. Leaf is a thoroughly convinced believer in spirit photography. Here then is my challenge to him: as a photographer myself for many years, I know quite a little about photography. Would he be prepared to meet me and my camera — which is a miniature one — and prove how easy it is photographing spooks with it? If not, why not?

—NEXT WEEK—

E. ROYSTON PIKE, a former R.P.A Secretary,
discusses
MILITANCY AND "THE FREETHINKER"

This Believing World

On the TV Brains Trust the other Sunday were two "infidels," Dr. Julian Huxley and Prof. A. J. Ayer, and opposed to them were two fundamentalists, Lord D. Cecil and the Very Rev. M. C. D'Arcy S.J. Viewers and listeners must have been enthralled at the way the two Christians upheld the reality of a personal Devil and a personal God against the two unbelievers who rejected both. In addition, Fr. D'Arcy stoutly defended the doctrine of "original sin," aided by Lord Cecil against the unbelief of the other two. Needless to say, Fr. D'Arcy very adroitly avoided discussing the "reality" of Adam in the Garden of Eden, but he said enough to show that he believed every word of it — as did indeed Lord Cecil. It was an intellectual treat to hear their defence of a mythical story which had been pulverised by science ages ago.

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Of course it has to be admitted that from the genuine Christian point of view, a personal Devil is literally necessary to account for the evil in the world. A good God cannot be held responsible, and the only explanation must be a Devil. Lord Cecil heard with the most amused contempt Dr. Huxley on the theory of natural causation which all defenders of the Devil expose as soon as they open their mouths — but there is little doubt that both Fr. D'Arcy and Lord Cecil will have the bulk of the viewing public with them. After all, "our Lord" thoroughly believed in the Devil, so what more can be said?

★

Fr. Trevor Huddleston, who recently scornfully rejected the idea that true Christianity meant little more than "kindness," and insisted that it was a supernatural religion, appears to have been heavily attacked; and in the *Sunday Dispatch* recently asked, "How Pagan is Britain?" Our real sin he insisted, is "apathy and confusion" which is quite true. The average man (if there is such a person) is obliged to learn in school all about Christianity, but later is completely indifferent. And certainly, when he notes the tremendous differences between the beliefs of the various sects, he is bound to be confused. All the same, in spite of everything, "there is ground for real hope and enthusiasm." And why?

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It appears everywhere Fr. Huddleston goes, he is "enormously impressed by the sense of a spiritual hunger." This "spiritual hunger" is the great stand-by of all evangelists. And there is not the slightest evidence for it. The vast majority of people simply haven't got any spiritual hunger — they are much more concerned with material things such as good wages, plenty of food and drink, and if possible, a good win on football pools. Whether Jesus Christ did or did not die for them nearly 2,000 years ago no more concerns them than whether Aladdin had his wonderful Lamp pinched or not centuries ago. Fr. Huddleston had better try again.

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How beautiful and thrilling is "Divine Love" — the love Mr. Fred Astill, a 29-year-old married man, has for the 42-year-old Miss Sheena Govan who is the leader of the one true Christian sect known in Scotland as "the Nameless Ones." Sheena, we are pleased to say, is the New Messiah, and bearing in mind how Jesus expects everybody to throw over father and mother and certainly one's wife for his sake, we need not be surprised to learn that Mrs. Astill heartily concurs in the divine triangle. "It is all God's will," she buoyantly says. Which proves how beautiful can be the influence of Jesus Christ and True Christianity even in married life.

Anybody who has doubts about the mills of God grinding slow or exceeding small or otherwise should take heed of the fate of poor John Archer, aged 73, who, after winning £8,000 in a lottery, was suspended three months later by the Salvation Army of which he had been an enthusiastic member. He suffered a stroke a week after winning and died the other day. Winning huge sums on a lottery is an abomination in the eyes of the Lord — as we are sure the Rev. Donald Soper would gladly admit. And we now can see what happens or may happen when the Almighty is thwarted. Holders of Premium Bonds — beware!

REVIEW

Our Children and the Atomic Age

By JACK GORDON

The Atomic Age and Our Biological Future by H. V. Bronsted, price 9/6d., Watts and Co. Ltd., 1957.

ONE OF the problems which confronts scientists today is how to minimize the harmful effects of radiation from atomic energy sources. It is a problem which faces the world's statesmen on the political level and the successful solution of this problem in the near future is a matter of increasing urgency to every man, woman and child on this planet.

Of most immediate concern is the question of "fall-out" from the testing of atomic weapons: yet, even if an international agreement abolishing all such tests were concluded tomorrow, the basic radiation hazard would still remain.

Dr. Bronsted, who is professor of Zoology at the University of Copenhagen, has written a timely and very readable book with the above title, in which is set out a concise summary of what is known today about atomic radiation and its influence upon our biological make-up. As befits an expert in Zoology, Dr. Bronsted describes in some detail how mutations can arise from the bombardment of the fertilized egg by various radiations such as X-rays. After setting out a neat summary of the various forms of radiation, the author succeeds in describing and explaining by means of cleverly constructed models and analogies how the human egg cell is constructed and how normal growth takes place. Of particular merit are his descriptions of such recondite concepts as gene structure and chromosome patterns, and of the re-arrangement of molecular patterns which the genes undergo when subjected to bombardment by atomic particles. The mechanism of heredity is discussed and some interesting observations are made on the effect of medical, ethical and political factors operating as a brake upon natural selection. It is made clear that nothing but genetic disadvantage can result from artificially raising the mutation rate of the species through inadequate protection from atomic radiations.

With the gradual exhaustion of the world's sources of oil, coal etc., new forms of energy must be sought, and sought rapidly. The world's population is increasing steadily and first the Western nations and then the others will develop atomic energy for industrial uses on an ever-increasing scale. The safe disposal of the waste products from atomic furnaces will become a problem of increasing magnitude — it is already causing headaches at the Atomic Energy Commission in America. Unless the radiation hazard can be checked, we shall bequeath to our children, not merely the means to move mountains and re-shape continents, but deleterious changes in their genetic constitution which may prove irreversible.

Dr. Bronsted has aimed at creating an informed public opinion by a plain, unemotional statement of the facts. We wish his work the circulation it deserves.

THE FREETHINKER

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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.

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.
- 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: 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. SHIPPER, 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

- South Place Ethical Society (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1).—Sunday, July 28th, 11 a.m.: Prof. F. T. TEN HAVE (Amsterdam), "The Humanistic Adventure in Our Time." (Under auspices of I.H.E.U.)

Notes and News

The American Rationalist Federation is to hold its second annual convention at the Thomas Paine Centre in Philadelphia on August 24th/25th. The Centre is the recently-opened H.Q. of the Friendship Liberal League. We wish our American friends a very successful convention.

★
The Archbishop of Dublin, the Most Rev. Dr. J. C. McQuaid, recently expressed his "grave disapproval of the practice which has begun to show itself of permitting young women to compete in cycling and athletics in mixed public sports." He went on to remind us that "Pope Pius XI. emphasising the rules for separation of the sexes which the law of nature and Christian prudence demand, has declared: "These rules must be observed also in athletics and gymnastic exercises, where special precaution must be taken in regard to Christian modesty in the case of girls, inasmuch as it is extremely unbecoming for them to display

themselves before the public gaze." (Encyclical Letter, Divini Illius Magistri)".

★
In a new book, *Children's Missions*, the Rev. E. Blake states that children attend Sunday School because "Father likes to have the house quiet on a Sunday afternoon so that he can have a sleep. Others like their children to qualify for the summer outing, the Christmas party and annual prizes." Of course, a few abnormal parents might even send their children for religious instruction.

★
Speaking in Madison Square Garden, New York, Dr. Billy Graham (the Bishop of Wall Street), warned his audience that the end of the world may be near, people being obsessed with sex, violence and materialism, just as they were in Noah's days. "There are many signs to indicate that the end of the world may be near. The Bible teaches that the world system was once destroyed and it can be done again. The Bible says there will be similar conditions as in Noah's day. There has never been a generation so obsessed with sex as the present generation." If so, it is doubtless the result of unhealthy Christian repression. But what would Billy do without Sin? It is his theme song.

★
A proposal to build a secondary school for Manx Catholic children has been rejected by the Isle of Man Board of Education.

★
THE Vatican weekly magazine *Osservatore Della Domenica* answers with an indignant positive the question whether Catholics who consult horoscopes for guidance infringe basic principles of faith. "It is really shameful that in the 20th century people still resort to horoscopes like the ancient Egyptians 5,000 years before the birth of Christ." (They can believe the Virgin Birth story, featured in that period.) "Christians worthy of such a name must remember that every contingency of life is governed by Divine providence. When they find themselves in embarrassing situations they should pray to God and ask His help." (A small donation to the R.C. Church funds ensures a favourable hearing.) With great dignity the article reminds readers that Christians, sons of God, should not seek the help of "un-reasoning creatures" who cannot foretell the future.

★
THE Vatican authorities seldom miss a chance for publicity and during 1956 the Holy See took part in no fewer than 51 international congresses on scientific and social matters, the Pope often issuing a special blessing and giving a message to the assembly.

★
Archbishop Grimshaw, speaking in Birmingham, said: "The ambition of every father and mother should be the vocation of someone among their children to the sanctuary or the cloister, but it is disturbing to hear of parents, seemingly good parents, who refuse to contemplate even the possibility: who speak of it if they ever mention it, as if it were the greatest of tragedies, like a *wasting illness* or an *early death*." Well, he said it!

★
At a Methodist Conference at Nottingham the Rev. H. Davison (Sunderland) told the members that Methodists had a great responsibility to fight growing materialism among Durham miners and that the Durham miners' leaders were looking to the Methodist Church to be very ardent in its evangelical endeavour in the colliery villages. Naive as we are, this seems outside the province of miners' leaders to us. Perhaps some miner might be interested enough to ascertain the primary interest of his representatives?

The Old Art

By PETER F. MOORE

IN Brunswick, Western Germany, some months ago, a bookseller was sued on the grounds that a volume he was selling was inciting the peasantry to Witchcraft and Witch hunting.

The book in question was *The Sixth and Seventh Books of Moses* and here three interesting points arise: — (a) The whole matter of what is, and what is not, Holy Writ, (b) The prevalence of Witchcraft in Europe today and (c) The gentle art of bookselling.

This *Sixth and Seventh Book of Moses* is a manual of the Black Art, and its origin is obscure. The title page claims Philadelphia as its place of origin but this is unlikely.

It is significant that Moses has the honour of lending his name to this most valuable text book, for both he and Solomon have reputations as magicians quite outside orthodox religion. Most occultists agree that Moses was an adept; he was in fact, regarded as the equal of Solomon in transcendental magic. The whole story of the Exodus and events leading up to it have more of Ammon than Jehovah. Solomon on the other hand, was of a much more practical nature and was a magician pure and simple and is brought into propriety by the explanation that his actions were really spiritual allegory. The Mohammedans have no such squeemishness and say bluntly that both of them controlled the power of God, which is the basis of magic. In fact, "Solomon's Key" and the "Kabbalah" can be considered genuine but much too dangerous.

What then, influenced the compilers of the Bible? The main object of course, was to give credence to what was already being taught. But there were some slips — notably the Gospel according to St. John. The Authorised Version's only claim to be the Word of God is based on the manipulative ability of generations of bishops, so that if the Bible as we know it is genuine, why not these German books? The Authorised Version has such a grip that anything not contained in it is automatically rejected, whereas in Germany no Bible seems to have the authority that the Authorised Version has here. Therefore this particular volume has a credence it cannot have in this country. It is the only advantage of a standardised scripture that frauds, other than official ones are out, thereby saving the population a lot of unnecessary worry which cannot be good for them. This line of argument has been used by priests since the invention of state religion and in affairs such as this they appear to win a point.

Our main interest is the survival of Witchcraft. It may be said that this is just an isolated case but peasants are much the same everywhere so it seems that European Witchcraft is still one of the forces of natural existence. I do not mean here, gatherings in dark hollows to dance around fires, though that probably still goes on. What are involved are primitive methods of controlling the forces of nature, which is the limit of the peasants' occult ambition. Why Germany? Because the German tradition is much older and more primitive than anything to be found inside the limits of Greco-Roman culture, as there were no cities beyond the line made by the Rhine and Danube. Indeed, the northern parts of Europe received Christian civilisation very late; Prussia as late as 1400 A.D. A glance at the history of these areas shows that most mystical and heretical doctrines had a German origin. But it would be a mistake to assume that the rest of Europe is without any Witchcraft. It is still practised from Finistère in the West to Crete in the East but there is no widespread underground organisation. It is just a matter of each village having its own

consultant on how to make crops grow or babies come. Cultivated Witchcraft appears to be having a little "Renaissance" of its own and the reasons are not far to seek. It represents a relief from tension and uncertainty. It will be noticed that although the most dry and rational religions are in obvious decline, spectacular ones like Catholicism and Evangelism are enjoying something of a vogue, though I doubt if these satisfy everybody's aspirations. In a revival of the spiritually exotic, a darker and more daring outlook is needed. Once again there is no sinister widespread organisation, but it is still a profitable line of business nonetheless. Forbidden fruits certainly taste sweeter; they are also more expensive. Which brings us back to the German books. They are not exactly in the paperback price range. They cost anything up to £9 in a de luxe edition. The mere fact of such an edition being made available, provides a clue to the type of clientele envisaged. Among the ingenious devices to be found in it are blank pages which fill half the book (this is a psychological gambit of the first water) plus the old German type used, which looks somewhat sinister at the best of times. But in England we don't go in for that sort of thing — or do we? There are in England many organisations operating on similar lines. Initiation into the inner secrets of life is a financially unprofitable method of obtaining knowledge. We have had in England some extremely expert Occultists, but I have never heard of one dying in poverty.

As well as this sophisticated cult, there is still a surviving nucleus in the countryside. Sometimes it is got at by the local vicar, polished and generally bowdlerised. But there are still those who prefer it to remain discreetly in the background. Different people give different strongholds; some the Midlands, some say the South is the Citadel of English Witch cults but as it defies the efforts of the well-meaning and the inquiring (i.e. busybodies and the inquisitive) the science of statistics has so far made no headway. The main conclusion to be drawn from this is that civilisation is not as deep as is generally believed — or hoped. The pattern is as it always was: centres of civilisation in towns and cities with a progressive thinning down until barbarism is reached. Here, there are so many centres of life that nobody is cut off from town influence. But on the continent, the density of towns is smaller and there is greater isolation from the main stream.

From the U.S.A.

ARIZONA

MRS. BETH KURRUS, President of the Arizona Secularists, informs me that they are a member of their parent group — the United Secularists of America — and are affiliated to the POAU (Protestants and Other Americans United for Separation of Church and State) and the Freethinkers Tract Society. Founded in 1952, the Arizona Secularists hold monthly meetings and send representatives to national conventions. They are fortunate in having a source of inexpensive printing and correspond with other secularists in the U.S.A. and in several foreign countries. They are very interested in important issues such as separation of Church and State, equalization of taxes, equal representation in communication and publication, and distribution of free-thought literature.

They are endeavouring to start a local POAU branch, as they feel that the POAU is "organized for constructive action in the field of separation of Church and State —

a field which is gradually being narrowed down in this country by constant corroding of the legal channels and the unenlightened representatives being sent to our legislative bodies."

Phoenix, their H.Q., has a predominantly Catholic population but all the orthodox religions and sects "abound and advertise with a vengeance!" says Beth Kurrus.

She finishes her informative report on a hopeful note by affirming: "As a minority group we have much opposition and though we have not presented any appreciable threat to sectarianism we do hope to augment our membership so that in the future, secular influence may be felt."

TEXAS

THE CONGREGATION of Czech Freethinkers of Houston, Texas, has been operating ever since its foundation in 1896. It operates under a bona-fide Charter with the State of Texas, which authorizes free speech and performing of secular wedding, "christening" and burial ceremonies. My correspondent, secretary Marie F. K. Vala tells me the Congregation has great possibilities for the propagation of Freethought, but points out that although the Texans are dedicated to the moral and democratic principles of Washington, Paine, Jefferson, etc., they find that many Freethinkers do not assert themselves "because of a fear of malicious reactionary elements."

Marie Vala believes that the right of Freethinkers to perform ceremonies previously accepted as a religious prerogative is of great importance and that all Freethinkers should give consideration to this field of activity.

UTAH

RICHARD O. Pitner, organiser of the Utah Secularists, an affiliate of the United Secularists of America (Clifton, New Jersey), a journalist with *The Salt Lake Tribune*, tells me his group encounters many difficulties in the Mormon country. He inaugurated the group by contacting contributors of anti-religious letters to the "Public Forum" of the *Tribune* and built up a list of members and sympathisers in this fashion. Mr. Pitner asserts that the dabbling in politics by some Freethought journals gives them a "leftish" look and this alienates many atheists and agnostics who are also anti-socialist.

As the territory of the Utah Secularists extends over hundreds of miles of mountainous country and more than half the members live outside Salt Lake City, finding a suitable time for meetings presents a great problem. It is to be hoped that some way of overcoming these difficulties can be found in the near future, a strong freethought society being a necessity in the Brigham Young H.Q. city.

DAVE SHIPPER.

N.S.S Branch News

IN ADDITION to the numerous lectures held by National Secular Society Branches, there are many other interesting activities that are worth recording. Space is the problem and we cannot hope to mention all. This is merely a selection.

Pride of place to Portsmouth — recently formed and going well. Ninety-nine year old Branch President, Mrs. E. J. Perrett was recently interviewed by the local press and clearly made known her Secularist views. These were left out of the report, though a personal visit to the newspaper offices by the Branch Secretary, Mr. P. G. Young, induced the editor to mention Mrs. Perrett's connection with the N.S.S. Mr. Young tells us that every time he visits Mrs. Perrett he comes away "the richer for having seen and listened" to her. "She is bubbling over with information about the early days: she is completely alert and remembers as if it were only yesterday" he adds. Portsmouth Branch is lucky in its President and Secretary.

Nottingham Branch has been busily countering the propaganda of the Methodists during their Conference in the city. But the Branch was able to hold its annual outing on June 30th. Wet weather did not discourage the party, which spent an interesting day in Derbyshire under the guidance of Branch President, Mr. J. W. Challand, who knows the county well.

The following Sunday, Leicester Secular Society paid a visit to Newstead Abbey, Lord Byron's home, noting among other things the grave of "Boatswain", the poet's Newfoundland dog. Byron gave instructions in his will that he was to be buried with his dog, but this was ignored by his family. Burial at Westminster Abbey was refused by the Dean, so the poet is buried with his ancestors at a small church at Hucknall. Leicester also reports that the City Council has agreed to include THE FREETHINKER in the City Libraries.

Bradford Branch has issued its first "Bulletin" as "a useful means of contact between members of the branch and sympathisers" similar to the now well-established Manchester Branch Bulletin. Mr. H. Day the President, and Mr. W. Sheppard, the Secretary, contribute to Bradford's first issue. Mr. Sheppard asks for suggestions, criticisms or brickbats. We prefer to send a well-earned bouquet.

In Edinburgh, we are pleased to note Secretary Mr. W. Cronan has recovered from his operation and is at present convalescing. We wish him well.

Finally, we send our good wishes to our active Overseas Branches in Trinidad — Fyzabad and San Juan, noting with pleasure an increase of membership of both. "We shall never give up the struggle to oust superstition" writes Mr. S. Gustavus Stephen of the latter Branch: a fitting note to end this brief report.

C.McC.

John T. Brighton, M.B.E.

JOHN T. BRIGHTON, whose death at the age of 62, was briefly announced last week, was one of the most loved and respected of Freethought propagandists: loved by his supporters and respected by his opponents. His skill on the platform and his power of evoking the deepest loyalty from his followers were mainly responsible for building up the Secular movement on Tyneside. He was the principal speaker for both the Newcastle and the Chester-le-Street Branches. But he was much wider known. He spoke all over the country, and his rich flavoured voice and his inimitable humour made him a favourite with his audiences wherever he went.

John Brighton had a rare capacity for friendship. People recognised his deep humanity, and this, together with his common sense and "sweet reasonableness," made him equally popular in other walks of life. He was a miner, and he lived and worked among miners all his life. For many years he had been specifically concerned with safety precautions in the pit. His trade union work was extensive; he helped to establish the Durham Deputies' Association and was its President for the last decade; he was on the Durham Trades Council and the Federation Board of Mineworkers. He was also an active member of the St. John Ambulance Brigade.

All these — and other organisations — acknowledged the debt they owed him. But his local friends will miss him equally, if not more, for he was ever ready to help them with their many problems. And the National Secular Society will miss him sorely. It is true that a minor illness had recently prevented him from speaking on the open-air sites where he had become so familiar a figure that the Press called him the "Atheist Bishop," but he had still spoken indoors and debated from time to time, and he remained the very heart of Tyneside

Freethought. Men with his wit and common sense are hard to replace. He was greatly admired by Chapman Cohen, and the Society honoured him with a Vice-Presidency. Characteristically, though, he relinquished it when his health curtailed his activities.

It is sad to think that he might still be alive had he sought medical advice earlier than he did, when he felt an abdominal pain. He thought it was the result of a wrench at work; it turned out to be appendicitis. When he was rushed to hospital it was peritonitis and, though he rallied a little after the operation, there was no real hope of a recovery. It all happened with terrible suddenness, and the sympathy of all Freethinkers will go to his widow and two sons.

Several hundred of his friends—including many Secularists—filled the Newcastle Crematorium on Thursday, July 18th, when a secular service was conducted by Colin McCall, General Secretary of the National Secular Society.

CORRESPONDENCE

DEATH-BED CONVERSION

The death-bed reception of Dr. Gilbert Murray into the Roman Catholic Church is reminiscent of the "conversion" of Oscar Wilde.

When Wilde was dying on November 29th, 1900, his Catholic friend Robert Ross brought a priest to his bedside. The priest baptised and administered Extreme Unction to the unconscious Oscar, who died the following day.

Wilde had always been temperamentally attracted by the Catholic Church, but the last minute roping-in of an unconscious man seems to be taking an unfair advantage!

H. A. ROGERSON

Cassandra recently referred to the death-bed readmission of Dr. Gilbert Murray into the Roman Catholic Church. "A Strange Case" he headed it, and it certainly was. But he also mentioned a "close friend . . . who, to say the least of it, was sceptical towards the Roman Catholic Church" who was nevertheless received into it a few days before he died. He had been nursed with great care in a Catholic nursing home, and before he died explained to a Protestant friend "that he did it to please the matron who had been so good to him." "She would have been shocked and desperately unhappy," he added, "had I not done so." I think this might be termed a generous — if not *over-generous* — dying gesture by the sceptic.

ROBERT DENT

I do not think a Roman Catholic priest would have had entry into Dr. Gilbert Murray's bedroom had he not had Catholic relations. It is obvious that he himself was too ill to do much about it, and his daughter (a R.C.) has admitted that he was rarely fully conscious during his last illness. It is all well and good to say that his daughter acted according to her faith; that the priest acted in good faith. They acted according to a *bad* faith. JANE GLYDE

BULGARIA

[N.B.—Our correspondent, a Bulgarian who has to remain anonymous, is writing from a considerable distance. Hence the delay in his reply.—ED.]

In his letter of May 3rd, Mr. H. Fraenkel went a bit too far in saying that Bulgarians are secular minded and that therefore they do not need an anti-religious organisation. In support of his statement he has to go back as far as the 15th century to say that many Bulgarian priests fell in battle against the Turkish domination. In answer to my statement that there is no freedom in a country which has become a concentration camp, Mr. Fraenkel quotes two articles from the Constitution of the People's Republic. This may satisfy some readers, but I do not think it gives a true picture.

It is true that many priests fell in the battle against the Turks, but that does not necessarily prove that the Bulgarian Orthodox Church, as a body, was in favour of political liberation, or that it reflected the wishes of the people.

Mr. Fraenkel quotes Article 87 of the present Bulgarian Constitution: "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."

In other words, provided that they accept what they are told, provided they do not express their own opinions (when such differ from the officially accepted views), and they do not criticise big brother, "the party," they are "free."

According to the other Article (88) quoted, "The citizens of the People's Republic are guaranteed freedom of the press, of speech,

of assembly, of meetings and demonstrations." This is all very well; some who are out of touch with reality may credit it, but personally I am not influenced by such beautiful words of political demagoguery. To these quotations I answer: "When facts speak the gods should be silent."

Under the same Article, publications such as *Free People's Workers' Thought*, *Socialist Youth*, *Agrarian People's Standard*, *Young Agrarians' Standard*, *Workers' Solidarity*, and others were suppressed. The editors were jailed, and many of them met their deaths in concentration camps or prisons. Again, under this Article a group of students who dared to print a few thoughts from the atheist poet Botev's work, and who visited Vola, the mountain where he was killed, were arrested and without trial sent to the concentration camps "Kussran" and "Bogdanovdol." One hundred and one of the opposition parliamentary representatives were arrested and their leader, V. Petrov, was hanged.

Also, all anarchists were arrested at their national convention and sent to Dupnisa camp without trial. Under the same Article I myself was jailed without trial and sent to a Russian concentration camp. So that this constitution is just the cover of a terrible reality.

I would like to give the name of some of the Freethinkers I met in the concentration camp. Some of them are still in Belene camp, but I dare not, in case it may make their situation worse or cause trouble to their families. Anybody who knows the terror of German and Russian concentration camps—the crime of this system—will understand this statement. It will be clear, too, why nobody is persecuted for his religious beliefs, but only for freethinking ideas. G.F.

THE VALUE OF RIDICULE

A member of the N.S.S. for only 12 months, I look forward very much to Thursday mornings for THE FREETHINKER. Could we possibly have more articles like the "Poor Folks Religion" by C. G. L. Du Cann, a gem on how to ridicule the whole religious set-up? MAXWELL BENNETT.

OBITUARY

West Ham and District Branch N.S.S. has lost another loyal member, with the death of William Branford Dixon at the age of 72. He was a close friend and business associate of the late Laurence Venton, and only a few days before his own death, had written of the sterling qualities of his friend. The tribute is equally applicable to Mr. Dixon himself. He lost his only son in the last war, and our sympathy goes to his widow and daughter-in-law. A secular service was conducted by the General Secretary N.S.S. at Croydon Crematorium on July 16th.

THIS month has been an unkind one for the National Secular Society. Now Florence Akroyd has died in Sheffield. Miss Akroyd spent most of her life teaching in Yorkshire after leaving Sheffield Training College in 1910, but she worked for some years in London and there she met Miss Edith Vance (former N.S.S. Secretary), to whom she became warmly attached. She was firm in her convictions to the end. Mr. A. Samms, Honorary Secretary of the Sheffield Branch N.S.S. conducted a secular service at Sheffield Crematorium on July 15th.

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