

The Freethinker

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THE RECENT DEATH in Geneva of His Highness the Aga Khan, supreme Pontiff of the Ismaili (Khoja) sect, Vice-Regent of the Holy Prophet of Allah Muhammed—but generally better known to the European public as one of the richest residents in the Ritz Hotel and one of the most successful racehorse owners in Europe—has excited a good deal of attention in the British press. His late Highness appears to have been a man of marked ability, unlike the generality of Indian Princes, usually more noted for the size of their elephants and harems than for any pronounced interest in their administrative duties or in the welfare of the poverty-stricken peasants over whom they rule—or, at least, did rule until recently. The Aga Khan, however, occupied in this respect a somewhat peculiar position. For, unlike his secular colleagues, or ex-colleagues, the Nizam of Hyderabad or the Maharajah of Kashmir, the late Aga Khan was not a temporal ruler, nor did his grandson, the new Aga Khan, inherit any territorial principality from him. Ironical as it may sound in view of his popular reputation, his sensational matrimonial family alliances and his sporting pastimes, the Aga Khan was a *religious* leader! In fact, quite an important one; for the Aga Khan inherited from his father as successor by Divine Right, the *spiritual* office of Imam of the Ismaili Khoja sect of Muslims numbering some twenty millions scattered over the Muslim world. It should be added that the office of Imam has no exact equivalent in English speech or in current Christian practice. It represents an hereditary distinction based on the Aga Khan's descent—or alleged descent—from the Prophet Muhammed. One might say that the Aga Khan held his office by Divine Right, not by any special personal sanctity, which in any case, was not particularly noticeable in this urbane patron of "The Sport of Kings."

Vast wealth (the Aga Khan was reputed to be one of the richest men in the world) usually commands respectful, even respectful *post-mortem* references, in a capitalist democracy such as ours, in accordance with that inspired dictum of Anatole France that "in all lands money rules, but in a Democracy nothing else does." Consequently the press notices of his late Highness have been generally restrained and respectful; only a few have ventured to point out timidly the incongruity between the sort of life the Aga Khan lived in the playgrounds and amongst the playboys of Europe and his almost supernatural status as a religious leader by Divine hereditary right. Certainly we do not recall any modern religious leader who has managed to serve both God and Mammon more successfully, or with more general approbation. Here, however, there appears to be an immense gulf between the Oriental religious mind and that of the Christian West. The Pope of Rome and, say, the General of the Salvation Army, both probably exercise as much—or perhaps more—actual power over their co-religionists as do the Aga Khans (There have been several of them in strictly hereditary

succession over their Ismaili spiritual subjects.) But both the Pope and the Salvationist General are *elected*; the mere accident of birth does not confer the office, whilst the Papacy, for example, is regarded by Roman Catholics as an institution by Divine Right; the successor of Christ as the Aga Khan is held by his Ismailis to be the successor of Muhammed. But it is the *office* which is attached to the Divine Right, *not* the individual who happens to hold it.

No Pope, nor any other Head of a Christian Church, has the right to nominate his successor; the idea that personal sanctity goes with the hereditary blood stream seems to be an Oriental idea exclusively. In the case of the Aga Khan and his family, his personal habits

would probably nowadays disqualify him from holding high spiritual office in any *European* religious community. Time was when Renaissance Popes and other highly-placed ecclesiastics went in for secular sports analagous to the Aga Khan's passion for horse racing, and even consorted with film stars—or their then equivalents! But that was a long time ago, and even the most mediocally-minded Churches have been forced to some extent to conform with modern ideas. That is in the West. In the Orient, the apparently well-authenticated fact that Muhammed had *fourteen* wives does not prevent some 300 million Orientals and Africans from revering him as the Holy Prophet, God's Shadow upon Earth. Similarly, the fact that the Aga Khan lived in luxury in the Ritz Hotel during the "Hungry Thirties," whilst millions around him were starving, and won fortunes gambling on the Turf, does not seem in any way to have detracted from his right to receive spiritual homage from the millions of Orientals who compose his spiritual following. To be sure, we, too, have read our Kipling and we know that "the wildest dreams of Clapham are the facts of Katmandhu."

The Shadow of the Assassin

The Khoja Ismaili sect, over the spiritual destinies of which the Aga Khans preside, represents an old Muslim heresy dating from early medieval times and named after Ismail, the last of the seven Pontiffs, descendants of Muhammed who—according to the tradition of the sect—was "caught up into a secret place" to await the Last Judgment. At any rate, thanks to the Press, there was nothing secret about the whereabouts of his most recent successor. The main point at issue between the Ismailis and the *Sunni* (Orthodox) Muslim Church lay in its assertion—so strange to Western eyes—of the *hereditary* right of Muhammed's descendants to rule over Islam, as against the orthodox practice of electing the *Khalif*, or successor of the Prophet. There have been several offshoots of the Ismaili heresy; the best-known of which were the famous *Assassins* whose curious practice has added their name to most European languages. The celebrated sect from the last Imam of which the Aga Khan's claims to be directly descended, combined assassination and freethinking scepticism in their mountain fortress in Persia and Syria. They,

— VIEWS and OPINIONS —

Allah Ran Second

— By F. A. RIDLEY —

and their dreaded chief, the *Sheik-al-jebal*, or "Old Man of the Mountain," as the Crusaders styled him, were objects of terror to the medieval world. Their title *Assassin* is derived from the *Hashish* with which their killers were drugged before setting out on their murderous errands; the *Assassins* were exterminated by the Tartars in 1256, but the Khoja sect of which the Aga Khan is hereditary *Imam*, represents apparently a modern offshoot, the modern chiefs of which appear to have substituted horse-racing for homicide as their principal sport. By an agreement dating from 1844, the Aga Khans were recognised by the British Government of India as the spiritual chiefs of the sect and, despite their lack of a territorial state, the princely title of "Highness" was conferred upon them.

A Peculiar Will

THE FREETHINKER takes (shall we say?) a professional interest in religious idiosyncrasies, but an ostensibly religious leader can scarcely have left a more peculiar will than did his late Highness. Students of English history in the 18th century have heard of Captain Jenkins who, after the Spaniards had cut off an ear, bequeathed the muti-

lated member, along with his honour, to his country! But this is the first time that we have ever heard of a religious leader who left his racehorses to his son and his religion to his grandson, on the explicitly-stated ground that his son was too busy running his horses to have time to run his religion! Evidently his late Highness did not share the opinion of another Oriental potentate, the late Shah of Persia, who, on being invited to go to the Derby, made the classical reply to the no doubt shocked Queen Victoria. "Madam, all my life I have known that one horse could run faster than another. It is a matter of complete indifference to me which can." Contrarily, the late Aga bequeathed the finest stable in Europe to his son, Aly Khan. The less arduous task of supervising the spiritual welfare of twenty million Ismaili Muslims he palmed off on a grandson evidently unfit for the sterner duties of the racecourse. This is surely the *reductio ad absurdum* of a religion, and the less said about the mentality of the twenty million Ismailis who accept the fantastic arrangement with apparent docility, the better. In the final stakes, promoted by the late Aga Khan, Muhammed's descendant and successor, Allah, God of Islam, evidently ran a bad second!

No Dragons for the Dean

By G. H. TAYLOR

IN THE *Telegraph* of July 20th Dr. W. R. Matthews, the Dean of St. Paul's, considers the danger—from the Christian standpoint—that the Welfare State may now be depriving the Church of the chance to fight social evils.

When the Christian Churches could afford to ignore social evils they did so. Today they are only too glad to make a show of tackling them. With their theology in ruins and their numbers depleted they *must* do something to keep their heads above water. And to their dismay, the dragon of social ills is being fought by a rival St. George, the Welfare State. The people are looking for natural, as opposed to supernatural, remedies, and it threatens to cut off another possible avenue of "activity" by which the Church might survive a little longer.

However, the Welfare State is not the alpha and omega of social reform and there is no lack of dragons. What is lacking is the Churches' ability to fight them. Problems of divorce, abortion, euthanasia, Sunday freedom, the BBC, to name only five, find the Churches hopelessly lagging behind the times.

The dragons are there all right, but they are not for the Dean to fight. So far from being a weapon to use against them, Christianity is the very milieu in which these dragons have grown.

Religion is left behind with every scientific advance made. For religion belongs to the pre-scientific age. When Christianity brings its medieval lumber to the doors of the modern laboratory it cannot expect admittance. Its distinctive character is a Special Revelation, and once you appeal to revelation you must take your chance against all the other rival "revelations" the world has known in the history of its many religions. Not a single fact has been advanced to show why the story of a miraculous Christ is any more worthy of our acceptance than that of a miraculous Osiris or Mithra or Krishna.

The wealth of Christianity has been accumulated by exchanging treasures in Heaven for cash down. It was a tempting offer to the credulous who had no treasures on earth. But the customers today are not in such dire straits, and the old sales talk is wearing thin. St. George staked his reputation on an old weapon which is quite incompetent to deal with the latest dragons.

Science Front—17

RAIN-MAKING : SCIENCE versus PRAYER

IN DAYS of old, one of the most popular pastimes in religious circles was praying for rain during those occasional summer droughts which used to bother our farmers so much. The prayer for rain is one which is always answered — if one is prepared to wait long enough.

Unfortunately the rain is not always sent where it is required: and when it does arrive, it is not always in the quantity required. One frequently suspects that one has received the rain intended for someone else and vice versa. It may be just enough to lay the dust, or it may be a torrential downpour of such magnitude that (as happened once) every living soul on the planet is drowned with the exception of one family in a boat somewhat overcrowded with other animals.

As a rain-sender, God is notoriously unreliable. Even his best friends admit it. The situation is no better if one prays for a fine day as an accompaniment for an excursion to coast or country. Once more, the whim of the Deity is like the even-money chance in Roulette — completely unpredictable!

For the world's farmers, however, it is no laughing matter. With millions of new mouths to feed arriving annually, the basic food crops have to be got ready in time — with or without God's help. The result is that agriculturists have called in science to aid them.

Experiments in rain-making have been successfully tried in many countries. In the U.S.A. in 1951 a Dr. Krick was under contract to farmers and ranchers to provide rain over and above the average amount to an area of some 33 million acres. So successful was he that, on a tariff of two to five cents an acre, his receipts were estimated at ten million dollars as against an outlay of under a million. From Japan, according to a report in the June issue of *Discovery* extensive trials to increase the rainfall over certain districts by artificial means have been "almost invariably successful." A great deal of study remains to be done in this important extension of Man's control over Nature. But it does look as if the decision to leave prayer out of it and to concentrate upon the laboratory rather than the pulpit is having the desired effect. Thus the lesson of all history is once more underlined: Man's success in this world depends on his own unaided effort.

J. GORDON

Defenders of "The Faith"

By COLIN McCALL

The Faith is the monthly organ of St. Paul's Apologetics Circle at St. Dominic's Priory, Rabat, Malta. From time to time it comments on articles that appear in *THE FREETHINKER*. Sometimes it misrepresents them, as in March 1957 when it quoted long passages from Mr. Paul Varney's side of the controversy with me on Hungary (*THE FREETHINKER*, January 18) but neglected to mention that there was another side presented in the same issue, and generally gave the impression that Mr. Varney's view was the official view of our paper. Rather shamelessly, considering the circumstances, it ended on that occasion with the exclamation: "Isn't that worthy of a freethinker!"

I am not concerned with any misrepresentation here, though. On the contrary, the current copy of *The Faith* (July 1957) prints nearly the whole of report from Malta which appeared in these pages on February 22 under the heading *Catholics or Hypocrites?* Readers may recall that the report gave some idea of the way the Roman Catholic Church "sets about its task of 'netting' the Maltese from birth", but also suggested that "In Malta — as in other Catholic-dominated countries — most of the people, and more especially the younger generation, are only nominally members of the Church."

Not surprisingly our Maltese Correspondent has rather upset the Dominican Fathers. They get quite annoyed with him and end up by telling him to mind his own business. As a Maltese Correspondent it would seem that Maltese affairs are his business; certainly as much *his* business as the business of *The Faith*. But the Fathers are also rankled in not knowing who they are dealing with. They refer to our "Maltese (?) Correspondent" and repeat the question mark whenever they mention him. I can understand — and even sympathise with — their irritations on this score; it is irritating to deal with an anonymous writer; but the fault is theirs — or their Church's. If Malta were not "the Island Convent"; if it were not dominated by Rome, our Maltese Correspondent would have no need to remain anonymous. The situation being what it is, I am afraid the Dominicans must be kept in suspense, though I sincerely hope it will not be for long!

Back to the report, which they say "deserves nothing but contempt", but which they print "to show once more to our readers the kind of mentality English Freethinkers have with regard to Maltese Catholics." For the sake of "space and clarity (?)" — here the bracketed question mark is mine — *The Faith* adds its own comments throughout the report. These vary from minor disquisitions to exclamations of "Thank God!" or allegations of "Tautology!" This last term, for instance, occurs after the quoted sentence "Freethinkers in Britain can have little idea of the determination with which the Church sets about its task of 'netting' the Maltese from birth." I am still trying to puzzle out how that can be called a tautology — or rather, I have given up trying to do so.

The Dominican Fathers "believe in Christ's Baptism by which we become members of His mystical body: and the sooner we become His members the better, first through the will of the parents, and then through our own will, when we are of age. No one in ten thousand of us deplores that he was baptised when still a baby of a few days Unbelievers, of course, do not know what it means to be a member of the Church of the Living God." It is true that I personally have never been a member of Christ's "mystical body", but I know a good many people who have — who have left the "Church of the Living God"

and now deplore that they were ever baptised into it.

The Maltese child is "moulded to a set pattern" wrote our Correspondent. How right he was is alarmingly confirmed by *The Faith*, which tells us that "no one in Malta goes so willingly to church as children do." "Many of them" — it adds — "hear Mass and receive holy communion every day . . ." (my italics). Perhaps, though, this statement unconsciously admits our Correspondent's point that, as they grow older, the Maltese often begrudgingly submit to Church discipline.

The Faith may well be correct in stating that "Non-church goers are very rare exceptions" in Malta, as I believe our Correspondent was correct in asserting that there are "many hypocrites who profess a religion which they detest." Nobody "molests" the non-church goers, says *The Faith*. But it immediately adds the significant qualification, "unless they are in a high social or civic position unworthily representing a Catholic Nation." Now I am sure our Correspondent was right about the hypocrites! And, my dear Dominican Fathers, your Church is responsible for them. You may protest that it isn't, that it is lack of character that makes men hypocrites, but you are condemned out of your own mouths. A man in "a high social or civic position" must apparently choose between churchgoing or molestation!

"What kind of habits do secularist parents or societies engender in their children?" asks *The Faith*. Well, the habit of thinking for oneself is among the most important and with it, we believe, a tolerance of other people's opinions will develop. Neither of these can be called characteristic of a Catholic upbringing. On the contrary: for the Catholic child, the "Truth" is delivered from above: the Church alone possesses it and is capable of disseminating it. Its critics are enemies of the Truth, "enemies of God" — as *The Faith* itself says. Clearly this is not the language of tolerance. It is the language of the crusade; the same sort of language the Roman Church has used to denounce the heretic and the infidel throughout the ages.

Today — fortunately for mankind — the Church can no longer enforce death for heresy, even in Malta. But it can still make life very uncomfortable for the heretic and the unbeliever on the George Cross Island. It can — and in Malta it does — as our Correspondent indicated, deprive the young of "literature that might encourage his full mental and physical growth: literature that he most urgently needs." By this, our Correspondent did not mean — as *The Faith* seems to think — only "atheistic" literature, necessary though that is. He meant also books on sex that are unobtainable in Malta. "As if the Bellocs and the Chestertons and other Catholic giants of literature and art were undeveloped mentally and physically", exclaims *The Faith*. And nobody would deny the physical development of the two gentlemen named: "giants" they certainly were in that sense — overdeveloped one might say. But we are surely dealing with ordinary cases, not exceptional ones. Secularists encourage children in their pursuit of knowledge — about sex, religion, or what you will.

Our children (and here *The Faith* is quite right) are brought up "with no holy fear of God, and no notion of life everlasting." But *The Faith* is wrong in thinking them "poor" children for that. They are better for it. Having no notion of life everlasting, they have more regard for this life — for themselves, for other men, and for other animals. Having no fear of God, they show more respect for man.

This Believing World

It is now calculated that about two million people regularly look in at ITV's "About Religion," and some pious people are wondering whether this is not making religion an entertainment, a word quite out of place with things so sacred. Quite possibly the same may be said of the BBC's version on TV — for certainly Dr. T. W. Manson's contribution the other Sunday added to the gaiety of nations. He got somebody else to read those captivating bits from Mark where Jesus is carried about by a Devil, and where he is feeding huge crowds of people with a few loaves and fishes, and perhaps wanted us to believe that they represented history. His talk was, the *Radio Times* confidently told us, quite relevant to us today. If his contribution was not superb entertainment, not to be heard without chuckles, what was it?

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ITV's religious producer, Michael Redington, told the *News Chronicle* that the clergy gets shaken up when they see so many "big names" on the show; and "the only time the Church complained was when it suffered a defeat in a discussion" — but "we have to be careful now about how we present" laymen. The well known actress, Miss Moira Shearer, is appearing on one of the programmes — and as she laughingly insisted, "It is very sensible" to avoid any suggestion of dreariness in TV religion. Quite true. Even *News Chronicle* is not too keen on "a series of determined jolly parsons who rubbed their hands, chain smoked, spoke slang," etc., "in a vague effort to prove that parsons are not a race apart."

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All the same, the Rev. Dr. W. E. Sangster, who is the general secretary of the Methodist Home Mission Department, insists that "telly-religion is not enough." At the Methodist Conference the other week, he admitted that "there was no obvious revival of religion in the nation as a whole." Even their own church membership "had decreased again." In fact, "no real revival of religion can by-pass the church." Yet it was not "militant opposition" which faced them—it was just apathy and indifference. Well, apathy and indifference can be more deadly even than militancy on occasions. If nothing else, on Dr. Sangster's own confession, it is thinning his own Church. Or, to put it bluntly, in spite of the rise in population, the Methodist Church will never again increase in numbers.

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Even the Cross appears to have lost some of its old glamour. A Mr. Michael Malone came all the way from Leeds to parade a Crucifix in Whitehall with a placard — "Why Crucify the Pensioners?" He expected a huge crowd to follow him, but only a policeman and a sergeant were attracted, nobody taking the slightest notice. In any case, if anybody had been attracted, it would not have been because of the Cross. Mr. Malone wanted to see the Prime Minister, but even Mr. Macmillan did not succumb to the Glory of the Cross. What a shame in this our Christian country!

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Five Members of Parliament officiated for the TV "Religion in Parliament," all of them ardently supporting "conscience" and "principles", and all of them talking and talking all the time without saying a word about the subject they were supposed to discuss. Ardent Christians, though completely differing from each other, the Catholic Labour MP brought in a strong plea for Catholic Schools at the country's expense, the Baptist, Free Church and C of E heartily concurring. Could anything be more reasonable than that children should be taught the religion of their parents at

the country's expense — that is, so long as the religion is Christian?

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However much Tory and Labour differed on politics, on Christianity they were all adamant. Not a word of heresy came from any of them. Naturally, they sadly agreed that some Members of Parliament were not actually believers — but, thank God, the BBC, TV and ITV were not for them. It was all clean fun. With Christian charity, they bore their own differences also with dignity and forbearance. Just as "our Lord" himself would do if he were a Member of Parliament.

On Disendowment

By SEAMUS

AT FIRST sight, it appears to be a reasonable viewpoint to say that the abolition of direct tithe endowment removed the public endowment of religion in England and that all other endowments are private endowments and the property of the particular religious body concerned. But the matter must be probed further than this stage. Dissent from the Church of England was not granted legal recognition until 1689 under the Toleration Act. Unitarians did not attain legal recognition until 1813 and Roman Catholics until 1829. The legality of bequests to secularism was not established until 1917. Therefore, ignoring the further ramifications, any endowment left for religious purposes at all before 1689 had by necessity to be left to the Church of England as there was nowhere else to leave it. Again, it must be recalled that this was long before the days of the "welfare state" and that the church largely controlled the social scene in cultural and humanitarian services. As a result, the money left was often for purposes which could only be designated as religious in any sense within this very wide conception.

After 1689, there was a change and many old-established chapels possess endowments coming from those years. Changing economic factors affected the situation with the result that the vast endowments of the Church of England became a public scandal and the Ecclesiastical Commissioners were set up in 1836 to administer them for more general purposes. It might well be argued that there is a strong case for secularisation of all endowments prior to 1689 on the grounds that they belong to the nation at large and that they are now administered for partisan ends by a body which represents only a small part of the nation. Again, the various legal changes made by war circumstances affect the issue. Long standing endowments may exist in a parish which is closed down under one of these reorganisation measures. They are taken and appropriated by the general funds of the diocese, an end which may be far removed from, or even antagonistic to the donor's original intention.

This state of affairs has happened over and over again within the last few years. Readers of THE FREETHINKER will recall references over the last twelve months which bear drastically upon it. The law was modelled to permit the situation but it might well be argued that the remodelling of the law lacked all moral considerations with regard to the original donors. On one occasion, *Reynolds News* reported an interview with the Ven. M. M. Hodgins, Archdeacon of Hackney, in which it stressed this point. Mr. Hodgins was prepared to defend the appropriations upon "empirical" grounds. We would suggest that old endowments should be diverted to their original intention, the human wellbeing of the nation at large. This would imply a secularisation not recognised by the earlier centuries, but fulfilling their basic desires.

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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Orders for literature should be sent to the Business Manager of the Pioneer Press, 41 Gray's Inn Road, London, W.C.1.

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

TO CORRESPONDENTS

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

R. MAYALL: The Churches will do anything to keep "in the swim" if they can; we note that one vicar has recently "jazzed up" his Lord's Prayer into a Rock 'n Roll rhythm. We now await the Jesus juke-box.

IAN FALLOWS: Charin-formulas are often the remnants of prayers handed down through generations.

ELLEN WHITE: The Catholic slogan, "Outside the Church there is no Salvation" has poisoned men's minds with fanatical hate and drenched Europe with blood.

F. WALKER: It was a Canon Barry who said "The one really formidable argument against the truth of the Christian religion is the record of the Christian Church."

NEIL MCEWAN: The paper you mention calls itself "The Organ of Labour." But the organ plays psalms and hymns.

HENRY DEAN: You prompt us to ask a riddle. Q. When is a salary not a salary? A. When it is the Archbishop's. But you can't deny that it is money, or that money provides comfort.

NELSON HUGHES: Bacon's *Wisdom of the Ancients* shows how the stories of Greek Gods often embody ethical meanings through symbolism. There may be, as you say, undiscovered symbolism in the Bible: that is only to say that the writers did not intend it as historical report.

A. PARKES: The story of the man who died while reading THE FREETHINKER is, we believe, genuine, and happened in Ayrshire. As he was nearly 91 at the time, we think it was not a bad way to die.

D. AYRES: Islam and some oriental religious cults actually have recipes for inducing the mystic state.

R. RHODES: The path of the nervous impulse to the brain is not a "psychic event"; it is a physical one. Its velocity was estimated by Helmholtz at 380 f.p.s. in man: in the frog it is much slower. It is affected by temperature, it generates heat and electricity and produces a measurable amount of carbon dioxide. A thoroughly mechanistic happening, as you see — no "psyche" needed.

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.

Mercyside 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).—Sunday, 11.30 a.m.: R. POWE. 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.

The Freethinker Sustentation Fund

PREVIOUSLY acknowledged, £230 17s. 3d.; A. Hancock, 2s.; P. Turner, 10s.; W. B. Sunley, 5s.; J.A., £1; Mrs. N. Rutherford, £2.—Total to date, July 25th, 1957, £234 14s. 3d.

Notes and News

READERS may remember that Mr. Alt offered the \$5,000 to any faith-healer who could effect a cure in two specific cases. Although one might have imagined a queue of eager claimants in a land so choc-a-bloc with these religious quack-doctors, no-one has yet availed himself of this wonderful opportunity, a chance not only to make some "easy money" but also to convince a lot of sceptical Freethinkers of wondrous supernaturally-inspired powers. Apparently lacking in faith, over 300 Christian Scientists in the Philadelphia area have ignored the offer. As the Americans seem to lack confidence in themselves perhaps some British faith-healer would like to earn a paid holiday in the U.S.A.? He can also help the invalids and adjust our dollar deficit a little at the same time.

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On behalf of the miners in the Bedwellty area, Mr. Bruce Griffiths applied to the local magistrates for licensing hours (already extended for the summer) to be extended until 10.30 p.m. all the year round, pointing out that many shifts finished at 10 p.m., making it impossible for these workers to obtain a drink when finishing a hot day's work in the bowels of the earth. The only objectors were the Free Church Councils of Tredegar, Ebbw Vale and Abertillery and a wordy battle ensued. The police of these areas entered no objection whatsoever. The magistrates granted the application and the clergy met with yet another defeat.

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Five statues of figures from Greek mythology, which have been erected outside a new school, are causing a controversy among members of the council at Smethwick, Staffordshire, reports the *Manchester Guardian* (17/7/57).

It is generally agreed that as works of art the statues leave nothing to be desired. But Councillor Peter Griffiths who is a schoolmaster himself is terribly worried that the children may start asking questions when the school opens in September. And then what can poor teacher say?

At the entrance to the boys' section of the Sandwell Secondary Modern School are Zeus and Pandora; at the girls' entrance are Leda, Icarus and Pan. The statues were commissioned and approved by the sites and buildings sub-committee of the Council and were made by students of the sculpture department at Birmingham College of Art. But that is no consolation for Councillor Griffiths.

"The statue of Icarus, especially, is most unfortunate," he said. "If a child were to produce a drawing or model of the same thing it would be considered obscene. Then there is the story of Leda and the swan. It is a story of lust and lechery—one of the most salacious in Greek mythology. Pupils are sure to start asking about them. I, for one, wouldn't like to retell the stories." Councillor Mrs. Esther Seager defended the choice of the subcommittee, of which she is a member. If children were to be brought up in all branches of education they had to learn the various expressions of art, she said. She added: "There are a lot of stories in the Bible that might be considered obscene, and also in Shakespeare."

NEXT WEEK

INTERVIEW WITH A. B. HEWSON

Editor of The American Rationalist

Problems of Church and State - 5

By F. A. RIDLEY

The Free Church in the Free State

So far we have considered the questions raised by the Church-State relationship in relation both to Rome, totalitarian Christianity, to the Protestant Churches and to non-Christian religions. It now only remains to summarise briefly the attitude of Freethought and of the philosophy of Secularism towards this most important contemporary question. In general perspective, we might affirm that the gist of the Laic and Secularist philosophy in its bearing upon this matter was expressed a century ago by that great Italian Liberal statesman, Count Cavour, in his celebrated aphorism *The Free Church in the Free State*. This expression surely summarises effectively the Secularist approach to this question? As the Social Democracy in Germany and elsewhere has so unambiguously expressed it *Religion is a private matter for the Individual*; it cannot, and it should not, be the subject of State regulation, except in so far as it is necessary for the State to intervene to protect its citizens against the interference of dogmatic institutions which seek to exercise a monopoly in their own exclusive interest and to deny to others those rights which they claim for themselves. The ideal *Concordat* between a State animated by the principles of the great Revolution which are the essential principles of a secularist philosophy, will reduce to a necessary minimum State interference in religion; whilst similarly excluding religion and its representatives from any interference with State affairs and in particular will deny to them the coercive powers of the State for the purpose of furthering interests which are purely confessional and dogmatic in character. Such a basic outlook is, we repeat, flagrantly violated by such *Concordats* as that concluded between Spain and the Vatican in 1953 and to a rather less degree by the Lateran Treaty between the Papacy and the Fascist regime of Mussolini in 1929. It is utterly intolerable that a modern State should employ the criminal law as in Spain and Italy, to enforce religious beliefs upon non-believing minorities, thus depriving the State of its essentially neutral character in religious disputes. Such *Concordats* have about them a medieval odour: one has the instinctive feeling in perusing them that the *auto da fe* and the Most Holy Inquisition are only just around the corner, for the implicit totalitarian principle remains the same and after all, the Church of Torquemada has never formally disowned that redoubtable "Hammer of Heretics", nor more fundamentally has she ever renounced the principle of "the One True Church", religious totalitarianism which, in the days of Pacelli—Pius as of Hildebrand—Gregory, remains her dogmatic sheet anchor. Nor can a secular philosophy as classically enunciated by Cavour approve of the type of *Concordat* exemplified in, say, such Protestant lands as England and Sweden in which, whilst the rights of religious minorities are adequately safeguarded, yet that of individuals — or at least of some individuals — is not: in which Heads of State and other high dignitaries are *ipso facto* precluded, as an *essential* condition of retaining their offices from changing their membership of a particular confessional body with certain definite dogmatic beliefs. Such an exclusive denial of a fundamental human right passes from the absurd to the positively ludicrous, when as in the present case of the British Monarchy, her Britannic Majesty is by law, the member *simultaneously* of two religious denominations — the State Anglican Church in England and the State Calvinist (Presbyterian) Church in Scotland. What, one may relevantly ask, could be more ridiculous than to compel an adult human being, even

if he or she happens to be an hereditary monarch, to profess a belief in Free Will, a dogma of the Anglican Church south of the River Tweed, the boundary between England and Scotland, and in Divine Predestination the famous dogma of Calvin, accepted by the Presbyterian Church of Scotland the moment she sets foot on its northern bank? Such a *reductio ad absurdum* of the position of a State Church bring into sharp relief the complete absurdity of any official connection between Church and State: they represent organisations with totally divergent aims and functions. Actually, as already noted, nowhere in the whole world is a State Church more unjustifiable than in the British Commonwealth in which Christians are in a minority amongst its citizens, and Anglicans and Presbyterians a minority amongst the Christians: the State Churches of England and Scotland represent therefore, merely a *minority of a minority*, which reduces the whole principle of Establishment to its logical absurdity!

One further point. There is nothing totalitarian about the Secular philosophy; nothing whatever. (It is no part of the philosophy of Secularism to *suppress religion* by force. We do not go to Rome and to Mecca for our principles and demand freedom as they do merely in order ultimately to deny freedom to others!) Contrarily we take our stand on the famous aphorism of Voltaire and defend the right to exist of even the most absurd beliefs provided only that they seek to propagate themselves by persuasion and *not* by force. "The Free Church in the Free State" represents the normal mechanism of a society in which the principle of laicity has been fully realised. But this mechanism itself creates the conditions for a *purely* intellectual conflict in which Reason and Science will confront — on equal terms and without any bias of the State power or any exclusive monopoly by any one party of its machinery of propaganda — the traditional arguments of the religious apologists and the traditional prejudices of religious dogma. It is the firm and unanimous opinion of Freethinkers everywhere that, given *equal* conditions of propaganda, Secular Reason in an age of ever-growing knowledge, will prevail over dogmatic anachronisms bequeathed to us by pre-scientific ages and needing the "dead hand" of the past and the living hand of "the Secular arm" to exist and to prevail in our present epoch.

In so wisely deciding to place the problem of *Concordats* on its current agenda, this World Congress met in Paris — in France, the classic land of Reason and of the French Revolution — seeks to apply to the mutual relations of Church and State the impartial principles of an enlightened Laic philosophy. We seek for that ideal arrangement so notably summarised by Cavour, in which man is recognised as primarily a moral and intellectual being who, without interference from either Church or State is free to decide for himself or herself upon the nature of ultimate Truth. Such is the aim of the Charter of UNO in its relation to man's fundamental right of belief; such also, is the final objective of this memorable gathering in putting upon its current agenda the complex problems represented by the effective co-existence of the Secular State and of Churches which profess another and totally different principle.

May our labours here assist in promoting a happy and equitable solution!

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

An Address to Christians

by H. CUTNER

EXACTLY why Mr. Oliver Marlow should have sent us for "review" an 8-page pamphlet with the title, *The Evidences of the Virgin Birth of Our Lord* and which is specifically addressed to "Christians of all Denominations" is not quite clear. Does he seriously maintain that he has proved the Virgin Birth? It may well be that for Christians the evidences are indisputable. I should not have thought such a pamphlet was necessary for them. They are taught to believe the Bible — everything in it comes from God, and therefore *must* be true. The Christian who does not believe in the Virgin Birth is well on the way to infidelity.

What are the "evidences" of the Virgin Birth given us by Mr. Marlow? Simply that the story is related by Matthew and Luke! Nothing else. It is true that he deals with a few "hypotheses," but as none of them comes from a convinced Freethinker, they are hardly worth considering. Fancy anybody going to a converted Jew like Dr. Schonfield who believes everything no matter how silly! He could not be a convert if he didn't.

Mr. Marlow even goes to the Jewish Life of Jesus, the *Tol'doth Yeshu* (as he calls it) and to Klausner's *Jesus of Nazareth*, a work which can be riddled to bits. Klausner, as a good Jew, praises Jesus as a Jew — and even Mr. Marlow would not have us seriously believe that therefore Klausner is quite sure that a fellow Jew was born of a virgin?

The two stories given us by Matthew and Luke teem with contradictions — and no wonder. Not only are both writers completely unknown, but we do not even know for certain what they actually wrote, or when they wrote. What we do know for certain is that there is not a scrap of evidence that either of the Gospels was known before the earliest 150 AD. Personally, I would put the date at 180 AD. Now if this is the case, will Mr. Marlow tell us how Matthew knew that "an angel of the Lord appeared unto him [Joseph] in a dream . . ."? Who told this tale about Joseph to Matthew? Was it the "angel of the Lord"? What is Mr. Marlow's "evidence" that there are "angels"? Has he seen any? Or does he believe in them on "faith"? Moreover, how does a *real* angel (notice, not a *dream* angel) come to somebody in a dream? This is the question which Mr. Marlow must reply to, or admit that the whole story is one of the most stupid, if not the most stupid, in the whole of the Bible.

Notice how the two stories of the birth of Jesus are given different dates. If the story in Matthew is true, the date must be before 4 BC, because that is the date of the death of Herod. If Luke is followed then the date should be about 6 or 7 AD. Nobody knows which is true.

In any case, note that the "angel of the Lord" announcing the "miraculous conception", came to *Joseph* in Matthew, and to *Mary* in Luke. And when did the "Annunciation" take place? According to Luke, it was *before* Mary's conception; according to Matthew it was *after*. According to Luke also, "The Lord shall give him [Jesus] the throne of his father David." Yet according to Matthew, the father of Jesus was "the Holy Ghost"!

According to Matthew, Joseph was a resident of Judea; according to Luke he was a resident of Galilee. So thoroughly do the inspired writers disagree that we do not know whether Jesus was born in a manger or a house — Matthew telling us that it was a house, and Luke that it was a manger.

I do not intend discussing the famous "prophecy" in

Isaiah about Jesus being born of a virgin. No bigger fraud has ever been perpetrated on people ignorant of Greek and Hebrew. There is literally no prophecy of Jesus in the Old Testament. All that happened was that the Gospel writers, when hard up for incidents or indeed anything either went to the Old Testament, or to Josephus, or to the stories of Greek gods, and wove these around their mythical deity.

Let me give one instance not so well known. The "hymn of praise" uttered by Mary recorded in Luke is a re-hash of the song of Hannah taken from the book of Samuel. It is one of the most impudent pieces of pure plagiarism in literature. And the aerial flight of Jesus to Heaven is just a copy of the similar flight made by Elijah.

I do not expect Mr. Marlow will take any notice of this review. The best way to answer the Freethought case is — silence.

Militancy and "The Freethinker"

By E. ROYSTON PIKE

(formerly Secretary of the R.P.A.)

APPARENTLY the old question of militancy in Rationalist and Freethought propaganda is once again receiving attention. What sort of propaganda is the most effective, in the particular circumstances of time and place? To put it bluntly: Shall we be rude or reasonable?

My personal memory and experience of the Rationalist Movement goes back to the days immediately after the first World War. I first met C. A. Watts in 1922, and for a number of years I was in close contact with him, more particularly when I succeeded C. T. Gorham in the secretarial chair at Johnson's Court.

Without the slightest hesitation I can confirm that he was not an aggressive militant; he believed, as Holyoake believed and his father, Charles Watts, believed before him, that a reasoning attitude was the right one to adopt. He deplored the tactics of the National Secular Society and THE FREETHINKER, considering them unnecessarily offensive and, moreover, ineffective when directed against the sort of people he wanted to influence and bring into the movement. Mr. Bennett is right when he says that C. A. Watts wanted the R.P.A. "to provide a broad platform for the propagation of modern scientific and philosophic thought, with special reference to its impacts upon religion." He wanted it to be an *enquiring* and *explaining* organisation as much as a destructive one. He welcomed into its ranks unbelievers of very varied character and intensity of conviction—agnostics (such as he was himself), humanists such as F. J. Gould, scholars such as J. M. Robertson, Biblical critics such as W. R. Cassels, and journalists such as Joseph McCabe.

Altogether they were a very mixed bag, but Watts was a very capable business man, and somehow he managed to keep them in harness. The work that he and they did in combination was immense, and of course it was militant—but not in the sense in which some people use the word. Always there was the courteous approach, even when it was hard-hitting. Often as I disagreed with him on some things, I never disagreed with him on this. To quote from the foreword to my *Encyclopædia of Religion and Religions*: "Facts are sacred, and never more so than when they are those hallowed by religious association. All religions are sacred to those who profess and trust in them,

and surely it is not too much to ask of an alien student that he should pursue his enquiries in a reverent spirit and with a real attempt at understanding."

What the father believed and practised, so did the son. The vast sales of the Thinker's Library are a tribute to the enterprise of ability of F. C. C. Watts, who unfortunately was not destined to enjoy his father's length of days.

Now we live in a very different world from that in which the young C. A. Watts launched the R.P.A. and its famous series of Reprints. On the one hand, there has been a tremendous growth in indifference to religion of whatever kind; on the other, the dogmatic faiths, from Jehovah's Witnesses to Roman Catholicism, are striding ahead in a way that would have astounded the Rationalists and Freethinkers of a generation or so ago.

Of THE FREETHINKER it can surely be said that it never changes. (That "Jesus and Krishna" article in this week's issue, for instance, and the tone of some of the critical paragraphs.) As for the R.P.A., its directors are facing a very difficult and challenging situation, but we are probably justified in assuming that none of them would maintain that today it is carrying out the policy for which it was founded and which attracted the support of those who bequeathed the wealth which has so largely kept it in being. This is not to say that the present policy is wrong or misguided—it may be or it may not be, only time will tell. But there is not the slightest doubt that it is very different from that of the "Pioneers of Johnson's Court."

However, the immediate question is that of "militancy," and speaking personally, I have not the least hesitation in taking my stand among the Holyoakes and Watts and Goulds and Matthew Arnolds and Leslie Stephens and John Stuart Mills, rather than among the Footes and Bradlaughs (though with some reservations here). The man who can be converted by abuse and the sneer is not worth converting—his second state is likely to be as bad as his first, perhaps worse. Religion is surely the most important subject in the world, for it comprises man's attitude towards the ultimate problems of human existence. Like sex, it is no joking matter. That is what I believed as a very young man; it is what I believe still.

[Mr. Pike says the R.P.A. is today "not carrying out the policy for which it was founded and which attracted the support of those who bequeathed the wealth which has so largely kept it in being." This is surely a serious indictment.

For the rest, we cannot agree that militancy and rudeness are the same thing, nor do we try to "convert by abuse and sneer." Such would not convert at all; it would merely antagonise, yet we contend that ridicule is a legitimate weapon. As Chapman Cohen said, no one is really free from religion till he has laughed at it. Is Mr. Pike a case in point?—ED.]

CORRESPONDENCE

FRANCE AND THE VATICAN

A glance at the American magazine *Time* for May 13, 1957, will show that the news from France is not entirely discouraging. Reporting on the third plenary assembly of the French Catholic Church since World War II, and remarking that "Except for the microphone on the table in front of Cardinal Liénart . . . the scene might have been one from the church's potent medieval past," *Time* added an important "but." St. Louis IX of France (1215-70), it said, "would have been saddened by the three grim problems before the French hierarchy: 1) the growing shortage of priests; 2) the defiance of the Worker Priests; 3) the crisis of religious education." And it proceeded to give further details. Well might the magazine entitle the report "*Rebellious Eldest Daughter.*"

D. J. McC.

HALOES

Re the remarks on haloes in "This Believing World" (12th July,) I think it is generally accepted that originally haloes were merely discs placed above the heads of statues to prevent befouling by birds."

H. A. ROGERSON

THE NAZARENE

On page 220 of THE FREETHINKER it is asserted that if a man was born in Bethlehem, he could never have been called "of Nazareth." This is untrue. A child born while his parents are on a journey and who was brought up in his parents' home would be regarded as domiciled there. Probably few people were aware that he was not born there.

W. E. HUXLEY.

IN THE BATTLEFRONT

Now that the world is growing up a little and looking things much more squarely in the face, your paper is very much in the battle line, and it has great opportunities. It seems to me, though, that it should take itself more seriously perhaps. There is still a lot of "tub-thumping," and its attitude often reminds me of an adolescent youth who jeers at his parents because he is trying so desperately to break from their influence. The more he jeers, the more one feels that he is still tied. There is a crying need for a fearless and adult FREETHINKER, and this is the excuse for my rather outspoken criticism.

RUTH POULTER.

KRISHNA

May I sound a warning: the phonetical similarity between the name of *Krishna* (i.e. "Black," meaning the New Moon, generally symbolising Redeemers) and the Greek *Christos* (*chrestos*) is purely accidental. Although Mr. Cutner cautiously refrained from saying so much as that the latter was a doublet of the former, this erroneous idea seems to prevail. In fact *all* the Saviours spring from the same (astral) pattern, hence their similarity.

O. T. WOLFGANG.

OBITUARY

We regret to record the death of one of the oldest FREETHINKER readers, Ernest Smedley of Hucknall who died recently in Sherwood hospital at the age of 90. Mr. Smedley was one of the few who had bought the very first number as far back as 1881 — and it would be interesting to learn if any other reader can go back as far. Since the death of his wife — also at an advanced age — some years ago, he has lived alone but was always happy to meet Freethinkers and discuss the many rare books and pamphlets he had collected during the course of his long life. Many of them were presented by their authors. In addition, Mr. Smedley was a Byron enthusiast, and loved to delve into old Nottingham history. He would never miss hearing Bradlaugh, Foote, Watts, Lloyd, McCabe, Cohen, J. M. Robertson and others, whenever they came to Nottingham and his interest in Freethought never wavered to the last.

H.C.

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