

The Freethinker

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As MENTIONED already in earlier articles, the French *Men of Wisdom* series now translated into English and issued here by Longmans, has already produced four initial volumes. Of these, the first three already printed in English and already reviewed in these columns, dealt with men who may all be described as figures in world history and not only in the annals of a particular church or creed. Gotama Buddha, Paul of Tarsus, St. Augustine of Hippo are all world-famous figures. Even their critics acknowledge their historical importance. Rather curiously, the fourth volume in this series deals with a much less known figure in world history—the German mystic, Meister Eckhart, a Dominican theologian who lived and taught in the middle ages — and who eventually got into trouble with the Church on account of certain unorthodox mystical tendencies of a pantheistic nature to be found in his published sermons and theological treatises. Eckhart is known to have been born in Hochheim, near Gotha. The exact dates of his birth and death are unknown but are thought to be about 1270-1329. Madame Jeanne Angelet-Houstache records the career of this little-known German mystic with the same scholarly competence as her colleagues in the early volumes of this series. As so little is known of her subject, it is hardly fair to criticise her on the ground that while Eckhart's period is described with learning and sympathy, he himself rarely comes to life in this biography. It is perhaps a criticism of the editors of the series that they did not substitute a better-known figure in the annals of religious history.

The Life and Times of Meister Eckhart

The meagre details which are all that are known of the medieval mystic, are recorded here very competently. They have actually little interest except for specialists. As a member of the Dominican Order of Preachers, Eckhart participated actively, if without any particular individual distinction in the current activities of his Order. He studied at the University of Paris about the beginning of the 14th century and later held various offices in the German province of his Order. During his life-time he was chiefly known to the outside world as the object of ecclesiastical litigation and censure when in 1327 the then Pope, John XXII condemned some propositions in his published works. Eckhart submitted, and withdrew the offending clauses in a public declaration in Cologne in 1327. And, thanks perhaps to the powerful protection of his Order, no criminal proceedings were taken against him by the Inquisition. He seems to have died soon after.

His fame has been mainly posthumous and, prior to the Nazi regime, he seems only to have been known in esoteric circles where mysticism flourished. The theological "underworld" of the Middle Ages was periodically lit up by fires at the stake, for the Roman Catholic Church always suspected mystical tendencies which it could not control. Eckhart was more fortunate than quite a few medieval

mystics! Two centuries after him, Ignatius Loyola was similarly in trouble with the Spanish Inquisition because of mystical tendencies in his *Spiritual Exercises*. Meister Eckhart does not appear to have been consciously opposed to the Church of Rome, though the later Protestant reformers claimed him amongst their forerunners. He was a zealous Dominican and an orthodox follower of the great Dominican theologian St. Thomas Aquinas, who had been a professor at Paris shortly before Eckhart had studied there.

— VIEWS and OPINIONS —

“Men of Wisdom” — Meister Eckhart

By F. A. RIDLEY

Eckhart's Mysticism

Eckhart was contemporary with the decline of the Middle Ages, the culture of which had reached its high watermark in the 12th and

13th centuries, after the Crusades had made contact with the highly civilised Muslim East and had ended the barbaric Dark Ages in Europe. Our French author gives a brilliant description of the latter part of this period in the 13th century, the current background to Eckhart's own career; a background which I, personally, found much more interesting than the meagre details available of Eckhart's own biography and his not very convincing mystical hallucinations. The author — apparently a Catholic — accepts the reality of what is termed “mystical experience.” Even Catholic Modernists apparently do. Baron von Hugel, the Catholic Modernist historian, has written a bulky work on the medieval Italian mystic, St. Catherine of Siena — a near contemporary of Eckhart. To analyse — or to debunk — mystical phenomena at all adequately, one would require to be a specialist in abnormal psychology. Knowing nothing of such recondite science, I shall not comment here on Eckhart's alleged “mystical experiences,” pleading myself Dr. Johnson's excuse, “Ignorance, sir, sheer ignorance.”

The End of the Middle Ages

Very wisely, from our angle at least, the author has devoted much more attention to the age in which the German mystic lived, rather than to those aberrations of the human spirit which make up the phenomena of mysticism. Eckhart's life was coterminous with the end of the High Middle Ages, a remarkable and, from some points of view, a great age. If it was the age of the Inquisition, it was also that of the great Cathedrals. At Cologne, where Eckhart died, the massive Cathedral dedicated to the “Three Kings” which still dominates the surrounding landscape, was founded in 1248. The scholastic philosophy — that daring synthesis of the scientific Pagan premises of Aristotle with the supernatural conclusions of the Roman Catholic theology — began in the same century. Dante was an almost exact contemporary of Eckhart who, however, is not mentioned in the *Divine Comedy*. The age, if not the man, is certainly worth writing about; but one could, as noted above, have suggested more appropriate subjects of more general interest.

Meister Eckhart and German Christianity

Actually, the chief interest felt in Eckhart has been in our

own day by — of all people — the Nazis! In particular by the proponents of "German Christianity," an exclusively Aryan Christianity purged of all its tainted Jewish associations. In his notorious book — it hardly deserves to be called "famous" — *The Myth of the 20th Century* (1930), Alfred Rosenberg, the Nazi arch-apostle — next to Hitler himself — of "German Christianity," has dealt at length with Eckhart and his disciples. The "Rhineland Mystics" became authentic "German Christians," along with Luther the spiritual forerunners of "German Christianity" and of the Third Reich. But our Catholic author skims lightly over this fantastic association though, had Hitler's Third Reich lasted the millenium which its founder predicted for it, Eckhart might now be an authentic saint in the annals of "German Christianity." However, Rosenberg was hanged

at Nuremburg and "German Christianity" has remained the myth of the 20th century.

"The Dark Night of the Soul"

As will be evident by this time the present book, despite its scholarship and beautiful illustrations, contains less of interest for Freethinkers than do its predecessors. We hope that its successors, still awaiting publication, will deal with more generally known figures with the same competence; with aspects of religious history more comprehensible than that "Dark Night of the Soul" as mysticism was termed by another exponent — accurately, in our opinion.

[*Men of Wisdom—Meister Eckhart and the Rhineland Mystics*, by Jeanne Ancelet-Houstache, translated by Hilda Graef. Longmans, Green and Co., 6s.]

A Rationalist in Hospital

By PROFESSOR SIR ERNEST KENNAWAY, F.R.S.

RECENTLY I went into a Nursing Home for a surgical operation, and, during one of the following nights, owing to a not infrequent form of mishap, I began to suffer rather acute pain about 1.30 a.m. which could not be relieved, except by not very effectual doses of soporifics, until the arrival of skilled hands about 9 a.m. As one lay there minute after minute, the prospect of time stretching away thus minute by minute until 9 a.m., seemed almost endless, and one's efforts to apply one's mind to various problems and projects, rationalistic and scientific, were not very successful. The idea then occurred to me, how should I feel if I knew that this pain, in a far more severe form, were to go on not just until 9 a.m. but for all eternity? Yet this is the punishment which the Church awards for the misdeeds of less than 100 years of conscious life, and some border-line cases incur this fate only by a hair's-breadth, which discrimination requires the exercise of Divine Wisdom. The Church has used this preposterous doctrine to terrorise its followers for many centuries, and now has not the courage, or even the common decency, to admit that its teaching has altered.

The Gospels contain 17 passages (12 in Matthew, one in Mark, 3 in Luke and 1 in John) in which Jesus himself depicts the physical tortures of Hell in the plainest possible language. Can anyone have the effrontery to maintain that the horrible story of Dives and Lazarus, told by Jesus himself, (Luke 16, 19-27), does not depict the physical torture of thirst? Certainly the great theologian Edward Bouverie Pusey (1800-1882) of Oxford, in the days before the Church began to disavow its own doctrines, was under no illusions in this matter for he could never drink a glass of water without thinking of Hell Fire.

In four of these 17 passages, quoted verbatim below, Jesus speaks expressly of the body, or of parts of it (hands, feet, eyes,) thus making perfectly clear that he is speaking of physical torture, and it is impossible to expunge this item of his teaching without repudiating his authority altogether.

Matthew 5. 29, 30

And if thy right eye causes thee to stumble, pluck it out and cast it from thee: for it is profitable for thee that one of thy members should perish, and not thy whole body be cast into hell. And if thy right hand causeth thee to stumble, cut it off and cast it from thee: for it is profitable for thee that one of thy members should perish, and not thy whole body go into hell.

10.28

And be not afraid of them which kill the body, but are

not able to kill the soul: but rather fear him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell.

18. 8, 9

And if thy hand or thy foot causeth thee to stumble, cut it off, and cast it from thee: it is good for thee to enter into life maimed or halt, rather than having two hands or two feet to be cast into eternal fire. And if thine eye causeth thee to stumble pluck it out, and cast it from thee: it is good for thee to enter into life with one eye, rather than having two eyes to be cast into the hell of fire.

Mark

9. 43-48

And if thy hand cause thee to stumble, cut it off: it is good for thee to enter into life maimed, rather than having thy two hands to go into hell, into the unquenchable fire . . . And if thy foot cause thee to stumble, cut it off: it is good for thee to enter into life halt rather than having thy two feet to be cast into hell . . . And if thy eye cause thee to stumble, cast it out: it is good for thee to enter into the kingdom of God with one eye, rather than having two eyes to be cast into hell: where their worm dieth not and the fire is not quenched.

Attempts are being made to maintain that the numerous allusions by Christ himself to the eternal torture of Hell Fire do not allude to physical torture and that eternal punishment consists in exclusion from the presence of God — a penalty, by the way, which some persons, especially among the wicked, would find quite bearable. Whatever attempts can be made to disguise the simple words of Jesus nothing can efface the pictorial records of the Church's doctrine in such examples as the stained-glass windows at Fairford* in Gloucestershire, in the mural paintings in the Church of St. Thomas at Salisbury, in the fresco of Michael Angelo in the Sistine Chapel, and in innumerable religious paintings. The Revd. J. R. H. Moorman, B.D., in his *Church Life in England in the Thirteenth Century* (Camb. Univ. Press 1945) says "Every child was familiar with the great 'doom' painted upon the wall of the church, with its grotesque portrayal of heaven and hell. Almost everyone was haunted all through life by the thought of possible damnation and endless torment."

Surely we rationalists, while directed to devote ourselves chiefly to polite advocacy of a rather vague Humanism, should attempt to compel the Church to state plainly what is its present doctrine of Eternal Punishment?

*These are described fully in chap. 9 of my *Some Religious Illusions in Art, Literature and Experience*, London, Watts and Co. 1953.

Should Freethinkers Celebrate Christmas?

A. R. WILLIAMS:

Why should we celebrate Christmas? We already make too many concessions to religiosity. And excuses for eating and drinking too much can be found at any time.

I quote Carlyle's Diary: "I saw my neighbours drunker than usual and remembered it was the birthday of their Saviour."

That it was a pre-Christian festival of the end of winter carries no weight now. Why should we celebrate a two thousand year old festival? Besides, the coming of spring would be a more appropriate occasion (which brings us up against Easter!).

Remembering the orgies of sentimentality in churches and on the BBC over Christmas, we should avoid it as we would the plague—which it is!

★

C. G. L. DU CANN:

Of course Freethinkers should keep Christmas, if only from the good-mannered complaisance which men and women of the world show, and which society is entitled to expect, as exemplified in the saying: "When in Rome do as the Romans do."

Even if the Freethinker be a stern and unbending atheist the principle seems to apply. Besides, Christmas is not merely a Christmas festival—it was a pagan feast long before the days of Christianity. Then today it is also for most British people who are indifferentists rather than Church-Christians, the festival of the followers of Saint (and Sinner) Charles Dickens: a time for eating and drinking, sentiment and general goodwill.

A man or woman does not have to worship Mammon or believe in banks or high finance before he can bring himself to celebrate Bank Holiday. Why, then, should he have to believe in Christ before he can celebrate Christmas?

I see no reason, then, why the most rigid and strict Freethinker (if a Freethinker can be strict or rigid) should not enjoy kisses under the mistletoe; filled stockings, Christmas trees, parties, roast beef, turkey, plum pudding—and anything else he can get, or give of that kind.

There is too little fun and enjoyment in modern life. We should take all we can get and give as much as we can. We may be quite sure "that whatever gods there be" will take very good care that we do not get more fun than is good for us—if even so much. Moreover, what little kindness the gods or Fates provide will be more than set-off by subsequent miseries—on the principle of natural compensation, I suppose.

Sensible people never carry their principles into extreme action. Thus, Christians never obey Christ literally. They do not sell all their goods and give the result to the poor; when they sell goods they are usually someone else's, and they keep the result, or as much of it as they can, for themselves. Nor do they "take no thought for the morrow"; they take thought for days, months and years ahead as the insurance and pension people know. No Bernard Shaw advocating equality of income ever divided his own income equally with the poverty-stricken in his lifetime. Those who believe in abolishing Christ need not carry their principles into the active abolition of Christmas.

One can accept a helping, and even a second helping, of turkey and plum pudding on Christmas Day without necessarily accepting the Virgin Birth in a stable at Bethlehem. Also, to a certain extent, Freethinkers in a Christian community are compelled to accept Christmas just as they are compelled to accept Sunday. If you want to keep Christmas Day as an ordinary day you cannot, for working

places and shops are shut, transport facilities lessened, and so on.

For my part, I am all for Christmas-keeping. Of course, it has its disadvantages: its commercialism, its sponging, its bribery and corruption, its dyspepsia and drunkenness—but they are insufficient grounds for not observing the occasion and keeping the festival. There are so many ways of keeping the feast that a man of irreligion, or a man of other religion such as a Buddhist, a Mohammedan, a Hindu, or a Jew, can enjoy the holiday without compromising his principles in the very least.

Because one is a Freethinker one need not be a Scrooge or a Timon of Athens, and especially not when the atmosphere is one of general joy. However virtuous Malvolio may be, there will still be cakes and ale going and Malvolio had better join in before the unvirtuous others scoff the lot. After all,

Why shouldn't Freethinkers
Be eaters and drinkers
And sing Allelulia
At Christmas and New Year?
Can only a chappie
That's Christian, be happy
And greet with guffaws
Our friend Santa Claus?

★

H. CUTNER:

Ever since, as a small boy, I was given (literally) a Christmas box, sometimes in a stocking but more often not, which was filled with good eatables, I have championed the jolly old feast. I cannot see one reason against all Freethinkers enjoying it too. Let us perpetuate a festival which has dominated mankind for certainly thousands of years.

For Northern nations at least, somewhere about the period marked by December 25, the days begin to grow longer. In these days, when an electric switch can give us a light almost equal to sunlight, the date doesn't mean quite the same thing that it did for our ancestors who must have had a heck of a time when it began to get dark. Even in my boyhood, candles and paraffin lamps, both with infernal smells, dominated our households—indeed, in the well-furnished flat I lived in in Paris only 50 years ago, it was a paraffin lamp which gave us the evening light. For our ancestors, apart altogether from the winter gales, snow, and cold generally, it must have been the absence of daylight which made them welcome the time when at long last the days began to grow longer. And they celebrated the beginning of the change in right royal fashion.

Eating and drinking and merrymaking of all kinds were uninhibited, of course; but so were many other things at which modern society frowns. Today, we can make Christmas Day a happy event, not only for our own family, but sometimes for the stranger within our gates. It is not Jesus the God or Man we celebrate, but the glorious re-birth of the Sun. And why not!

★

G. H. TAYLOR:

If we leave Christmas to the Christians it looks as though we concede to them that it is *their* season—which, of course, it decidedly is not. This time of the year was celebrated as a festival centuries before Christianity was heard of; it belongs to the antiquity of man and not to any specific religious section of humanity.

The attitude of those who fixed it as a Christian date was, bluntly: "Here is a popular festival which the people, Christian and non-Christian alike, are going to celebrate.

(Concluded on next page)

This Believing World

It would never have done to let the London *Evening News* get away with a Fundamentalist defence of the Bible, so the London *Evening Standard* has followed up with a "fact-finding survey" on the question of "immortality," that is, "Is there a life after death?" Its author, a Mr. G. Bocca, tells us that "all over the world scientists are having to face the uncomfortable fact that they must begin again"—whatever that means. Mr. Bocca is as Fundamentalist as possible, constantly telling us what the "scientists" think and what they don't think, but the only scientists he mentions in his first article are Jeans, Einstein, and an American, Warren Weaver, and of course Newton.

★

Naturally we are sternly told that "many scientists concede that indirect evidence for the existence of a Creator is indicated by the whole wide arc of experience in which science has made no progress whatever . . ." but Mr. Bocca was too shy giving us, say, a dozen of the names of the "many scientists." Instead, he tells us that "many scientists" don't know "the beginning of the Universe, the nature of life itself, etc.," which of course instantly proves not only absolute immortality — life after death — but also the undeniable existence of God. We don't blame Mr. Bocca so much for his infantile article as the Editor of the *Evening Standard*. We wonder whether this gentleman has ever read a book on Science?

★

The Assembly of the Free Church of Scotland is very worried at the "increasing dominance" which the Roman Catholic Church has managed to get into the BBC radio and TV shows. And it may as well be added that even ITV has now a Roman Catholic head. The Roman Catholic Radio Guild was formed for the express purpose of seeing that as much Roman Catholic propaganda and religious services are dished out to the public as possible — but after all, would not the Free Churches like to have the same opportunities? Why don't they form a "Free Church Guild" and help "Jehovah's Witnesses" to launch one, as well as Mrs. Eddy's followers, the Mormons, the Plymouth Brethren, and all the other Christian sects? Why have any "secular" items at all? Everything on the radio and TV should be permeated with religion — it is simply intolerable that man does not recognise that he is a sinner — even when he is listening to Tommy Steele or Gracie Fields!

★

We can quote in this connection the Rev. C. Pinder of All Saints, Hatcham-Park, who lashes out with, "If we won't allow God to rule our lives then the Devil will, and if life becomes Hell we have only ourselves to blame." And what better way of bringing God to man (or man to God) than a number of religious Guilds like the Catholic Radio Guild who all would gladly take over the BBC, TV, and ITV, and run them for God and his glorious Angels, and thus give the Devil and his unholy pack a kick in the pants. And wouldn't the British public just lap it all up!

★

And now for the latest religious importation — Sister Rosetta ("Holy Roller") Tharpe with her guitar. She does not want to rival her fellow countryman, Billy Graham, but she does want to bring our ungodly country back to Christ with "swing" hymns and "rock 'n roll" rhythm. She knows the Bible by heart, and is always thanking God for religion. Her motto is "Rejoice!" and she thinks that — according to the *Daily Mail* — "the Church should be lively." But exactly how can she make that formidable Man of Sorrows, Jesus, "lively"? Would he laugh his head off if he saw

Sister Rosetta rockin' 'n' rollin' "Rock of Ages" or what? We give it up.

★

For some reason veiled to our irreligious understanding, ITV now and then puts up a young lady firmly entrenched in Fundamentalist Romanism as a "soap-box" orator for their Sunday entertainment on Religion. The other week, her talk was on "Freedom," free will, the ability to choose between right and wrong — all pretty infantile and naive. It was too much even for her more or less religious audience whose questions she dodged as being quite beyond her. The only time she gave a semblance of understanding them was when she admitted that all religions, and particularly her religion, did some terrible things when in power. But did that matter? Not in the least. After all, Roman Catholicism came direct from God Almighty!

Religion in Thailand

IN THE ABSENCE of a contact in Thailand, I made enquiries about the position of religion in the country to the Royal Thai Embassy in London, and my query was answered by Mr. P. Khittasangka, the Public Relations attaché.

The National religion is Buddhism and the King is known as Defender of the Faith. Most of the population profess the form of Buddhism known as Hinayana, the Southern or Pali Buddhism.

Mohammedanism is represented by big communities in Bangkok and other areas.

Since the declaration of Malaya as a Moslem state there has been an increase in the previous demands for secession to Malaya by Moslems, dissatisfied with preferential treatment which, they allege, is accorded to Buddhists. Since the Thai Government recently introduced certain palliative measures we may assume there was some substance in these allegations. The majority of the immigrant Chinese are "Ancestor Worshipers" (Confucians), but, says Mr. Khittasangka, the "Luk-Chin" (children of Thai/Chinese mixed marriages) always become adherents of the maternal religion.

There are about 40,000 Roman Catholics in the kingdom while Protestants number about 20,000, mainly represented by the American Presbyterian Missionary Society.

Each individual enjoys full liberty to profess the religion of his choice, of whatever sect or creed, asserts Mr. Khittasangka, and to worship accordingly. Although the King professes the Buddhist faith he upholds all religions and the state extends help to all denominations.

In schools pupils are taught *morals* and any religious teaching is entirely up to the person concerned. This, of course, excepts Roman Catholic denominational schools.

My informant is not aware of any anti-religious feeling in Thailand, nor are there any political parties hostile to religion.

D. SHIPPER

SHOULD FREETHINKERS CELEBRATE XMAS?

(Concluded from page 387)

Let us therefore bag it for the birthday of our Saviour! Yes; it was as simple as that.

Let us celebrate Yuletide, which predates Christianity. Yuletide means, roughly, the rebirth of the sun, and is of Germanic origin. Christmas has become an amalgam of bits and pieces from various pagan cults plus some Christian hymns. Let us as Freethinkers liberate Yuletide from Christianising influences.

Having given our views, we now quit the arena, leaving readers to have a pull at the family cracker.

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.

E. A. HUNT.—(1) "Missing links" have been found not merely between the anthropoid and man, but also between the reptile and the bird, between aquatic and land animals, and between lower mammals and the monkey.

(2) The reference was an article in the *South African Journal of Science*, Vol. XI, 1943, article by Dr. Broom entitled "South Africa's Part in the Solution of the Problem of Origin of Man."

S. AYRES.—Unitarians seem unable to decide whether they are Christians or merely Deists. For instance, the Boston (U.S.A.) Unitarians recently dropped the word "Christian" from their official publication. It is now simply *The Register*.

G. M'GANN.—Since Morocco gained independence R.C. strength has increased, their reward for some shrewd political manoeuvring.

R.K.—It is absurd to say science is bankrupt. Do you expect scientists to explain immediately in six words, to you, everything about the universe?

Lecture Notices, Etc.

INDOOR

Bradford Branch N.S.S. (Mechanics Institute).—Sunday, December 8th, 6.45 p.m.: A Lecture.

Central London Branch N.S.S. (Laurie Arms, Crawford Place, W.1).—Sunday, December 8th, 7.15 p.m.: RITA MILTON, "Religion and the Class Struggle."

Conway Discussions (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1).—Tuesday, December 10th, 7.15 p.m.: J. LEWIS, PH.D., "Man—Fallen Angel or Promoted Reptile?"

Leicester Secular Society (75 Humberstone Gate).—Sunday, December 8th, 6.30 p.m.: P. BRODETSKY, M.A., "Ethics and World Affairs."

Nottingham Cosmopolitan Debating Society (Co-operative Hall, Upper Parliament Street).—Sunday, December 8th, 2.30 p.m.: L. HARRISON, "Public Ownership and the Co-operative Movement."

Nottingham Branch N.S.S. (Trades Hall, Thurland Street).—Friday, December 13th, 7.30 p.m.: E. ROGERS, "Why I am a Secularist."

South Place Ethical Society (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1).—Sunday, December 8th, 11 a.m.: Miss J. GRAHAM HALL (Barrister-at-Law), "The Wolfenden Report and the Law."

Wales and Western Branch N.S.S. and Cardiff Humanist Group—joint meeting (Bute Town Community Centre).—Tuesday, December 10th, 7 p.m.: Brains Trust—D. SHIPPER (N.S.S.), H. DAY (Humanist) and Religious Representatives.

OUTDOOR

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

London (Tower Hill).—Thursday, 12-2 p.m.: L. EBURY.

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

Sunday, 8 p.m.: Messrs. MILLS, WOODCOCK, SMITH or WOOD.

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).—Friday, 1 p.m.: T. M. MOSLEY and R. POWE.

Wales and Western Branch N.S.S. (The Downs, Bristol).—Sunday, 3 p.m.: D. SHIPPER.

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

Notes and News

WE live at a time when governments and institutions of many kinds unfortunately deem it necessary to make concessions to Roman Catholicism and when, in consequence, that Church has become more arrogant than ever before in Protestant lands. But arrogance—even Papist arrogance—can go too far. This happened in the case of Father Hugh Halton, former Roman Catholic chaplain at Princeton University, New Jersey, who has now been relieved of official standing by the University President, Dr. Robert F. Goheen. It was Father Halton's job to minister to the religious needs of Roman Catholic students at this non-Catholic University, and he was quite understandably disturbed when, what he termed, "an appallingly large number of Catholics" had lost their faith at Princeton from 1880 onwards. In Dr. Goheen's words, however, Father Halton, "under cover of advancing the truth has resorted to irresponsible attacks upon the intellectual integrity of faculty members." It seems that the ex-chaplain accused distinguished staff members of being atheistic and subversive, and attacked them in sermons and lectures. Religious courses at Princeton, he said, were "formal education in heresy." Mr. K. M. Whitten, writing in the *Freethought* paper, *The Liberal* (November 1957), congratulates Princeton on winning "an important battle in the campaign to prevent the Romanisation of America." But—adds Mr. Whitten—"the war is not yet over."

The Liberal also gives us an additional item of information concerning the Lincoln Square Project, which was outlined in our issue of November 15th. It will be remembered that the Roman Catholic University of Fordham would be among the beneficiaries if the project had gone through. We now learn that Fordham had agreed to pay five dollars per square foot for the land. This was raised, after public protest, to \$6.75. Standing in the same area (and incidentally belonging to Roman Catholic multi-millionaire and former Ambassador, Joseph P. Kennedy) is the Immigration Office building. The land here is valued at \$62.88. Quite a difference, you will notice.

WITH the usual exaggerated advance publicity, the *Evening Standard* heralded a "fact-finding" investigation into the problem, "Is there a life after death?" As anyone with the least knowledge of the British press could have predicted, facts were few and far between, and usually had very little direct relevance, whereas the result was a foregone conclusion. But there was the expected spate of letters from people who had found the series a "great comfort." We can only say that some people are very easily comforted.

PERHAPS Mr. Paul Jennings is right when he says: "Everything is special in Israel" (*The Observer*, 1/12/57), but things are not always what they seem to be, and this is particularly true of "holy" places. We were *photographed* (he tells us in italics) "in the Upper Room of the Last Supper;" "we stood among the restored first century ruins of the synagogue on the site of the one where He taught;" "We went to the Chapel of the Beatitudes, where Italian Franciscans (and who better?) live in the place of the Sermon on the Mount"; then on to see "just a hole in the rock, where They lived." Mr. Jennings is so moved by the setting that he never pauses to doubt the authenticity of characters and action.

—NEXT WEEK—

MY RECENT VISIT TO MOSCOW

By KATHLEEN TACCHI-MORRIS

Joseph Lewis on American T.V.

The following dialogue took place over WXYZ-TV (The American Broadcasting Co.), Detroit, Michigan, August 12th, 1957.

GORDON: Do many freethinkers believe in God?

LEWIS: A freethinker may be any one of these things. He may be an agnostic—he may be a deist—he may be an atheist. But I do not believe that a freethinker could believe in a personal God. That makes a difference and there is the distinction. However, it gives him the right to believe as he wants to believe and what his reason will dictate. We say the only light that we have—the only method that we can arrive at a conclusion—is to weigh all the evidence and use our reason to come to a decision. If we come to a determination, then we would say that is the result of reason and it's logical to our mind.

GORDON: Mr. Lewis, you've been in Detroit for three or four days now and if you've read the papers during these past few days, you found that there were two interesting news stories in which faith, religious faith, saved human lives. I refer to the aeroplane that was landed in Honolulu after being disabled on two engines. I talked to Major Samuel Tyson, who flew this aeroplane, and he said to me, and I quote, "My faith in God gave me the courage and nerve to fly that ship a hundred feet over the waves for a thousand miles." Now, he took this enormous Stratocruiser aeroplane, flew it a hundred feet over the water to bring in that aeroplane and save sixty-seven lives. In yesterday's paper there was a story of Mrs. Betty Rolfs, who three years ago was told by the doctors that she had only six months to live because of leukemia. Now, she is still alive, active and, believe it or not, has normal blood. She said, "I believe it was a miracle; I have no other way of explaining it." Her doctor, Dr. Bethel, said, and I quote, "Mrs. Rolfs said faith in her religion is what effected her recovery." Now, sir, my question is this. It's rather a long prelude. We respect the right, in this country, of everybody to worship God as he pleases or not to worship God. We respect your right as a freethinker and that's why we invited you here tonight. If this faith in God enabled this pilot—gave him the courage to fly that thousand miles a hundred feet over the waves on two engines rather than ditch the ship—if this courage enabled Mrs. Rolfs to face up to the facts—if this faith does so many things for many people—why destroy it?

LEWIS: My dear man, I don't believe the stories you've just related. Now, let me make my position clear. At the same time that you mention that this man was supposed to have called upon God and brought his plane safely to . . .

GORDON: He didn't say that. He didn't say that, sir. He said, "My faith in God"—in other words, his belief was so strong, this is what gave him courage that somehow or other God was on his side.

LEWIS: If God was on his side, why didn't God prevent his plane from getting into trouble in the first place? Why wasn't God on the side of the sixty-seven people who were killed in Canada a day after the Major made his so-called safe landing?

GORDON: Mr. Lewis, that's not my point. I'm not saying that God brought that ship in. I'm saying that God gave Major Tyson—not God, maybe, but his faith, his religious conviction—gave him the courage to face up to a situation where, as he explained it to me, the two engines were out on one side; they had to put pressure on the rudders constantly for hours to keep this ship from veering away. And this faith is what brought it through. Now, this is my point.

LEWIS: I don't believe it was his faith. Thousands of men throughout the ages have applied perseverance and determination to carry them through in crises far worse than his, and they did not attribute it to any particular faith. They did it as a matter of courage, as a matter of understanding, as a matter of knowledge. Let me say again, as a matter of determination, and Major Tyson merely gives you a false reason as to why that plane was brought in.

Do you mean to tell me that if Major Tyson had had no faith in God he would have given up hope and permitted his plane and all of his passengers to plunge into the sea and to certain death? Ridiculous! I was not with Major Tyson and therefore do not know the circumstances, but I am willing to wager that self-preservation, his duty as a pilot, and many other considerations entered into his determination to bring his plane into a safe landing.

If faith in God is the major consideration of Major Tyson when he gets into trouble or faces a crisis, such as the one the newspaper described, then he is, in my opinion, utterly unfit to have a commercial pilot's licence. It is too flimsy and unsubstantial a premise to be relied upon, because, generally those who rely upon prayers and faith to save them in such a crisis usually go down with the ship.

His story makes headlines in the newspapers because the people like to read about the fantastic and the "miraculous." Every day, men who fly our planes face many difficulties and were it not for their stable mentality and the knowledge and physical strength that they possess, we would have far more accidents. These men do not seek newspaper headlines. They are more interested in the safety of their passengers. They are unsung heroes.

Major Tyson brought his plane in to a safe landing after he had discovered trouble, because he brought into play all of his knowledge and every ounce of his mental and physical strength to save his passengers and plane. That is what saved the ship and prevented a disaster.

I think it pertinent that I mention here how headlines are made. Some years ago Eddie Rickenbacker and his plane went down on waters, I believe, near the African coast. After his rescue he was asked by some reporter whether his faith in God was responsible for his rescue. He replied, and I am speaking from memory, that his religious conviction was a personal matter, and he did not wish to comment on it. However, the newspapers wanted a blaring headline, and Mr. Rickenbacker reversed himself. The papers wanted a "story" and he gave them one. He said that when they were without food, God sent a seagull to land on their plane so they could have something to eat and sustain himself and the crew until rescued. However, a few days later, there appeared in the papers the statement of a noted scientist, who said that seagulls were not native to the area where Rickenbacker's plane had fallen, and lying for the "glory of God" can sometimes be terribly embarrassing!

GORDON: Now, Mr. Lewis, with all due respect to you, aren't you being a little presumptuous when you say, not knowing the man, not talking to him, that it's a false reason? He believes this. This is what he told me.

LEWIS: I repeat, I don't believe his explanation is honest. Many people are under a delusion and sometimes it's very difficult to explain it. You might say the same thing about this woman who suffers from leukemia. If God would cure her of leukemia, why doesn't he cure other people?

GORDON: This is not what the woman said, nor was this

my point. My point is that of her faith. Now, you know, when people are faced with catastrophe and they have nothing to hold on to, that in many cases they break down completely. They succumb to the inevitable. But here is a question where people's faith enabled them to carry on.

LEWIS: No, I don't believe there was ever a "miracle," until some medical miracle may have occurred, and I think they're under a delusion because so many people with a great deal of faith pray and pray and pray and get no results from their prayers. The will to overcome misfortune will produce better results than faith. Does God have favourites and does he answer the prayers of some and not of others? No prayer has ever been answered.

The Bible says (and this is only one of the hundreds of instances in which the Bible is wrong) that faith can move mountains. It can do nothing of the kind. It cannot move even a single grain of sand. Many people like to attribute to God results that are the natural order of events, and when the results are not to their liking they then say, "It was God's will" that it should be so. I don't believe that "God" knows what's good for me. I think I know what's best for me. If God knows what is best for us, why is there so much misery in the world? Such mentalities are so stupefied with the superstitions of religion that truth cannot penetrate. Only the fantastic and the impossible appeal to their stultified imaginations.

GORDON: I'm not saying that necessarily my premise is that prayer produces results, or that the Lord can correct situations intact. I'm simply saying that when people have faith (as a great many people do) and religion means a great deal to many people in that it enables them to face the trials and vicissitudes of life. This was true of my own father, who had much adversity in his life, and only his belief in religion enabled him to face up to the problems.

LEWIS: Again I disagree with you. Many people have adversity; I have had adversities. I overcame mine without any faith in religion, and others overcome their troubles in the same way. I believe this is true of your father. He may have given faith credit for it, but there was something else that he did not give credit to, that was the determination to overthrow adversity and prove his metal.

(To be continued)

The Passing Show

By G. H. TAYLOR and D. SHIPPER

WITH REGARD TO the recent appearance of Mrs. Margaret Knight on Television, along with three Christian representatives, two interesting facts can now be revealed.

It will be recalled that one of Mrs. Knight's opponents, Sir Edward Villiers, stated that he had previously been an unbeliever and was now a Christian. The argument, as we said, is inconsequent because it can be written off by quoting someone who was a Christian and is now an unbeliever. But we like to dig into these tales a little further and our experience had led us to be most sceptical of any claims of this kind made by public figures.

Sir Edward now admits in a letter to one of our readers that he never went so far as being an unbeliever, but merely let his early Christian teaching fade into the background. Yet the definite impression upon millions of viewers was undoubtedly that this contributor to the discussion had been an unbeliever!

* * *

WE ALSO REMARKED on the number of times Mrs. Knight was interrupted after her opening statement. One correspondent took the precaution of checking by a stop watch and found the average length of the Christian statements

to be 50.55 seconds, while Mrs. Knight was interrupted after an average of 10.15 seconds.

Mrs. Knight reacts to this treatment in a philosophical way, and sees propaganda value in the contrast with Christian aggressiveness.

* * *

MRS. KNIGHT recently debated at the Cambridge Union, her opponent being Father Joseph Christie, S.J. The motion was "That this House respects neither a united nor a dis-united Church." This latest "missionary journey" by Mrs. Knight also included visits to newly formed Humanist Societies at Liverpool University and Durham University.

* * *

SPEAKING FOR the Church Assembly, Sir E. G. Brown gives these figures for annual Church income, according to the *News Chronicle* for November 14th: Money subscribed by Parish Councils, £12-millions; Money given by the Church Commissioners, £11,750,000. And for capital and special expenditure between £6½-millions and £9¼-millions is also raised year by year by parishes, church societies, Diocesan Boards of Finance and other bodies.

* * *

THE PLAY, *The Making of Moo*, which so effectively exposes to ridicule the origins and development of modern religions, has been translated into several European languages; including French, German and Norwegian; and it seems more than likely that continental productions will be made. The play is also to be produced in New York in 1958 and we wish it every success. Mr. Walter Hoops, of the *American Rationalist*, tells us they will do all they can to publicise the play in the States, where, he says it will probably appear in a Broadway theatre, adding, "If it proves too strong for the main stem (Broadway) there are several smaller, out-of-the-way theatres that are interested." Our FREETHINKER review, we note, was reproduced in other freethought journals overseas, including one translation (in the Dutch *Freethinker*.)

Inherit the Wind, which dramatized the Tennessee Monkey Trial of Dayton, was a tremendous hit in America, so there is now hope for what Mr. Nigel Dennis, the author, calls his "sacred cow."

Another play that will not be to the liking of our religious diehards is appearing currently at the Unity Theatre and will be noted at greater length in a subsequent issue. It is *The Biggest Thief in Town*, the ITA appearance of which we mentioned last March.

* * *

SPEAKING TO Catholic trade unionists recently, Archbishop Godfrey told them they *must* attend union meetings. "One might almost say that a union member who is negligent about his attendance is by his apathy or his sloth failing to keep an appointment with his Maker," he remarked. "We were not aware that the Almighty held a union card. Perhaps we should now anticipate His elevation to the Presidency."

* * *

THE 48TH Catholic Social Guild Year Book has been published with the title *Programme for Social Action*. In it Prof. Fogarty proposes, among other things, that Catholics should have the legal right to be judged by Church Law, and not State law, in matrimonial cases. He says

It could be provided, as already happens in some countries, that those who marry according to the rites of the Church shall be judged in all matrimonial matters according to the law of the Church. This interferes with no one else's principles or practice but does make the law more helpful to Catholics in maintaining their own high standards. Have we not a right to demand this, just as we demand public support for our schools?

Such an attempt to impose Catholic teaching and prac-

tice into State machinery is rather more than a thin end of the wedge; it is a decidedly *thick* one. When Catholics want the law altered to suit themselves they are exercising their democratic rights; when the law does *not* favour them it is religious discrimination against them!

* * *

AFTER RECEIVING De Valera in audience the Pope said that Eire has provided a confused and sorely stricken world with the evidence of the capacity of a staunch Catholic people to govern themselves wisely and efficiently — "Happy indeed is the people that has the Lord for its God."

Now we know why 800,000 Irish immigrants have left Eire for this country.

Freethought Victory in California

LAST JANUARY in California a bill relating to the State Motto was introduced at Sacramento. The government code, it was proposed, would be changed to read: "In recognition of the fact that this Country was founded upon the concept that peoples and governments are morally responsible to a Supreme Being, 'In God We Trust' is adopted as the Motto of the State of California." Former Governor Culbert Olson then protested unsuccessfully before the State Senate Rules Committee against legislation to adopt "In God We Trust" as the official state motto. When he reached Sacramento the bill had already passed the State Assembly unanimously.

But the aging former chief executive, on his first trip to Sacramento in twelve years, was only beginning his crusade. Almost single-handed he turned defeat in Committee into victory before the Senate. Mr. Olson's terse, direct, prepared statement to the Senate Committee, made in less than 800 words, iconoclastic in temper, enumerated a number of telling and widely publicised points that largely caused the defeat of the bill.

He held there is no Constitutional authority for a legislative act adopting a religious dogma or doctrine as a state religion. It is not true that governments "are morally responsible" to God or a Supreme Being; no mention is found of it in the Constitution. To adopt this particular motto would violate the First Amendment of the U.S. Constitution prohibiting any law respecting the establishment of a religion. Such an act, prompted to promote subservience of our secular government to church control, would arouse hatred against, not tolerance for, freedom of religious worship. The bill is not based on fact; it is based on a belief for which there is no evidence, and plenty of evidence to the contrary. It is not true, as this bill declares, that our people trust God; they look to the State and National Governments for their protection and security. This particular measure is in keeping with the constant activities of a particular hierarchy. Governor Olson carried the controversy launched with these views to the *Los Angeles Times*, answering critics.

In June the bill, that but for Governor Olson might have slipped through, was defeated by the Senate 20 to 7. [*Free Mind*, U.S.A., September, 1957.]

CORRESPONDENCE

SUNDAY OPENING

ALTHOUGH many freethinkers will sympathise with Colin McCall in his criticism of Sunday closing in Scotland, many will object to the idea of Sunday opening of Public Houses. We must not forget that the Scots, like the Welsh, are Celts, and are more prone to violence than the more phlegmatic English.

Anyone who has had to bear the horror of being in Glasgow or Cardiff on a Saturday night can testify to the sickening all-pervading odour of beer, garlic, and onions from the drunken morons who fill the streets. Mr. McCall, I think, erred in wishing Burns was

alive to satirise the position, for Burns died drunk at the age of 37, and were I writing a defence for Sunday opening in Wales, I would certainly not quote the late Dylan Thomas in this connection!

PAUL VARNEY

BRITISH ESPERANTO-HUMANISTS

The first annual meeting of this organisation took place recently in Conway Hall. The aims of the organisation are:

- To spread the knowledge and instruction of Esperanto in the ranks of freethinkers and humanists;
- To spread the knowledge and understanding of freethought and humanism among the Esperantists.

We desire friendly relations with similar organisations in all countries and welcome letters and information from individuals of such organisations.

G. L. DICKINSON, *Secretary-Treasurer*.

GOD'S MERCY

According to a *Daily Herald* report (14.11.57), a man jumped into a gas-filled trench to stop a leak in a main, but lost his life. Others who went to his assistance escaped. The Coroner stated: "It is only by God's mercy that we are not holding an inquest on six or seven men instead of one." Well! Well! God's Mercy is similar to his Peace, inasmuch that they both "passeth all understanding."

G. W. Foote summed up the position thus: "It is not theology which purifies humanity, but humanity which purifies theology. Man civilises himself first and his gods afterwards—and the priest walks at the tail of the procession."

R. G. FORSTER.

FOX HUNTING

It's all very nice to see you devoting space to the "Don't let's be beastly to the foxes" campaign. But what about our children—should we not be tackling the armaments problem first? Are we Freethinkers or mice?

Perhaps we are mice—in which case we do matter less than foxes.

E. CROSSWELL.

SOVIET EDUCATION

When Archbishop Koenig of Vienna held a Special Mass for members of the international atomic energy conference, the congregation was graced by the presence of Soviet scientists.

That Soviet education, liberating the mind from superstition, works wonders!

D. SHIPPER.

FOR NEWCOMERS

AS AN INTRODUCTION TO FREETHOUGHT OR AS A SUITABLE XMAS PRESENT we will send

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