

The Freethinker

Vol. LXXVII—No. 52

Founded 1881 by G. W. Foote

Price Fivepence

FOR SOME TIME PAST, our friends of the *Inter-Planetary Society* have been predicting the proximate advent of the space-travel age predicted already in the 19th century by those pioneers of inter-planetary flight, H. G. Wells and Jules Verne, not to mention such older writers as Lucian and Cyrano de Bergerac. The predicted Space-Travel age effectively began in October with the launching of Sputnik I.

If we assume that the race for the moon is now on, who will get there first? Is our nearest neighbour in Space destined to fly the hammer and sickle or the stars and stripes? Is the first lunar mountain upon which strangely-garbed human explorers will alight destined to appear on future maps as Mount Lenin or Mount Washington? At present the Russians are well in the lead but the race is still technically open. That the moon will eventually be reached now appears nearly certain. Whether men will reach Mars and Venus later on is anyone's guess. My own is that they will and fairly soon. "Appetite comes with eating."

Science and Western Society

However, I am not here concerned with the immediate future of Space-travel, which I am not technically equipped to discuss. For the moment I propose to stay on this planet which is so profoundly affected by the scientific revolution of which the Sputniks are the outward and visible sign. One can state that the West, so long befogged by religious dogma and metaphysical speculation, is now beginning to realise the full truth of the statement that we live in a scientific age, that is, an age which, unlike any previous one, is based completely upon science. That this realisation is a direct result of the political and ideological competition between East and West, adds fresh urgency to the discovery.

The fact that it was Russia—still a medieval land in 1917—that successfully inaugurated the new age, and at present looks like winning the Lunar Stakes, cannot be regarded as an accident. By all computations the U.S.A. or some other Western land should have won this scientific race. Moreover, the U.S.S.R., unlike the U.S.A., has had to fight three wars of devastation on its own territory during the period. These are matters of history, not of controversy; and it is also a matter of history that, notwithstanding all this, it was Russia that won. What were the causes of this unexpected victory of the East over the West? In my opinion there were two: first, the superiority of a planned over an unplanned economy in an age of social and industrial co-ordination. Perhaps this proposition is open to controversy, but I do not propose to pursue it in a non-political paper like *THE FREETHINKER*. But the second cause is, I imagine, indisputable to Freethinkers. It is to be found in the fact that, whilst the West is founded only partly on science and partly on religion, the Eastern culture is founded throughout on a purely Materialistic, i.e. scientific, outlook. There, religion, where it still

exists, is purely incidental to the social set-up.

East and West

When I was in Eastern Germany in August, I had exceptional opportunities to note the relations of religion and science in the People's Democracies. Conditions seemed to be pretty uniform, though perhaps rather more favourable to religion than in the Soviet Union itself, where the separation of Church and State appears to be practically

complete. In East Germany and, I understand, in the other Peoples' Democracies, the Church, though disestablished, actually receives official grants from the State. However, the educational curriculum is materialistic throughout, and only specialists concern themselves with comparative religion. The current attitude of the Eastern bloc was explained to me by the Director of the famous Social Hygiene Museum at Dresden. The Director, a pupil of Pavlov, was quite explicit. If people want to go to church in our Republic, he told me, they are entirely at liberty to do so. But the State will not tolerate any intrusion of religious dogma into the material field of medical science. Christian Science, for example, is illegal. It is surely evident that, whatever its merits or demerits, a civilisation permeated by a materialist philosophy of life in which religion is merely a tolerated outsider, must have a tremendous advantage over the still officially Christian West.

The Millstone of Religion

This fact seems now to be penetrating the consciousness of the West. Both President Eisenhower and the Duke of Edinburgh have made rather belated public pronouncements on the need for more and better scientific education to catch up with the Russians. But Eisenhower—who was recently baptised—and the Duke—who recently presided at a baptism; whose wife is "Defender of the [Anglican] Faith," and whose sister-in-law, Princess Margaret, could not marry the man she loved because the Church forbade it—are fighting with a millstone round their necks; the millstone of religion. With State churches in half the Western countries, and religious revivals in the other; with many valuable hours in schools and colleges wasted on the superannuated dogmas of Christianity, it is obvious that the scientific outlook—the necessary basis for any scientific progress—is handicapped at every turn in competition with the East, which takes Materialism as its starting point. Neither Billy Graham nor the Vatican is any help in inculcating a scientific outlook!

The Millstone of Religion

I submit that the Secularist case against official religion has been immensely strengthened by recent happenings. Every Sputnik in the sky represents a warning to the West and constitutes a fresh argument for the long overdue separation of Church and State. When no longer compelled to fight with one hand tied behind its back and its brain fuddled with obsolete dogmas, the West can then re-enter the inter-planetary race with at least an even-money chance of success.

—VIEWS and OPINIONS—

Science and The Sputnik

—By F. A. RIDLEY—

A Positivist Centenary

By G. H. TAYLOR

A HUNDRED years ago died the founder of Positivism, the "Religion of Humanity," the French scholar Auguste Comte. There was a day when its devotees hoped that Positivism would supplant Christianity and the other religions of the world. It failed because it carried too much left over from the systems it sought to supplant. Today, its dwindling few adherents are seldom or never heard of, except that in Brazil, a country not in the vanguard of world culture, they form the only alternative to traditional religion. In the absence of a freethought organization in Brazil, therefore, one must not discount their usefulness.

According to Comte there are three stages in the cultural evolution of humanity: the theological, the metaphysical and the scientific; and the latter is the one to which man must now devote himself. In doing so he must however retain the best of what is past, and the new Positivist religion is to consist of the worship of Humanity. What followed was his artificial reconstruction of a new religious cult, in which the saints of the religion of his environment — Roman Catholicism — are replaced by the saints of the Positivist Calendar. Positivism is highly ritualistic, with prayers directed not to God but to the *Grand Etre*, the Great Being which is Humanity.

Most aptly has Positivism been called "Roman Catholicism minus Christianity." Priesthood, sacraments, fetishism — all this enters into it. Human action, says Comte, requires "purification by worship," this to be given by religious ritual (*vide Theory and Worship of Humanity*). His chief disciple in England defined religion as "that concentration of belief and feeling on one dominant Power, whereby our whole human nature is purified and disciplined." (Frederic Harrison: *Philosophy of Common Sense*).

In 1844-5 came a deep emotional impact on Comte's mind due to his meeting, and forming a compelling attachment for, Clothilde de Vaux (1815-1846), a cultured and artistic young lady who was, dying of consumption.

Nearly 200 letters, some very lengthy, passed between them, and Positivists have subjected this correspondence to the most detailed analysis. We have it sectionised into, for instance, Period of Passion, Period of Resignation, Period of Definitive Union, with all manner of sub-divisions comprising, in my view, an interminable rigmarole, but in the view of Positivists some Great Key to something or other!

Having laboured through the entire correspondence I find nothing, literally nothing, to justify the awe, the adoration and the worship of those who have knelt in the Positivist Temples of Humanity. What I find is one elderly scholar with a watery eye and an almost solitary lock of hair curved Napoleon-fashion over his forehead, his past life lily-white, hopelessly attempting to seduce one already disillusioned and in any case rather bloodless girl who found his mind beautiful and his exterior repulsive. What a wretched basis for a new cult which is to reform the world!

Nor do we discover in Comte's own life any great examples of heroic virtue such as one sees stamped indelibly over the life of Bradlaugh. Both Belfort Bax and A. B. D. Alexander, in their histories of philosophy, note Comte's vanity and egoism and his ingratitude to those who helped him financially (Saint-Simon and Stuart Mill). How could one who preached the doctrine "live for others," stoop to the vilification of his friends?

Incidentally, the doctrine "live for others" would appear to mean, in Positivism, "live for the dead," to judge from the amount of time given over to worshipping saints who

include, among others, Moses, Mohammed, Oliver Cromwell and St. Thomas Aquinas.

In one of his typically involved, but still meaningful passages, J. M. Robertson wrote that Comte

sought to impose his personal equation, the psychological state still not uncommon, of men who feel that outgrown beliefs about the universe, inasmuch as they set up a common (never universal) state of feeling, must be followed by a permanent hypostasis of the feeling in question at any cost to logic and consistency.

Frederic Harrison showed his Positivist love of humanity in some vicious passages he wrote about atheists in his *Positive Outcome of Religion*, where he speaks of the "slime of materialism," that "corrupting doctrine," that "grievous danger" propagated by those who revolt our hearts when they seek to crush the great moral forces." One need hardly add that Harrison (who is revered by Positivists) merely provides another case of a religionist vilifying what he does not understand, while at the same time talking about Positivism incorporating "the Whole of Humanity" in brotherly love.

One does not, therefore, grieve at the passing of Positivism. The work of Comte, in classifying the sciences, will remain. Even here he must not be over-estimated: his Three Stages were taken from Turgot, while the first to employ the phrase "Religion of Humanity" was Paine. As for Comte's religion, it has been left behind by the march of ideas.

Appreciation from the Antipodes

PROF. W. A. OSBORNE, now in his 85th year, for many years Dean of the Faculty of Medicine of the University of Melbourne, known as the author of several very successful text-books (and also as a poet and essayist), writes to Mr. Bradlaugh Bonner in a letter of thanks for the issues of THE FREETHINKER containing reports of the Paris International Congress: "I have read through these publications with deep interest and am delighted that so much valuable matter was so well covered at the Congress and so well reported in this journal. I have been so favourably impressed with the standard of the articles and reviews that I have sent a subscription for next year. Often it is necessary to take the buttons off the foils and I am indeed glad that THE FREETHINKER can do it so effectually. As a boy I heard Mr. G. W. Foote lecture and he made a profound impression on me. I well remember his caustic remark that the difference between an agnostic and an atheist was that the agnostic wore a top hat and lived at Eastbourne—a dig at T. H. Huxley, who refused to contribute to the fund raised to help Foote after an infamous prosecution. I also vividly recall his reply, when asked if atheists did not repent and call for mercy on their deathbeds. Foote was of opinion that most of these stories were apocryphal: in a few cases an exclamation might have been uttered, which meant nothing more than an exclamation: "if I knock my shin against something hard or sharp and shout out 'Oh Christ,' that does not signify that I abjure my atheism?"

In another letter Prof. Osborne writes: "Have you ever considered how the worship of relics died a natural death without any vigorous propaganda against it? Chaucer could laugh at the store of 'pigges bones' which were palmed off as relics and laughter is always a more successful weapon than scolding. Robert Burns has been said to have laughed the devil out of the Scottish kirk; even in the Holy Ghost."

C.B.B.

Religious Authority and the Modern

By F. H. AMPHLETT MICKLEWRIGHT

A VITAL QUESTION for freethought in the present day is that of a clear understanding of the central claim of the Christian system. This no longer turns on a belief in an infallible Bible or that the Bible is the sole source of doctrine and practice. Beliefs of this kind were characteristic of a certain type of Protestantism and still form the staple diet of the followers of Mr. Billy Graham. But this old-fashioned Protestantism is itself in decline and looks like fading away. Among educated people, it has had no support for a generation or more. Far more important is the Catholic claim which is re-echoed by high Anglicans. There exists in this world the Church as the source and fount of a continuing Divine revelation within human history. It is a corporate entity transcending history and is represented on earth by its gatherings where the ritual-patterns are performed. Catholicism, as Professor Kirsopp Lake used to urge, is the most logical form of Christianity. The Catholic Church professes an external authority in faith and morals voiced by the councils of its prelates and priests. A true disciple is bound to surrender himself to this authority which will see him safely through this world and will guide him into the next.

It would certainly be a mistake to underrate the strength of this position. It is logical and, once, its initial premises have been conceded, an argument which covers the whole span of human living. The Catholic position is at one with the types of argument which look for guidance in abstractions, such as community, Christian civilisation, the free world, and others which form the seat of authority in the modern world for a large number of persons. It is also able to meet the mood of contemporary moods of despair by promising an escape from the harsh conditions of living in the world of today or from the intellectual confusion which sometimes reigns. Perhaps its strongest appeal is that it does not demand any belief in man as he exists upon this planet but, from a sheer pessimism concerning his present and future, constructs a theory of the ultimate perfection of some part of humanity in another realm beyond the grave at the end of time. Conversions to Rome are frequently psychological and find their roots in one or other of these causes.

The authority breaks down again and again when it is put to the test. A century ago, both Roman and Anglican apologists appealed to it against the onslaughts of physical science. It let them down simply because the physical scientists won the battle on the intellectual plane. Challenged by Biblical criticism, fundamentalist views collapsed and the external authority was worsened. Finally, it was forced on to the vital battlefields of psychology and sociology. In psychological research is to be found one of the most clear-cut answers to the traditional Christian views of sin and moral responsibility. Sociology has shown organised religion as a façade within a particular series of social patterns and its form as determined by the nature of the pattern prevailing. Perhaps the hardest rap which ecclesiastical authority has been forced to take is that which has shown morality itself to be an evolution springing out of the background of social patterns and not of religious rites at all. Few intellectual assertions could so undercut the whole grounds of ecclesiastical authority. It is nothing less than a challenge to the part played by religion in morality.

In point of fact, it is here, and in the related issues, that

the conflict between religion and science lies at the present time. Religion still asserts an external authority claiming to define morality. But social patterns have changed and morality has changed with the shifting of emphasis. A naked commercial competition, once accepted as a social commonplace, is denounced by not a few as immoral. Hereditary privilege or racial discrimination comes to be regarded as something offending against the morality of society. On the other hand, sexual issues become a problem within the changing social pattern. They are *faced* along purely utilitarian and secular lines as the Wolfenden Report illustrates. Ideas of reward and of punishment in another world are forced to give way to questions of social usefulness or disadvantage in this life. Authority becomes something to be determined in terms of social behaviour and is related to immediate realities.

Just as a great deal of abstract thinking unrelated to reality has been jettisoned, the same point is true of the Church, which is regarded as the fount of authority. The Catholic conception is an abstraction and is unrelated to any obvious this-worldly scientific reality. Its authority is therefore both abstract and unreal, bearing no sort of relationship to life within the world disclosed by science. For example, its morality is usually quite unrelated to the recorded ethical teaching of Jesus save when it is convenient for it to make a claim to relationship. Much is made of the words recorded by Jesus on divorce. But the same people do not follow out the logic of their argument. The bishop who adopts these rigorist grounds on the marriage question does not usually give his overcoat to the man who steals his jacket! Nor does the priest smacked on one cheek usually turn the other, but he disobeys a further precept and calls the police! The pacifist teachings of the Gospels are set aside by official religion in time of war. At the same time, the moral claims urged by the Church over personal life and the claim that the Church possesses an ethical and spiritual finality are alike shown to be based upon the unreality of an abstraction which has no true relationship to social living as any modern sociologist would understand it, nor to the practical needs of the many millions who in real life follow out moral codes shaped and furnished by the social pattern within which they live.

For the freethinker of today, the true issues between supernaturalism and naturalism lie within the discussion of these points. Some of the great traditional controversies now belong to the past and are largely academic. The claim to an external ecclesiastical authority is something still active within common life and is a trap well baited to snare the unwary. Catholic arguments are strong so long as their final grounds are conceded. But, for those who are ready to accept tests of comparison and experiment as the guide to truth, the arguments collapse simply because they will not stand up to external tests. An ecclesiastical authority is not something which is immune from the testing which would be applied to claims in any other realm. On the contrary, it is open to the challenge of the scientist or the historian. Gradually, it is becoming clearer that the history of the Church within the world, so far as its claims to authority be concerned, is not a matter of history at all but of faith and that these claims will not work out when they are faced with the realities of living within a modern, scientific society.

This Believing World

The religious barrage for Christmas began with the BBC's "Meeting Point," in which the Rt. Rev. Dr. G. MacLeod proved himself a thoroughgoing Fundamentalist who not only believed every story in the Gospels but also contended that "Scientific Humanism," which he preferred to Agnosticism, was only possible because of Christ Jesus. It was Christ who gave the world "freedom of thought"—though, rather surprisingly, he did not actually call Jesus the Greatest Freethinker the world has ever known. But, of course, that is bound to come one day.

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Then there is a reverend gentleman, the Very Reverend W. O'Leary, who heads a newspaper article "Sputniks couldn't make men"—a profound statement that is, oh, so very true. Sputniks couldn't make cabbages either. And what does this prove? "Man has the power to make all other created things his servant," says Mr. O'Leary. "And that is the will of God." All these wonderful proofs of the existence of God are monotonously repeated—and where do they leave us? Exactly where we were before!

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According to Mr. C. Northcott, writing in *The Observer*, the Bible is selling more and more in Asia and Africa. It would certainly be interesting to know if Asians and Africans in general now are quite certain that Elijah went up to Heaven in a fiery chariot, that Jonah spent three days in the tummy of a whale and was eventually vomited out in perfect health, that Methuselah lived to be 969 years of age, that Joshua stopped the sun and moon—and so on, absurdities piling up on absurdities? Mr. Northcott tells us that the Bible has been translated in 1,109 languages—it would have been an awful sin to have said 1,110 languages; we must be accurate in these matters—but we are not surprised that one of the translations took 25 years to complete. It was to save the Solomon Islands head hunters who obviously, without God's Precious Word, would all have gone precipitously to Hell.

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Incidentally, we are told that "one of the problems of Bible distribution is the growing redundancy of many of the present translations." In fact, so very bad are some—in spite of the 1,109 translations—that they will have to be retranslated or revised. This seems to be the case even with some of those in English, for they are always either being revised or scrapped. Whoever uses the once famous *Literal Translation of the Bible* by Dr. Robert Young, these days—Still no fewer than 26,379,142 copies of the Bible in various forms were sold or circulated last year, an astonishing number—especially when one considers that about the only people who read the Holy Book are priests, parsons, and very religious spinsters. And we are not sure that even they do.

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In the meantime Russia is once again trying to get anti-religious propaganda going for, as Mr. E. Crankshaw points out in *The Observer*—"It is forty years since the Communists, brimming with confidence, set out" to stop believing in God, and "they have not solved it (the problem) yet." Stalin had to get the Churches and the people on his side when Germany invaded Russia, and that gave a fillip to belief again; but now Mr. Krushchev has returned to the attack, though he admits that the approach demands "a more alert and constructive approach," and that in actual fact, "there is a partial revival of religion" in Russia and that the Churches are "cleverer than they used to be."

All this is very interesting—but it proves that force is about the last thing one must use to propagate Freethought. Of course, the word used by Stalin and Krushchev is *Atheism*, but Atheism without Freethought can mean anything, and is used by Christians as a term of horror. There is no guarantee that because one gives up a belief in God Almighty, he immediately becomes a saint—a secular saint, so to speak. The "constructive" approach must be in a line with Freethought, and that is not easy, and never has been for Russians in power.

The Rising Generation

XXVII — NAMES

IT MUST HAVE STRUCK a great many Biblical scholars and critics, though it is carefully kept away from religious lessons in schools, that one thing about many of the names given to Bible heroes is that they occur only *once* in the Holy Book. You never get two Adams, or two Cains, or two Davids, or two Moses, and so on. Yet the Biblical story—if true—covers about four thousand years. In the whole of that time, it seems never to have occurred to any doting mother to name her baby after such well-known personages as the ones I have mentioned, or any of the others. It is one of the "mysteries" of Judaism and Christianity which no priest has ever been able to explain.

Of course, there is an explanation, and it is simply that nearly all the names of people in the Bible are *artificial*: that is, they were "made-up." The *Encyclopedia Biblica* says: "A considerable number of names in the Old Testament must be regarded as fictitious. Not to mention the names in the lists of mythical patriarchs down to Abraham, who are perhaps, in some cases, of non-Hebrew origin, we meet with various names which were invented in order to fill up the gaps in genealogies and the like. . . ." The *E.B.* even points out that "many representatives or chiefs of the tribes" had "no existence." But we still have their names.

In making up these names, special significances were always taken into account. Long lists are given in the *E.B.* showing how many names were constructed to mean certain qualities or attributes, even of God himself. Many names have a Phœnician or Babylonian origin; that is, they contain roots or meanings taken from the languages of the two countries—but for those people who still believe that the Israelites were slaves in Egypt as told in Genesis, they would find it hard to explain why only one name, "Phineas," in the whole of the Old Testament may be of Egyptian origin.

The Hebrew words translated "Jehovah" or "God" or "Lord God" have, of course, been the subject of great controversy but there is really little doubt that they also are purely artificial. The only way this statement can be contradicted is by showing us how and where "God" has told us his real name.

The Hebrew word "El" and its plural form "Elohim" are translated "God," while the Hebrew word "Ihvh" is translated "Lord." The English form is "Jehovah," but is now often spelt "Jahve" or "Yahve"—the name used by God to Moses in the burning bush. But most critics believe it is a made-up word much later than the date given to Moses. In other words, these dates are all fictitious—just like the names of many, if not all, Bible heroes. H.C.

—NEXT WEEK—

THE NEW YEAR

By H. CUTNER

THE FREETHINKER

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THE FREETHINKER can be obtained through any newsagent or will be forwarded direct from the Publishing Office at the following rates (Home and Abroad): One year, £1 10s. (in U.S.A., \$4.25); half-year, 15s.; three months, 7s. 6d.

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

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Lecture Notices, Etc.

INDOOR

Central London Branch N.S.S. (Laurie Arms, Crawford Place, W.1).—Sunday, December 29th, 7.15 p.m.: New Year Social Evening.

Leicester Secular Society (75 Humberstone Gate).—Sunday, December 29th, 6.30 p.m.: New Year Party.

Nottingham Cosmopolitan Debating Society (Co-operative Hall, Upper Parliament Street).—Sunday, December 29th, 2.30 p.m.: Rev. J. WRIGHT, "Religion and Science."

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

AFTER reading about the colour bar problem in connection with the Empire Games to be held in Cardiff, we looked up a news item in *The Times* of November 27th. Mr. Alfred Ruscha, a Labour member of the Dagenham Borough Council, had received a warning letter from the "Ku-Klux-Klan of Britain," referring to his opposition to "efforts of a group of free-born English people" to resist the "blackfly epidemic" of coloured immigrants. The editor of a local paper which reported the matter had in turn received a letter from the Klan, urging him to "desist from giving us unsolicited and unwanted publicity in future." "We work better when our presence is not detected," it stated, and claimed that "Our members are now established in Briggs and hope to have the success there which they had against Communism in Fords." It seems that the Klan works closely with a branch in Waco, Texas, and it was from this American address that Mr. M. Orbach, Labour M.P. for Willesden East, received a warning letter earlier this year. How strong this detestable body is there is no means of knowing, but it is encouraging that Mr. T. L. Iremonger, Conservative M.P. for Ilford North, should have put down a motion for the Commons deploring the formation of a militant racist organisation in the United Kingdom.

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BISHOP FULTON J. SHEEN may usually be depended on to cause a sensation, and he did so last month by praising Russia (*The Universe*, 22/11/57). Under large headlines,

"Russia Nearer a Return to God than West," we read that, in the modern world, "Christ and His cross" have become separated. Communism, said the Bishop, "has taken the cross without Christ, and when you take the cross without Christ, you get tyranny and concentration camps. . . ." But "Russia is closer" to reconciliation than the West and will be "one of the greatest spiritual and moral forces in the world within 50 or 100 years." Another hint; perhaps, of a possible Catholic-Communist deal?

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METHODIST Rev. William Gowland is one of those clergymen who owe their "fame" to what may be termed "nuisance value." When domiciled in Manchester he hit the headlines with plans to "clear up" Piccadilly (morally, of course) and to talk about Christianity over a pint of beer in the local. We are not aware that he had conspicuous success in either of these ventures, but they were good publicity for Methodism. Having been called to Luton, he is described as minister of a combined mission, college and community centre, as well as chaplain to ten factories and to Luton jazz club (*Evening Standard*, 5/12/57), and he seems to have been rather more successful. He has had, we are told, 1,700 applications for a course for industrial chaplains. Mind you, 1,100 are clerics, and the 600 laymen are doubtless regular churchgoers. But again Mr. Gowland has had some useful publicity.

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OUR hearts go out to those poor Yorkshire hearts that could not be uplifted on December 9th. Technical trouble at Leeds studio kept BBC programme, "Lift Up Your Hearts" off the air that morning.

American Pamphlets

FROM THE *American Rationalist* we have received the following attractively produced pamphlets, the first two being reprints from the magazine itself (2218 St. Louis Ave., St. Louis 6, Missouri):

Why I do not believe in a God (an address by Arthur G. Cromwell to a group of Methodists; 16 pages; 20 cents).

By Their Fruits . . . (Ira D. Cardiff; 14 pages; unpriced).

Pope Joan; a riddle of the Dark Ages (C. Olsen; 14 pages; 15 cents).

In the first of these Mr. Cromwell presents a cultured, reasoned statement of his Atheism such as would be endorsed by most Atheists. Nor does he lack militancy; he exposes the absurdity of Jesus Christ being regarded as unique among saviour-gods. "Let us," he concludes, "bury the last of the gods, knowing that they died from our acquired wisdom of the ages."

In the second of these pamphlets Mr. Cardiff has little difficulty in adducing evidence that the adherents to the Christian religion, whether considered as nations or as individuals, make a poor showing in the field of moral behaviour. As usual, the figures prove Catholics to be the greatest offenders in proportion to their percentage of the population, while at the other end of the scale those of no religion are as a group the best behaved. (This is a recurring picture, of course, whenever one looks at the figures for crime.) Unfortunately, Mr. Cardiff has no statistics later than 1944, and one could wish for fuller documentation.

The third pamphlet gives the story (or myth, or legend, or history, or rumour) of "Pope Joan" of the 9th century, in tabloid form. Like others before him, Mr. Olsen arrives at no certain conclusion. While there is no reliable record of this Pontificate, the origin of the tale itself has not been satisfactorily explained.

G. H. TAYLOR.

A "Freethinker" Anthology for 1957

(taken from the pages of THE FREETHINKER during the year)

PROF. SIR ERNEST KENNAWAY, F.R.S.: 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? (*December 6th.*)

G. I. BENNETT: A world government of federal structure was a desideratum forty or fifty years ago. It is now a long overdue necessity. (*June 14th.*)

DR. EDWARD ROUX (S. Africa): Catholic mumbo-jumbo in connection with the eating of the body of the man-god coincides so closely with African traditional magical ideas that it has tended to reinforce rather than replace the latter. (*April 26th.*)

A. YATES: Why, if the knowledge of Christ's teaching was necessary for salvation, was it so long deferred for the benefit of an obscure nation of Jews? (*April 19th.*)

ARTHUR B. HEWSON (U.S.A.): All the gods of the ages are simply fantasies born out of the human imagination . . . fantasies for the answers man was unable to supply because he has been unwilling to admit that he does not know the answers. (*August 16th.*)

C. G. L. DU CANN: Those whom folly, mistake or inexperience have joined together let goodness, decency and charity put asunder. (*March 1st.*)

AVRO MANHATTAN: The once proud British press . . . has succumbed to the intolerance of pressure groups, one of the most unscrupulous of which is undoubtedly the Catholic. (*April 5th.*)

R. READER (Belgium): The "world that could be" is too beautiful and interesting to sacrifice it to ideas that have their foundations rooted in the delirium of a handful of religious neurotics. (*November 15th.*)

F. A. RIDLEY: Rome will continue in her traditional vicious circle to demand the right of toleration whilst in a minority for herself on the ground that she possesses the Truth, and, once in a majority, the right to suppress others because "error has no rights against Truth." (*July 12th.*)

O. C. DREWITT (formerly Fr. Norbert Drewitt, O.P., S.T.LIC.): By encouraging certain minor reforms the Church is thereby enabled most conveniently to evade the giant problems of social structure and morality, the solution of which would genuinely make society free. (*October 11th.*)

C. BRADLAUGH BONNER: Statistics show that more than one third of our young people have doubts as to the existence of a god; that not more than ten per cent. of the whole population attend church with any frequency or regularity . . . and still fewer fancy that religion has any influence on contemporary events. (*September 13th.*)

A. R. WILLIAMS: In our and many other countries what liberties we do possess were won by disobeying bad laws. (*June 28th.*)

REV. JOHN L. BROOM, M.A.: The Almighty's atrocities in nature and human life make the activities of the Secret Police in Nazi Germany and Eastern Europe look almost kindhearted in comparison. (*January 25th.*)

COLIN MCCALL: In theological matters, too, the Church is being forced to adapt itself in order to survive, though here the process is noticeably slower. . . . The dead hand of the past weighs heavier on theology than on sociology. (*March 8th.*)

JOHN BOWDEN (Australia): The compilers of the recently published Revised Standard Version . . . have cor-

rected a great many of the more obvious errors occurring in the earlier versions. But the very existence of such revisions shatters for all time the dogma of Biblical inerrancy.

E. G. MACFARLANE: No educated person nowadays has any need for authoritative pronouncements on what he should believe or what he should consider moral or immoral. (*March 22nd.*)

LEON SPAIN (U.S.A.): The concerted drive for religious indoctrination via the public school system proves that the Sunday School harvest of children in America is a glaring failure. (*June 14th.*)

"ANDREW PEARSE": The social impact of the C. of E. is one which has alienated many members of radical and working class movements quite as much as have the more incredible of its doctrines. (*January 25th.*)

DR. S. CHANDRASEKHAR (India): Apart from the objection of the Roman Catholics, who form a minority of India's people, there is no real religious opposition to planned population. The problem is how to put it into execution. (*September 13th.*)

D. SHIPPER: The Pope is never in a dilemma: he has only to cover up one of his faces. (*August 16th.*)

JOSEPH LEWIS (U.S.A.): The human race would have been spared its greatest calamity if Jesus, either in the flesh or in the imagination, had never been born. (*May 3rd.*)

J. GORDON: As a rain-sender God is notoriously unreliable. . . . The result is that agriculturalists have called in science to help them. (*August 2nd.*)

"LEONARD MARTIN" (S. Africa): Formerly angels were a kind of telegraph messenger minus uniform. Even that simple job is no longer in existence, and, like God, what is there left for them to do, except adorn paintings or decorate pediments? (*March 29th.*)

H. CUTNER: Although hospitals and doctors have been using anæsthetics for over 100 years, it is great news to learn that the Pope is now going to allow them to do so with the Church's blessing. . . . No one can now say the Vatican is not slap up-to-date in these matters. (*March 8th.*)

G. H. TAYLOR: The age when the I.G.Y. has become possible is burdened with a religious heritage, true, but its very character as a world team-effort shows, in contrast, religion receding as a petty geographical accident. (*July 26th.*)

Digging up Jericho

The following extracts from the recently published *Digging Up Jericho*, by Kathleen M. Kenyon (Ernest Benn Ltd.) may be of interest to readers: Chap. 7—The Early Bronze Age (page 170): "It results from this identification that no fragment of the walls of the Late Bronze Age city, that of the period within which the attack by the Israelites under Joshua must fall, survives. This is in contradiction to the interpretation made in the 1930-6 excavations. The previous excavations had traced a double line of wall which was considered to be the final stage of the Bronze Age walls, and signs of destruction by earthquake and fire were attributed to the time of the Israelite attack. As is described below in connection with the walls of Trench I, a more detailed stratigraphical examination shows that the two walls are not contemporary, and, as has been already said, both belong to the Early Bronze Age."

"In Trench I, therefore, the layers of debris represent at least four missing stages between the last visible wall on the inner line and the first of three stages on the outer line. This is important, since the two highest walls on the inner and outer line had been ascribed to the Late Bronze Age, and to be probably the wall destroyed by the Israelites under Joshua. The clearer stratigraphical evidence now obtained makes it quite certain that this is not so." (Page 181.) Poor Professor Garstang!

F. M. BLAKE.

A Mexican Centenary

By D. SHIPPER

THIS year Mexico celebrated the centenary of the 1857 Constitution of Benito Juarez which signified the end of the Roman Catholic domination of the country.

In this year of "La Reforma," Juarez announced the complete separation of Church and State and ordered the leaders of the hierarchy to end the political scheming dictated by Rome. The Church, formerly the biggest landowner in Mexico, was dispossessed of its property and the clergy forbidden to wear ecclesiastical uniform in public. Although various plots were being hatched underground for the restoration of Church power, the governmental authorities took stern action in the two decades following 1857 to make sure the subjugation of State to Church would not take place again.

After the 1917 revolution (also a Communist revolution, the Catholics said) Venustiano Carranza became the new leader and, although a new constitution was drawn up, this left as little opportunity for the resurrection of Catholic power as the hated 1857 Constitution.

In 1924 Plutarco Calles (a Freemason and militant anti-clerical) became President and this year saw the emergence of the "Cristeros," Catholic revolutionary fanatics directed secretly by the clergy and pledged to make Mexico a monarchy — the monarchy of Christ the King.

Their slogan "Viva Cristo Rey!" (Long Live Christ the King!) could be seen everywhere — painted during the hours of darkness.

The revolutionary activities of the Cristeros, began in 1924, culminated in 1927 with the assassination of Alvaro Obregon, the President-elect.

A Jesuit Father, Miguel Pro, was executed for his part in the assassination (*The Universe* recently announced his case for beatification has been introduced). The government stamped out the Cristeros and the Mexican bishops were exiled for two years.

In 1926, realising Cristero activity was being planned in what were ostensibly religious gatherings, the governmental authorities decreed that R.C. clergy must register or close their churches. They also decreed that civil officials must be present at religious meetings and governmental authorisation must be obtained for meeting-places. In spite of the activities of the bloodthirsty Cristeros this was denounced as religious persecution! Although President Cardenas began his term of office in 1934 by granting an amnesty to those accused of sedition and treason (practically all Catholics) the opposition to Church claims was maintained.

Since 1940 the position of the Church has been eased and Mexican liberals and freethinkers have continually given voice to their anxiety.

When Manuel Avila Camacho was elected President in 1940 he called upon the Mexicans to restore "Christian harmony" and the clergy were allowed to own property once again.

Under Camacho and the succeeding Presidents Aleman and Cortinez, a number of concessions have been made and Catholic Action grows progressively stronger.

Fortunately, *La Voz de Juarez* ("The Voice of Juarez") still speaks through the freethought journal of that name, ably supported by *El Libre Pensador* (*The Freethinker*) and *El Liberal*.

The warnings of the freethinkers that the Catholic Actionists of today can be the new Cristeros of tomorrow should certainly be heeded, or a new page of bloodshed may be added to the revolutionary history of Mexico.

The Chinese Population Problem

[A summary of the address by Prof. Ernest Kahane, Secretary of the French Rationalist Union, to the World Union of Freethinkers Congress at Paris, September, 1957.]

THOUGH IT may be a good thing to admit the limits of *scientific knowledge*, it must be borne in mind that it constantly expands and is constantly tested; it constantly gains precision, but it never achieves finality. The *interpretation* and *generalisation* of scientific knowledge vary widely. When such wide variations appear, the student is justified in preferring the least optimistic. M. Cotereau is right, in dealing with the demographic problem, to set aside till fully proven all prophecies of a remote achievement, particularly of any great development of food production sufficient to meet the present rate of increase in population. Short-term forecasts are of a different category; here experts may agree, or nearly; and we may consider as possible an increase of world food production amounting to 3% to meet a population increase of 1½%.

It must not be overlooked that extreme poverty is met with not only in the thickly populated regions of the earth, but also in sparsely inhabited regions, e.g., in Africa and S. America. Here the distribution of wealth is markedly defective.

I must admit that I was surprised to find when recently I visited Communist China that the population difficulty had not been considered from the point of view of food supply. The delegation of ten [*of which Prof. Kahane was the leader*] were all interested in this question of population and did not neglect any opportunity of obtaining information on it. We had received no official information till the eve of our departure from France; the reason given was that the Chinese Medical Association had appointed a Commission of 58 members to study Birth Control, and its investigations and decisions were only then available. The authorities had noted a disturbing frequency of abortions, a tendency to delay marriage, to break up homes, etc. which seemed inspired by the pressure of overpopulation. Moreover there were heard more and more often requests for the establishment of birth control clinics or advice bureaux. The Chinese government therefore in Sept. 1956 decided to take action. The legal age of marriage was raised to 18 for women and 20 for men; and intensive propaganda was launched among the university students in favour of later marriages. We visited an information bureau in Peking which had recently been established. There were four little rooms; in the first were demonstrated the inconvenience attendant on large families, both from the social and the individual angle; in the second the risks of abortion; in the third the physiology of reproduction; and in the last was given information on contraception. Apparently there are now 60 such information centres in Peking as well as others established in factories.

China has 615 million inhabitants, of whom under four million are Christian; the mass are Buddhists, Taoists and Confucians. There is then no special religious obstacle to birth control; but there is a powerful obstacle in the tradition of large families and in the mystery in which conception and birth are wrapped so that it is not proper to refer to them openly.

Such birth control propaganda as has been possible up to now has shown results; in Peking the birth rate has fallen from 43 per 1,000 to 39, for example.

Whereas the annual world increase in population is approximately 1%, the increase for China is over 2%. Lord Boyd Orr calculates that China can increase its food production by 4%, rising in time to 10%; but the mass of

the population will remain underfed, although in the past twenty years food consumption by the peasants has increased by 32% and by the industrial workers 38%. The aim is therefore to make it possible to offer every member of the population sufficient by reducing the increase in mouths till it is met by an equivalent increase in food.

It must not be thought, I was told, that the mothers and children will be of less importance; no, the opposite will be the case.

[Summarised and translated by C. Bradlaugh Bonner.]

An Open Letter

The Editor, *Radio Times*.

WITH the Russian Sputnik in the air, the West has lost a conspicuous race; a big share of the blame falls upon the BBC pundits and their programme policy. In the Soviet Union, the topmost place, reserved in the West for a blank called "God," is efficiently filled by Science. We are bound to keep lagging behind, so long as our rulers go out of their way to clog the inquisitive brains of our coming generation with the same old rehash of primitive fancies, to foster harmful obsessions and to waste precious hours on that expandable blank.

Those responsible for this state of affairs are generally too intelligent to believe themselves in that childish twaddle they daily dish out for old and young alike. Naturally they do not take the Creation story literally, although then the whole magic "necessity" for a "Saviour" falls to the ground. They do not for a moment think that religion is morally wholesome, as they can daily scan criminal reports and notice that the inmates of our jails and penitentiaries are the very opposite of atheists. They perhaps even realise that the belief in a supernatural agency is highly harmful; the truth is that always when men think themselves to be but instruments to a superhuman end, they also think they have the superhuman right to use inhuman and underhuman means. And yet they force this poison down the children's throats.

For the same reason as Hitler needed the race myth, our powers-to-be need the Jesus myth, and no logical opposition can rest in them. If you want to fleece people, there are two means to do it: by brutal force (as is used in the Iron Curtain countries) or by hoax, *i.e.*, the subtle presentation of a transcendental god as the fountain-head of power and authority.

Five years ago Lord Bertrand Russell, our greatest living Philosopher, wrote: "What the world needs is not dogma, but an attitude of scientific inquiry."

You cannot have both.—Yours truly, R. G. Roy.

CORRESPONDENCE

SPACE TRAVEL

I would like to say how much I appreciated Mr. G. I. Bennett's article on "Space Travel." The humanitarian point of view is expressed so adequately from that standpoint that there is little one could add. I wonder, however, if those who see nothing to offend their sense of decency in enclosing a dog in the way that the Russians enclosed the dog in Sputnik II would by virtue of their own "conditioned" mental outlook find that Mr. Bennett's article means anything to them?

We in this country will know, of course, of the lower mental grades of our society who chase foxes and deer on horseback and the particularly inane and cruel "sport" of pheasant and grouse shooting pursued by generations of royalty and prime ministers; but, on the whole, the English people's attitude to animal life—both wild and domesticated—is one dominated by kindly feeling.

Quite recently James Fisher pointed out that the extraordinary tameness of the English robin is due entirely to our attitude of friendliness towards it, whereas, on the Continent, the robin is a

shy, retiring creature. It would indeed be interesting to know if any societies for the protection of wild and domestic creatures exist either in Russia or the Continent generally?

This interesting relationship between Freethinking and Atheism may well be an accident of history, desirable as it is to those who think like Mr. Bennett and myself. On the other hand, it does seem that to many one's attitude to religion—whether it be Atheist or Theist—need not extend or relate to any moral considerations whatever.

ROBERT F. TURNEY.

PANTHEISM

Alvin McElwain, as a pantheist, disclaims the contemptuous title, atheist. No one, I imagine, challenges his right to choose to be called "pantheist" rather than "atheist," but one wonders if he is trying to imply that the term "atheist" is "contemptible" as well as "contemptuous." After all, an atheist is merely one who is without god, or God. To the Christian Alvin McElwain is an "atheist," because his God is quite definitely not a Christian's God.

One gathers that Mr. McElwain uses the proper noun "God" to mean "a supersensual metaphysical principle," whatever that description may mean to him or anyone else. But Mr. McElwain states that "Words carry the meanings we give them." Granted! If that were not so we could not carry on intelligent communication, but will Mr. McElwain tell us (1) What meaning is given to the proper noun "God" by any half dozen people taken at random; (2) How many people he knows who would define "God" in his terms; and (3) What his definition precisely means to him?

It is understood that a pantheist, a deist, and a theist use the proper noun "God" with different meanings, and this writer has never yet encountered two people of any persuasion who attempt to define the word in even similar terms. "God," apparently, means so many vague and "aery faery somethings" to so many different people as to be a meaningless term. Jove, Jupiter, or even Jahweh are meaningful to some extent, as names given to imaginary beings, which are credited with superhuman attributes.

No one person can be in a position to know, or even to guess at, what another person may mean by the proper noun "God." It would appear, then, at all times, to be incumbent upon the user of the proper noun "God" to define it precisely and objectively. We might then know what is the Deist's God, the pantheist's God, the theist's God, the Anglican's God, the Catholic's God, the Non-conformist's God, the Unitarian's God, etc., etc. Or would we?

H. DAY.

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