

The Freethinker

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I HAVE REFERRED before to the fundamentally dishonest attitude of the Roman Catholic Church towards Lourdes. Probably its greatest centre of pilgrimage after Rome itself, and likewise a source of enormous publicity, Lourdes yet remains incompletely recognised by the Church. The alleged miracles which earn it so much fame have not the status of dogmas so, theoretically, a Catholic may deny them. And, if he finds himself unable to meet the criticisms of a freethinker, he often does retort that he isn't compelled to believe in Lourdes. Yet we know that pilgrimages are advertised and organised by churches all over the world; that the Catholic press boosts Lourdes in every possible way; that Popes give it their blessing. Thus—as so often with the Church of Rome—the position is allowed to remain just sufficiently ambiguous to afford escape should it be necessary, the utmost capital being made out of it in the meantime. And if that isn't dishonesty, I don't know what is.

The tragedy is that decent individual Catholics see nothing wrong in this. So thoroughly have they been trained that the "double think" is quite natural to them. And, although they almost invariably believe that miracles occur at Lourdes; although they know that hundreds of thousands of invalids go there every year with the express hope of being cured; although they know these are the outstanding features of Lourdes, they are prepared, in argument with an opponent, to dismiss them with a shrug of the shoulders as unimportant. It doesn't matter whether miracles occur or not, they will say; what is much more important is that pilgrims (sick and well) return home with "renewed" faith.

Disgust

It isn't always true, of course. Some pilgrims come away disgusted with the commercialisation, which has indeed been condemned by Monsignor Théas, Bishop of Tarbes and Lourdes, himself, though it was defended on BBC television last year by the Roman Catholic Bishop of Leeds. He liked it, he said, when questioned. The noted French Catholic novelist, François Mauriac, by contrast, vowed that he would never again go back to Lourdes after reading the exposure of the many rackets in *Les Clés de Lourdes* (The Keys of Lourdes) by another Catholic writer, Pierre Dumas. Even small and pathetic little shops in the town change hands for fantastic sums; sordid hotels charge extortionate prices for poor accommodation; in short, the pilgrims are "fleeced" right, left and centre. I don't know about returning home with "renewed" faith; any Catholic of sensitivity (and there are a few) must surely react like M. Mauriac. The vast majority are, however, impervious to gaudy, ghastly, vulgarity—having been brought up amidst it—and we might say that their faith is strong enough to survive the Lourdes variety.

Reassurance

Anyway, why should a strong faith need renewing?

Here, surely, is another indication of the insecurity at the heart of Catholicism to which I referred the other week (THE FREETHINKER, 13/3/59). The Catholic often needs to be reassured, and he gets reassurance from the ceremonies at Lourdes. One of thousands, he pays his homage to the Virgin; he takes his communion; he chants and recites; and as evening falls he lights his candle in its little shade (bearing pictures of the BVM, Bernadette and the basilica) and marches in a long, winding procession before the basilica. Here he is safe from the external world; part of the throng; protected and secure; if not hysterical, at least excited. With the intelligent Catholic it is not so much faith, as armour,

VIEWS and OPINIONS

The Seamy Side of Lourdes

By COLIN McCALL

renewed—at least temporarily.

But that amour must withstand many strains, not only from opponents, but from its own side. For Lourdes—mainly no doubt because it is such a gold-mine—is often the centre of unedifying squabbles. The latest involved Monsignor Théas and the Roman Catholic Information Centre, with money, needless to say, in the middle. Henceforth, said the Bishop, "Catholics must, as a matter of conscience, abstain from membership, gifts or subscriptions" to the Centre. "The presence on its committee of priests foreign to the diocese is," he added, "an aggravating circumstance" (*Time*, March 2, 1959.).

Aggravation

Behind the trouble, as *Time* further informed us, was the "near financial disaster" which began three years ago when the Bishop approved plans for the building of a new underground basilica in Lourdes at a cost of around £1,000,000. Money was borrowed from bankers "against future donations from pilgrims", but the foundations were threatened by floods, and repairs doubled the estimate. Monsignor Théas turned again to the bankers, but this time without success. For a time work ceased, so an appeal was made to Pope Pius XII. On to the scene, as a result, came Monsignor George Roche, former parish priest, now head of a lay order, Opus Cenaculi. The order, enjoying the strong financial support of a wealthy Canadian widow, Mrs. Melvina Rivet, had raised millions of pounds to build churches in Italy and France, and it underwrote the basilica. But Roche laid down a condition. He "demanded complete control of all basilica finances in Lourdes" and formed a "small controlling group", the Association of the Friends of Lourdes, with Mrs. Rivet among them.

Protest

The group sold shrine passes to all pilgrims at a cost of roughly 6/6 each for French, and double for foreigners, and "launched sidelines to bring in more money—sale of medals, souvenirs, books". The Bishop protested to Rome about this extra commercialisation and a coadjutor bishop was finally sent to keep an eye on the Association.

But, no sooner was this under control, than trouble

started over the new Information Centre, founded with the blessings of the influential French Cardinal Tisserant. Not only did one of the priests belong to the Opus Cenaculi (the "aggravating circumstance") but the Centre intended to start its own publishing house instead of devoting all revenue to the basilica. Hence the boycott.

So, although the new building is completed, Monsignor Théas has—in the words of *Le Monde*—"paid a heavy price for his basilica in every sense of the word". And perhaps some Catholic will wonder why the spouse of God permits such goings on in the Pyrenees town that she chose to hallow with her presence.

Biology for Catholics

By DR. EDWARD ROUX

Mother M. Dalrose's Biology for Catholic High Schools, revised by Mother Mary Celeste, O.P., Ph.D., Boston; Allyn and Bacon, Inc. 1957.

THE RECENT PERIOD has seen more than one attempt to revise science, and particularly biological science, in the interests of ideology. Under Hitler "national Socialist science" (the real thing) was contrasted with "cosmopolitan science" (effete and Jewish tainted). The Russians subsequently produced "Soviet creative Darwinism," also called "dialectical materialist biology" or "Michurinism", in opposition to "reactionary bourgeois Morganism-Mendelism". These cults have fortunately ceased to be popular in their centres of origin, but this book indicates that ideologically-orientated biological science still flourishes on a world scale, or wherever the Catholic Church is able to gain control of scientific education. Some queer features of this otherwise attractively printed and well-written book may interest biologists as well as freethinkers.

On the imprint page, under *nil obstat*, we find the name of Carolus W. Grindel, C.M., *ensor deputatus*. Thus the devout Catholic is assured that everything that follows has the endorsement of the Church. The text opens with quotations from Genesis and the assertion that "plants and animals according to God's plan serve man, His masterpiece of creation". Anthropomorphic and teleological views are consistently maintained throughout the book. Every plant and animal structure has a "purpose" and is there "in order that, etc." Most biologists try to avoid such language as unscientific, but here it is part and parcel of the whole approach. In addition religious moralising is frequently used to give the student the correct outlook. He is told, when the human eye is described, that "sight is a precious gift from God". Pathogenic bacteria are mentioned later, but it is not stated whether these are an equally precious divine gift.

The reverend mother does not try to avoid the subject of sex. She faces it bravely. Students are told about the pollination of flowers. The mating of viviparous fish is mentioned. "During mating the male discharges milt into the body of the female to fertilise the eggs. After a certain period of development the young fish are born." Students may then infer, presumably, that something similar happens in the case of mammals, including man. They are told about sex cells and gonads, the uterus and the placenta, though the location of these structures is not shown in the diagrams. Theology naturally comes in here, and we read: "Human beings not only perpetuate the human race but actually co-operate with God, their Creator, in the procreating of future citizens of heaven. At the moment of conception—that is, when the two biological units, the sperm cell and the egg cell, unite and fuse to form the new individual—God creates an immortal soul to animate the body which the parents, by their God-given rights as father and mother, have formed." It is just like that.

Evolution, of course, presents problems about which Catholics agree to differ. Mother Celeste says that

"while the advocates of materialistic evolution endeavour to explain the appearance of life on earth by stating that primitive organisms of a very simple type evolved through a succession of very slow changes from non-living matter, Catholics maintain that the origin of the first living matter came from one source only, a divine Creator. The theistic theory of evolution maintains the possible evolution of man's body up to the time that God breathed into the material body a spiritual and immortal soul. Then the evolution of the body ceased and man was created."

However, in spite of these concessions to Catholic evolutionists, Mother Celeste appears to be a fundamentalist at heart, for she says: "Up to the present, no scientist has been able to produce proof either through speculation and observation of variation in form or through similarity in structure that one plant or animal species has evolved into another plant or animal species".

It is interesting to observe how the Catholic mind works. While organic evolution is in the highest degree doubtful, "it is a revealed truth that all human beings now on earth are descendants of Adam and Eve, the first parents of the human race".

How nice it is to be so certain about certain things!

A Catholic President?—No!

By DON B. KATES, JUNR.

IT HAS BEEN SAID that a Roman Catholic President would not show favouritism to his Church; would not undermine religious freedom and Church-State separation that our mainly non-Catholic Congress would over-rule Presidential favouritism, and that the President would not dare to alienate American non-Catholics.

This view must be regarded as naïve. The citizens, disorganised and disinterested, have little influence in most governmental decisions. Daily actions of the President and Congress are determined by lobbies representing interests of far less importance than the Roman Catholic Church.

Even were the Senate to oppose decisions of a Catholic President, history records numerous presidential victories over Congress. *The Age of Jackson*, by Prof. Arthur Schlesinger, illustrates how "Old Hickory" repeatedly overrode the dictates of a hostile Congress and even ignored the decisions of the Supreme Court.

Granted, we should be above religious discrimination. Similarly, voting should be based on the candidates' qualifications, not religious affiliations. But, in considering a Roman Catholic candidate for public office, particularly our highest, we must recognise the dual nature of the Roman Church. Unlike other religions, the Vatican is both a spiritual and a temporal power. It has well-defined political aims, designed to promote Roman Catholic influence. Among these aims, as stated by the American Bishops in 1948, is the *destruction of Church-State separation*.

A sincere Roman Catholic President (and surely we would not want a religiously insincere President) would represent the *political* as well as the religious principles of the Roman Catholic Church—just as a Communist President would represent Marxist socio-economic principles.

[Reprinted from *Progressive World* (U.S.A.)]

Birth Control and the Population Problem

By H. CUTNER

(Concluded from page 95)

IF THE READER WILL turn back to Mr. Grubiak's article—"The Neglected Question"—he will find only one name given in support of some of his contentions, that of Kropotkin who is quoted as saying that "Britain could feed 75 million people." If Kropotkin really said this, it is the kind of remark we would expect from him. However great his reputation as a Humanist was—and it was great—his knowledge of practical agriculture was almost nil. Some of the things he said in this connection showed a most lamentable ignorance of which he seemed pathetically unaware. It is not what Kropotkin said that matters, but his evidence and proofs.

Similar drivel came from the famous Henry George, the "single taxer" who, in his anti-Malthusian tirade claimed that the city of London—mark the *city*, not the county—could easily provide for 1,000 million people! I have read a lot of drivel in my time but that is its high-water mark.

As for Mr. Bond, though he airily talks about "the world's scientists," he takes good care to give us no names. Who are they—the scientists that is, who could easily give us the means whereby, no matter what was the population, there would still be enough food for all?

A few weeks ago we had Sir Julian Huxley and Bertrand Russell on TV solemnly warning us of the dangers of over-population—dangers which were almost if not quite as terrible as those resulting from indiscriminate nuclear bombing. On the other side was that stout champion of Russian Communism, Professor Bernal, and a Roman Catholic priest, both of whom were for once in full agreement against the enemy—Malthusianism. They both insisted that there was always quite enough food to go round, and that Malthus didn't know what he was talking about.

And now here comes Sir Charles Darwin who asked in the *News of the World* recently, "Can the World feed 5,000,000,000 . . . ?" He pointed out that 47 million people were added to the world's population in 1958—half of it in Asia, and if the present rate of increase continues—and there is nothing to stop it—instead of the world's population being 2,700,000,000 as at present by the end of the century it will be nearly *double*.

Who is Sir Charles Darwin? He is, of course, the grandson of Charles Darwin whose epoch-making *Origin of Species* published nearly 100 years ago and based in some measure on the work of Malthus, is a landmark in the history of the world. He has written extensively on the Population Problem and the reader would do well to take heed of his solemn warning:—

"This subject of population increase has been given much too little attention in the past, but to those who have considered it, it seems far and away the most important thing now going on in the world. In the long run it holds threats for all our ways of life very much greater than would be the consequences of any of the wars we dread so much."

As Malthus pointed out, what kept population down in the past was starvation, misery, disease, and war. Famines and plagues, to say nothing of floods and tempests, took a fearful toll of human life. The mortality among children was very high due to lack of sanitation and ignorance. The big families of Victorian days were mostly reduced to half or less long before puberty for most of the children.

In fact, as Sir Charles Darwin points out, "it is an exaggeration, but only a slight exaggeration, to say that the number of people in the world was nearly constant

for 2,000 years, and then in the last 200 they jumped to five times as many . . ." With the opening of the great fertile plains in America and Australia and the modern, enormous industrial development so that food could be exchanged for goods, millions and millions more people could be fed; and the expansion and development of transport have added to a better distribution of food than could ever have been thought of by Malthus writing over 160 years ago. But the snag is that population invariably increases with all these advantages, and in the end they must be swamped by the mass of new mouths to feed.

Great dams and engineering and irrigation works designed to help the latest methods of agriculture are all being tried and put into practice; but the net result must always be the same. Unless the rise in population which invariably follows can be checked, hunger must again be the lot of the increased numbers. There is a limit to the amount of food grown from the same land year in and year out—due to what is known as the law of diminishing returns. In fact, one has only to listen to some of the agricultural experts on the radio discussing ways and means of increasing and improving agriculture to get some little inkling of the enormous difficulties facing farmers to grow more food. We may be lucky in England, but in Asia with its enormous populations of Chinese and Hindus it can be said that they are under a threat of perpetual starvation. What can one do with 600 million Chinese trying to grow food in a land which is almost exhausted?

Moreover, look at the Japanese faced with the problem of 90 millions in three small islands with the continent of Australia not far away, with a population of about 12 millions only. In the ultimate, can war there be avoided? If any one thinks so, he should think again. War was one of "nature's" checks to population increases. Malthus pleaded for the abolition of war, and the other "positive" checks of famine and disease, and to substitute some form of birth control. And of course no one was in consequence more bitterly attacked. The idea of trying in some measure to avoid "nature red in tooth and claw" among people was not at all appreciated by purveyors of other forms of social systems.

To go into the question from an historical and statistical point of view in a short article is of course quite impossible. Over 30 years ago, a famous Harvard Professor who was both a Professor of Biology and of Agriculture wrote a book, *Mankind at the Cross-Roads*, which has always seemed to me to be one of the best ever written on the Malthusian problem. Those readers who are interested should get this carefully detailed study by Professor E. M. East. It makes mincemeat of the childish objections based on sheer ignorance put forward by our Bonds and Grubiaks.

That some methods of birth control will have to be devised if mankind is to survive with a proper standard of living is as certain as that the sun will rise tomorrow. But much more will have to be considered than mere birth control. If the time for this is not yet, it is fairly near. The danger of over-population was never greater.

—NEXT WEEK—

A POPULAR POPE

By COLIN McCALL

This Believing World

Talking to "The Observer," the Archbishop of Canterbury tells his readers, "When the Christian must remain silent," particularly instancing the way his fellow Christians are introducing the complete segregation of whites and blacks in South Africa. Dr. Fisher was asked if Christians "must bear it?" And the reply was, if they don't like it, they must lump it. Of course, the Archbishop's reply was not put as bluntly as that; he said, "The Christian *must* bear it"—but that is only a polite way of saying the same thing.

★

In any case, Christians are never silent, unless forced to be, on the radio and on TV. They had a perfect feast of everything Christians stand for on Good Friday. For example, on ITV the holy proceedings began with a Good Friday Service and, as we should expect, a film in the afternoon all about the Death and Resurrection of Jesus Christ—in case viewers were not certain what happened on the "Good" Friday of the New Testament. On TV, the same kind of thing opened the day, and in the afternoon viewers were given "The Stations of the Cross." In the evening there was a "Passion Play" complete with all the usual characters except Jesus, of whom only his "voice" was allowed to be heard.

★

On the radio, hearers were given a talk on "Light from the Cross" as early as 6.30 a.m.; then "Music for Good Friday," at 10 a.m., "God's Wisdom in Christ's Cross," followed by a Good Friday Morning Service; at 2 p.m. we heard "The Last Hour Upon the Cross," all on the Home Programme. On the Light, there was a "People's Service" at 12 noon called "On Cross Purposes"; and at 3 p.m. "A Solemn Remembrance." As could be expected, Bach was roped in for the Third Programme with his "The Passion of our Lord." After all of which, we hope, most good Christians will now be satisfied that there really was a Crucifixion and a Resurrection. But is it any wonder why Christians are so jubilant?

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A lady archaeologist has now discovered once for all that Peter was buried in the catacombs under St. Peter's, Rome. She came across many inscriptions, and one of them "unequivocally says, 'Peter is buried in here.'" This ought to settle the whole question as, of course, there could have been only one Peter among Christians as there could be only one Abraham or Moses among Jews. The inscription was scratched, we are informed, "before the end of the second century," that is, when the Gospels and Epistles were beginning to circulate—for they were quite unknown before. And, of course, no Christian would descend to forgery!

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It may well be impossible to say with mathematical certainty that there never was either a Paul or a Peter, but outside the New Testament there is not a trace of contemporary evidence for the real existence of either. So far, their "tombs" have always been matters of speculation; but, of course, Christians are always prepared to believe anything vouched for by the Church—even the most hopeless forgeries like the remnants of the True Cross found in so many churches. Somebody may come along one day and discover the *veritable* Tomb of St. Peter somewhere else—and then devout Christians will believe in both.

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Spiritualists seem unable to resist the temptation to deal with "spirit" photographs, and one of them, Mr. Horace

Leaf, is no exception. In "looking back" in a book he has just had published, he tells us of photographs he took of an American medium, Frank Decker, and friends, the roll film of which he later had developed. Some additional "figures" appeared on the negatives, and Decker put them down to his "guide," Blackfeather. Does Mr. Leaf expect us to believe this fantastic nonsense? No "spirit" photos have ever been produced except in huge numbers of fakes of the most blatant kind. There has never been a "spirit" photo which is not easily explained and "exposed."

★

We note—not without amusement—that the prospective Tory candidate for South-West Norfolk, Mrs. Kellett, refused, according to *News Chronicle*, to have her photograph taken on a Sunday as it was "against her religious beliefs." Thus, she almost joins that noble band of fervent Christians we so often read about who would *never* take a bath on a Sunday for exactly the same reasons. *News Chronicle* gave us a portrait of Mrs. Kellett but laid special emphasis on the fact that it was *not* taken on a Sunday. We wonder how many of its readers would have protested if it had been?

An Open Letter to Teachers

[Issued by the Secular Education League, Stanton Coit House, 13 Prince of Wales Terrace, London, W.8, from whom free copies of this letter in leaflet form may be had for distribution to teachers.]

Dear Fellow Teacher,

SPECIALISTS, and today we are all specialists of one sort or another, are keen on getting on with their job and commonly do not like any of their precious time being diverted into a side channel, for that is what most of us feel R.I. to be—and so do most of the pupils. Just as we do, and just as their parents before them did, the great bulk of boys and girls feel in their hearts that Religious Instruction is not what they come to school for. Moreover, the youngsters see the Jews, the Roman Catholics, the Mohammedans, the Parsis and the Hindus (and we have had quite a packet of our Asiatic brethren with us in the last year or so) are exempt from Religious Instruction, and they fancy that this exemption allows the privileged minority extra time for study to the disadvantage of the herd. The herd, unthinking, does not realise that these minority religionists receive their Religious Instruction *out of school* as undiluted denominational doctrine. No, they may not realise this, but they do see that these exemptions show up the one subject in the curriculum for which they do not come to school, a subject of no apparent practical value to the vast majority.

We are agreed, I fancy, that it is not amusing to take an uninterested class in a subject which is not only a dissipation of energy, but in respect of which we sympathise with the class. The pick-and-choose syllabus, though it rules out the obviously difficult matter, is unworkable save by a B.D. with ample time at his or her disposal. Of course, you may, as a geographer, give the class maps to draw in colour (that keeps them busy and quiet) of the Mediterranean and the Near East; or, as a historian, dwell vividly on the rise and fall of empires; or you may expand on social service. But why don't the parents who want Religious Instruction for their children send them to Sunday school and have done with it? Let the rabbi, the parson, the priest and the maulana, those specialists who devote their whole time to the job, give Religious Instruction on the days set apart for it by their religions and leave work-days for secular instruction?

THE FREETHINKER

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

Hon. Editorial Committee:

F. A. HORNIBROOK, COLIN MCCALL and G. H. TAYLOR.

All articles and correspondence should be addressed to THE EDITOR at the above address and not to individuals.

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Lecture Notices, Etc.

OUTDOOR

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

London (Marble Arch).—Meetings every Sunday from 5 p.m.: Messrs. L. EBURY, J. W. BARKER and C. E. WOOD.

London (Tower Hill).—Every Thursday, 12—2 p.m.: Messrs. J. W. BARKER and L. EBURY.

Manchester Branch N.S.S. (Deansgate Blitzed Site).—Every weekday, 1 p.m.: G. WOODCOCK. Sunday, 8 p.m.: Messrs. WOODCOCK, MILLS and 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. Sunday, 6.30 p.m.: T. M. MOSLEY.

INDOOR

Leicester Secular Society (75 Humberstone Gate).—Sunday, April 5th, 6.30 p.m.: D. SHIPPER, "International Freethought (2)."

South Place Ethical Society (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1).—Sunday, April 5th, 11 a.m.: RICHARD PETERS, PH.D., "Thomas Hobbes and His 'Leviathan' Today."

Notes and News

Progressive World is the outspoken organ of the United Secularists of America (P.O. Box 27, Clifton, N.J.), and in the February copy, Mr. Sherman D. Wakefield reprints a letter sent to the Protestant Council of the City of New York, when returning a sheet of Christmas seals he had received from them. He states his reason: "In almost every public contest with the Catholic Church in their efforts to break down the principle of the separation of Church and State for their enhancement you have taken the Catholic side or failed to raise your voice against their encroachments." Here we have yet another example of one of the significant features of our time, the virtual disappearance of militant Protestantism.

The *Atlanta Journal and Constitution* quoted a Mr. LeCraw in praise of South Korea as "a tremendous Christian country." There are, he said, 300 Presbyterian churches in Seoul alone, including the world's largest, with more than 5,000 members. But there aren't many Communists in South Korea, he added. "The South Koreans simply shoot them when they find them." We ought to confess that we haven't seen *The Atlanta Journal and Constitution*, though we're impressed by its name. Our information is taken at one remove from *The New Yorker* (7/3/59), whose comment we endorse: "That's the Christian way."

AND in the same issue of *The New Yorker*, theatre critic Kenneth Tynan tells us that the season on Broadway is "a busy one for the Deity." "He accepted two human sacrifices in *Requiem for a Nun*, and now, in *God and Kate* Murphy... he gets equal billing with Fay Compton..."

The Freethinker Sustentation Fund

PREVIOUSLY acknowledged, £155 17s. 6d.; W.H.D., 2s. 6d.; C. J. Cleary, 5s.; I. Newman, 10s.; W. Dzus, 13s.; W. A. Osborne, £2 2s.; 2 Merchant Seamen, £1; Directors of G. W. Foote and Co. Ltd. (personal), £10 10s.—Total to date, March 27th, 1959, £171.

Mr. Tynan thinks this second "assignment" will do the "monotheistic cause" more good, if only in a negative way, for he challenges any sceptic to "put his hand on his heart and swear that it is harder to believe in God than in Kate Murphy."



ONCE again we applaud the League Against Cruel Sports for its honesty in deprecating royal patronage of foxhunting. Not only does the Queen subscribe £100 to the West Norfolk Foxhounds, "but their hunting activities are welcomed on the Sandringham estates," says the League's executive report. Stag hunting, it rightly describes as a "foul blot on the West of England." The League has the knowledge to ruin any hunt "and activities will be extended as soon as more League members come forward to take part."



OUR forthright Australian contributor, Dr. J. V. Duhig, recently travelled 4,000 miles to Perth, Western Australia, and was—in his own words—"royally entertained" to lunch by the group of Freethinkers who produce *The Westralian Secularist* (THE FREETHINKER, 30/1/59). The organiser, Mr. Collin Coates, tells us how stimulated the group was by Dr. Duhig's visit. The latter, in turn, describes his hosts and hostesses as "extremely kind and devoted Freethinkers" in "a (theologically) very backward community." "You would be very surprised and comforted by the enthusiasm for THE FREETHINKER amongst these kind, nice people," adds Dr. Duhig.



THE rediscovery of Church membership effects a "transformation," says F.J.M., the writer on the Free Churches in the *Manchester Guardian* (20/3/59). "The Church has a far greater sense of being the Church," the "congregation becomes more truly a fellowship," and individuals "discover that their faith grows deeper and more certain." What he means quite simply is that more people should go to church. "The certainty for which we seek," he tells us, "is not found at the conclusion of an argument but as a result of the experiment of accepting the demands which God makes upon us." What he means here—if we understand him aright—is that you can't prove the existence of God by logic but you may be convinced of his existence emotionally in corporate worship. The "experiment" F.J.M. refers to may be more refined, but it is not essentially different from that of a primitive tribe.



MR. ERNEST JOINER is the editor of a small weekly paper in Texas, called the *Banner*, and he has the reputation for being outspoken. Indeed, other editors quote him because he "often blurts out the sentiments that the larger papers would like to say on their own but dare not." (*Time*, 23/3/59). Mr. Joiner confirmed our impression of the "religious revival" in the U.S.A. when he reported that he had bought a new Bible. It has 773,692 words in it, he said, "and it is such interesting reading we are considering asking ministers of our acquaintance to base a Sunday sermon on it one day when there is a lull upon the congregation from an overdose of economics, labour statistics, soil conservation politics and the lagging subscription for a bigger church." Maybe the ministers know what they're doing, though. Isn't Mr. Joiner over estimating the appeal of those 773,692 words?

“None of Those Things”

By LESLIE HANGER

THE MODERN HUMANIST can well sympathise with Gallio, the Roman Proconsul of Greece who, when engaged on his official duties at Corinth was confronted with Sosthenes, the chief ruler of the synagogue, and a group of his followers crying accusations against a fellow Jew named Paul.

Paul's crime was that he persuaded men to worship their god contrary to the time-honoured customs. Had it been a matter dealing with the law and social conduct, Gallio would have listened attentively and acted in the matter, but a question of ritual was no concern of his; gods were many and the methods of worshipping them more numerous still. A man was free to worship what god he liked in the manner he pleased, as long as he kept within the law of Rome. "And Gallio cared for none of those things." Had he done so, doubtless he would have found the case against Paul proved, for Paul was a Jewish heretic who was busy Hellenising his faith, an abomination to the orthodox. As it was, Gallio ordered Sosthenes to be beaten with rods as a punishment for troubling him with such trifling matters.

It is usual to belittle Gallio for failing to see in Paul the founder of a mighty and far-flung religious movement, but Gallio was in possession of something that was far finer than anything Paul could offer, the wisdom of the Greek philosophers. It is reasonable to picture him as an Epicurean and an opponent of all the queer superstitions that fog the mind of man. Like all the cities of the Roman world, Corinth had many groups who were in the habit of meeting at simple religious banquets, being the continuation of old tribal ceremony and a universal feature of ancient religion. The followers of Paul who frequented the table of a Semitic God named Jesus were merely one small group of many which existed among the unlettered and credulous multitude. It was usual for individuals to be members of more than one group, partly because polytheistic ideas were strong, and partly because it was often their only hope of a good meal. All the elements that were to go to the making up of Christianity, its dogmas and ritual, its heresies and schisms were already present in the pagan faiths and Gallio had dismissed them all.

Gallio's failure was his inability to foresee that Roman organisation would fail to hold together the civilization of his day and that increasing pressure from the barbarian hordes would force the state to call to its aid an authoritarian and exclusive religion which would finally usurp the powers of government, or that this catastrophe would bury for centuries the wisdom and open-minded philosophies of Greece. If he had, I doubt if he would have acted differently.

Were Gallio to return today and see to what proportions that small sect of Jesus worshippers had grown he would have found no basic difference from the cults of Dionysos and Osiris and a multitude of other gods, save that all these myths have now been gathered together and attributed to one God—a fact which has not helped the Christians to clarify their thought. In Humanism he would find a rejection of the belief in supernatural revelation analagous to the teachings of Epicurus that superstition and fear of death were the main obstacles to happiness. Looking back on history he would see that the Epicureans had blazed a trail which they themselves, lacking the means, had been unable to follow. Adversity

could be met only with self-control. Famine, pestilence, poverty and the final overwhelming disaster of the collapse of the Roman world could be met by the exhortations of great philosophers and sages. They preached the brotherhood of man but lacked the technology to put it into practical effect.

Gallio would see that it was not the Reformation but the birth of modern science which was the water-shed of history, and the attitude of mind of the early Humanists had fostered this science and brought it into existence. Rejecting magical thinking, the consulting of oracles and scriptures, they devised a new kind of enquiry in the face of unpopularity and at times, persecution. They showed the world that the most powerful weapons for the disinterested pursuit of truth were observation and experiment, controlled by clear rules of procedure, which gave unprecedented control over the forces of nature—including human nature, thus undermining the traditional theology that had passed for absolute knowledge.

Rejecting the Christian problem of how man is to save his soul, the Humanist is concerned with the salvation of the world here and now, and carries his conviction that the world can be saved from the catastrophes which threaten it, and rebuilt to a nobler plan. The Humanist scale of values is what the Humanist desires and is not derived from Pope or priest but from experience and human nature in its maturity. Though of necessity bearing the marks of its animal ancestry and distorted by environment it is not incurably deformed. Man is a being who emerges from a world governed by natural laws in which he participates, and by which human relationship exists. This relationship, finding expression in reason, has emancipated man from nature, and in the development of society this is directed towards freedom for all individuals progressively to throw off all limitations for the fullest realisation of the possibilities. Directed to society, Humanism strives for a community of emancipated and morally adult people. It is directed not to a heaven but to a community built with hands in which the happiness of all is fulfilled through the happiness of each.

Though his action was slight and recorded in history almost by accident, Humanists should honour Gallio for what he did. Christians of his day were canonised for less.

RELIGIOUS INSTRUCTION

My son recently attended school for the first time, and it was therefore necessary for me to reach a decision which all Freethinkers with children must face, as to whether or not the child should be withdrawn from religious instruction. My decision, reached I might add after considerable heart-searching, was to withdraw him. I am now wondering whether this decision was the correct one, as the child is to some extent being segregated and made to feel different from his fellows. An example of this is that during the religious period he must sit on his own in the hall until the period is over. This results in the child resenting his isolation; yet one can hardly blame the school for this position, as our child is the only one who has been withdrawn.

If religious lessons were simply based on Bible stories, I should have no hesitation in allowing my son to take part. The danger arises in the combining of religion with moral and ethical teaching. This, I feel, could have a deleterious effect, especially as the teacher's words are accepted as fact by the remainder of the class and all other lessons are factually based.

I should welcome other parents' views regarding the correctness or otherwise of my decision.

J. B. POTHECARY.

A Visit to Fatima

By NAN FLANAGAN

A SHORT TIME AGO, I visited the holy shrine of Fatima, with the Catholic members of the British colony. On the way in the charabanc, we prayed for all you atheists and especially for the lapsed Catholics amongst you, whom Fr. Flynn informed us still belonged to the Church—on the principle that once a Catholic, always a Catholic. We shivered at the thought of the many enemies of the Church, but we gloated over the hell and its torments awaiting you all if you didn't return to the fold and pictured your dismay when the Supreme Judge screamed at you: "Out of my sight, you cursed ones! To the inferno with you!" We saw the devils, as hungry wolves, seizing you and carrying you with them into the bottomless pit. Fr. Flynn described it all so vividly.

We stopped at the great, old monastery of Alcobaca. In the right transept is the chapel, built by Dom Pedro I for his own splendidly decorated tomb and that of his mistress, Inez de Castro. The side chapels lie stripped and deserted owing to the great shortage of priests. We beseeched God that he would bless the Church with more vocations. Fr. Flynn told us of whole villages living in sin as there were no priests to marry the people. "But," I asked, "if there is such a shortage of priests, how is it that so many rich people still keep their private chaplains?"

"Not so many, nowadays" Fr. Flynn answered, "as the licence for that must be obtained from the Pope and costs a lot of money." We gasped at the beauty of the pale blue tiled kitchen through which gurgled and bubbled the River Liz, that sacred river that further on in its course is pumped from the valley to supply water to the miraculous well of Fatima. The story goes that on fast days the good monks drop a bullock in the river, then recover it and roast it. Having been in the river, it counts as fish.

We also visited the Monastery of Batalha to see the tomb of King John and his queen, Philippa, their two stone figures lying hand in hand on a great gothic sarcophagus.

When we arrived in Fatima, we went round the booths to gaze at the many-coloured rosaries, the statues of Our Lady, the scapulars swinging in the wind and disclosing their tabs on which were written the indulgences which went with them—freedom from death by drowning, freedom from the dangers of death when child-bearing, in fact freedom from the many ills which we fear.

The midnight procession, with the sick to be cured on stretchers, took place amidst the flare of torches, the glare of flashlights from the basilica, the shouting of the priests with their loud speakers as they ran continually along by the side of the afflicted, stirring them on to excitement with:

"Lord make that I see." "Lord make that I hear."
 "Lord, Lord! cure my leprosy!" As they called the thousands on the field echoed: "Lord", etc.

After, came the kissing of the statue, all decked up in brocade and precious stones, when the air resounded with smacking slobbering kisses inflicted by the sick and the healthy.

Alas! Alas! there was no miracle!
 We left next morning at dawn and had a weary journey to Lisbon. The good bishop of Leira sent our charabancs up north through villages to prove to the natives that foreigners also believe in Our Lady of Fatima.

Dusk was falling when we approached Lisbon, one of the most beautiful capitals of the world, built, like Rome,

on seven hills, with deep valleys running down to the broad Tagus. We stopped at the Lisbon Cathedral and lamented the bare, deserted chapels, set starwise behind the high altar. "We must pray, pray, pray for more vocations" said Fr. Flynn as we parted.

CORRESPONDENCE

POPULATION QUESTION

Mr. G. F. Bond, in "The Increasing World Population" (THE FREETHINKER, 20.2.59), stated that "Malthusian theory could have had serious validity only if the human race had been found by Malthus in a condition approximating to that of rabbits," and that "Human beings are by no means as brainless as rabbits."

I refer Mr. Bond to column 6 of page 13 of the *Daily Telegraph* of 26.2.59, headed "Bulge in Education was not Foreseen," where it is reported that a British Minister for Education stated that: "Unfortunately no one foresaw in 1944 that for the next 15 years we should have to concentrate on an enormous building and teacher-recruitment programme for providing for the million or so extra children born during and after the war."

Am I, perhaps, alone, when I wonder whether anyone has foreseen any of those million youngsters' other needs—housing, clothing, feeding, etc., and, above all, employment? R. READER.

Ref. Mr. G. F. Bond's article, "The Increasing World Population." The fundamental doctrine of Malthus is that populations tend to increase faster than subsistence, i.e., faster than subsistence can be made to increase at any given time. Idle guesses about what "science" may be able to do at a future time are therefore, as criticism, irrelevant.

W. E. NICHOLSON.

HOUSE OF LORDS

If the House of Commons always expressed the views and desires of the total electorate, there would be no need for another chamber. But laws are sometimes enacted by a very slender majority in the Commons. And it often happens that the Government enjoys the support of only a minority of voters, even when Parliament is new. Mr. Corrick should not ignore these plain facts.

Except for those thinly disguised Christians who preach non-militancy, all secularists should unite in demanding the removal of the Lords spiritual from the Upper Chamber.

It is regretted that pressure of private affairs prevented an earlier response.

W. E. HUXLEY.

IMAGINARY INVALIDS

Mr. D. Penketh (THE FREETHINKER, 27/2/59) feels uneasy about the plight of simple folk whose simple faith has been disturbed by the heartless ridicule of scoffing Freethinkers. Religious devotees are in the position of a neurotic hypochondriac, who, though in perfect physical health, has allowed himself to be persuaded by an unscrupulous quack that he is a very sick man who cannot survive for a day without the quack's patent remedy. If an honest doctor exposes the quack for the fraud he is, throws the "medicine" out of the window, and exhorts the "patient" to get up on his feet and prove to himself that he is fit and strong, are we going to call this a shame and a scandal? The "quack" doctor is the priest, who tells the religionist that he is suffering from "sin" and needs "the doctrines of the Church" if he is to "save his soul." The honest doctor is the Freethinker, who points out to the believer that his "malady" is entirely imaginary, and that it is time he pulled himself together and sent the charlatan out of the house.

S. W. BROOKS.

S.O.S.

I append an extract from a letter from correspondent, C. A. A. Ellis, of Melbourne, Australia, which I thought might amuse you:—

"Here in Melbourne we are in the throes of a Billy Graham crusade. Open air meeting last night, with a computed audience of 75,000. And the number of people who 'declared for Christ' was a record. He has it all off pat. Any time now the good will be whisked off to Heaven where bliss will be theirs eternally, and the bad will go to Hell. He has divided all humans sharply off into these two classes.

"Could you possibly start a public agitation to put pressure on Billy to come back to England? Do it quickly. We Australians came to the aid of the Mother Country in two world wars. Now we are in need ourselves. Billy Graham is pouring his stuff into us and there are no stewards to call for swabs. Get him over to England. Offer him a job running a football pool—anything—it's urgent."

HENRY MEULEN.

ANARCHISM

In the otherwise excellent article concerning Francisco Ferrer, by Mr. Bonner, there is a reference to anarchism which could be misleading to those who are not acquainted with the subject today.

It was probably true to equate certain forms of violence with individual *anarchists* of fifty years ago, but today it would be wrong to presume that those who are guided by anarchist ideas also believe that they can be achieved through any form of violence. At the same time many anarchists do not identify themselves with pacifism because of its religious affiliations, and also believe that direct action is the only way to achieve a society free from war.

L. C. WARREN.

ISLAM

It never surprises me when I come across any amount of absurdities concerning Islam in a Church-sponsored publication. But when a journal like THE FREETHINKER, which we expect to uphold the standards of rational thinking and objective commenting, lapses into un-factual reflections, it does come as a disappointment.

In your issue of February 20th, 1959, under the caption "This Believing World," you say that Islam conceives of God as residing somewhere "up there." It is unfair to ascribe to us this kind of spatial conception of God. We certainly don't hold any such belief. God, according to Islam, is above all limitations of Time and Space—indeed above comprehension in terms of our physical experience. All we can know about God is how His will (or law) operates in the universe. And Islam means just this much that, in our lives, we must also keep in step with the rest of Nature in observing the law, violation being the surest path to disaster.

Then, you take exception to the Muslims' mode of prayer, calling it "hitting the ground with their heads," and "grovelling." Certainly you can see for yourself that even in our human relationships, we express inner feelings by outward bodily poses. Bowing is a very common pose of courtesy and respect in all civilised societies. Prostration which you describe as hitting the ground with the head is only a natural expression of man's utter insignificance before the unbounded grandeur and majesty of God. Besides, the idea of "grovelling" also never enters into our prayerful attitude. On the contrary, a Muslim, while thus communing with God, seeks self-elevation and self-expansion.

Your third charge, however, is one to which I must particularly plead guilty—partially because it is true only in so far as the practice among Muslims is concerned. It is regrettable that slavery should have been in vogue in Muslim societies. But this has been so, in spite of, not because of the teaching of Islam. Emancipation of the slaves is time and again enjoined in the Quran as the highest virtue. I would refer you to just two verses 2: 177, 90: 13, to verify this for yourself. Emancipation is more than mere abolition. It includes making due provision for them otherwise, rather than just throw them on the street.

MUHAMMAD YAKUB KHAN

(Imam,

The Mosque, Woking, Surrey).

[Mr. Cutner writes: "Mr. Khan has a right to describe what I call "grovelling" in any way he likes, but it still remains grovelling. Hitting the ground with one's head even before the "unbounded grandeur and majesty of God"—for which there is no evidence whatever—is distasteful to any normal man not frightened by religion. As for slavery—the followers of Islam still practise it *whenever possible* in spite of the Quran. I am glad even the Imam has to "partially to plead guilty" to my charges. But why hasn't Islam *abolished* slavery?"—ED.]

SCIENCE AND RELIGION

I rather felt some misgiving in reading Mr. Ridley's article on "Science versus Religion—1959 Style."

He speaks of Prof. J. B. S. Haldane's article in *The Rationalist Annual* (1959) as "brilliant." In this brilliant article Prof. Haldane suggests that there is little danger in Russia of the association of Science with the State; it may lead to some dogmatism and suppression of opinion, "but it has not yet done so."

He then goes on to equate the suppression and persecution of the great Russian botanist of international fame, Vavilov, and the erection of the mountebank Lysenko in his place—with the suppression of Sir Victor Horsley during the 1914-18 war.

I would have thought as freethinkers we were—and the real ones always have been—against tyranny and persecution in science anywhere it rears its ugly head. So far as I can recollect, Prof. Haldane had neither criticism nor condemnation to offer during the Lysenko-Vavilov affair.

The treatment of Vavilov was callous and brutal to a degree. Eminent botanists that I know personally communicated again and again with the Soviet authorities as to Vavilov's welfare but could get no reply and it was only much later that they heard

that the great scientist had been sent to die in obscurity and miserably in an Arctic camp. For a freethinker this is no "political" issue at all. To anyone who follows world affairs, the treatment meted out to those who wish to think, write and publish in their own way by the cultural, Commissar dictatorship of the U.S.S.R. has no merits or advantages over Catholic Europe. The storm of abuse, threats and persecution levelled at Boris Pasternak for receiving the Nobel Prize for his novel with its very mild criticism of Soviet attitudes is shocking.

No. I think both Mr. Ridley and Prof. Haldane are open to the criticism of genuine freethinkers for not coming out in the clear about this sinister and callous attitude still evident in the U.S.S.R. towards those who would work and think freely there.

ROBERT F. TURNEY.

[Mr. Ridley writes: I merely made a passing reference to Professor Haldane's article on "The Bishops and the Sputniks" in the *Rationalist Annual*, and that solely in connection with its subject matter. I think—as presumably did the Editor of the *Annual*—that Haldane made an important point when he said that the present anti-communist alliance of the West with the most reactionary forms of religion (the R.C. Church in particular) is actually contracting a liability, even from the standpoint of its own aims. It is causing the West to fall behind in the all-important scientific race with the uninhibited Russians. Further controversial points in Mr. Turney's letter appear solely to concern Professor Haldane.—ED.]

OBITUARY

It is with deep regret that the Merseyside Branch announces the death of John Leak on March 17th, at the age of 74 years. His wish for a secular funeral was carried out on March 21st, when, before an assembly of relatives and friends, a service was conducted at Anfield Crematorium by Walter C. Parry, junr. To his widow we send our deepest sympathy in her great loss.

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