

The Freethinker

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IT WAS ONLY to be expected that this new version of the New Testament would receive all the publicity possible (and plenty of it without cost) in our national journals and on TV. It certainly has given a wonderful boost to the Bible to the world at large, especially with regard to the hundreds of thousands of copies sold on the day of publication, and how this new translation can now appeal to all "teenagers", so easy is it to understand.

The *Daily Mail* immediately commissioned its lady theologian Miss Rhona Churchill, to deal with it in profuse detail. A few years ago, Miss Churchill dealt with about half a dozen or more of the "miraculous" cures at Lourdes, believing that every one was a miracle direct from the Virgin Mary, the Mother of God; so she *must* be fully able to deal with a new version of the New Testament—which, incidentally, is the only canonical work which mentions Mary.

A Great Literary Event?

Listening to some of the speakers about this New English Bible on TV, I ought to have felt that it was the greatest literary event in the history of the world, but I did not. It took a number of eminent scholars about 14 years to translate what is, after all, a very short work. One of their excuses was that most of the books and epistles in the New Testament are written in very bad Greek, and the translators had an awful job trying to find out what was really meant.

Now this is very curious and most interesting. We have all been strictly taught at school and in our homes that the Bible was God's Precious Word, that it was so simple and easy that any child could understand it. Indeed, one of the first translators of the New Testament into English, William Tyndale, said, "If God spare my life, ere many years I will cause a boy that driveth a plough shall know more of the scripture that thou dost" to a learned man with whom he was discussing the Pope, and the ban the Roman Church put upon translating the Bible.

And for 300 years at least the "pure and beautiful" teaching of Jesus has always been that of the English Authorised Version. If any difficulties were encountered, this was the fault of "churchianity" which, for some reason I have never discovered, seems to have been the villain of the piece. If Paul's theology was shown to be unintelligible in spite of thousands of books, sermons, and pamphlets expounding it, that was naturally not the fault of Jesus, Paul, or the "original" Greek. It was always the fault of the Churches!

Well at last "churchianity" will not be the "evil one", to blame for the unintelligibility of the New Testament. The English of the New English Bible is absolutely modern; though reading some of it, I have been staggered at the length of time it took to write. Any good journalist could have taken the AV and put it into modern English quite as "genuine" as the NEB in a few weeks. What great scholarship was necessary to change the familiar

Lord's Prayer into the modern version?

Who Is The Evil One?

We all know "Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name"; and now we are told it will be understood better if changed into "Our Father in heaven, thy name be hallowed"; "And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil" really should be "And do not bring us to the test, but save us from the evil one". The "evil one" is obviously the Devil who, even if he is kicked out of the new Church Catechism, is safely restored into the prayer which, it is hoped, will henceforth be adopted in the new translation. Incidentally, it is interesting to note that the famous "For

thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever. Amen" has been (as in the Revised Version) discreetly omitted. It is one of the regrettable mistakes so abundantly found in the dear old Authorised Version. Obviously, Jesus never said it—if he ever said anything at all which has correctly come down to us. The Oxford and Cambridge University printing presses are churning out hundreds of thousands of copies of the new version with the unbounded optimism that they will all be *read*; thus safely restoring the Bible to the proud position it may once have held as the greatest and most widely read book ever produced. That some people will read it is certain—but *not* because of religion. For if there is one thing which is utterly lacking in the new version, it is that "reverent" atmosphere which distinguishes the AV from other books. Its English was divinely religious. Nobody ever *spoke* like it, or even wrote a book in the same pious phrases. To read a chapter aloud was really communing with God Almighty. It enshrouded his Divine Commands. So does the New Version, of course, but nobody would think so reading a passage for the first time. The translators, though doing their utmost to render the Greek into modern English, were obliged to keep at least something of the old, willy-nilly. For example, they changed "Hallowed be thy name" to "Thy name be hallowed"; but they were literally forced to retain "thy" in spite of its being archaic. "Your name . . ." has about as much reverence in it as a teen-age story.

Is The New English Bible, God's Word?

The truth is that once we have destroyed the legend that the Bible is God's Word, fostered so assiduously by the archaic and reverent language of the AV; once we have changed it into the prosaic language of every day life—even if it does retain a few "thys and "thous"—we have destroyed the "religiosity" of the famous Book. It is of on more value as a "Divine Word" than the *Arabian Nights*.

All this can be easily proved. The English Churches as a whole have never taken to the Revised Version of the Bible, though naturally, against an "infidel" if the AV is obviously rubbish, and the RV gives a little better rendering, then the RV is always quoted. Sometimes in

— VIEWS and OPINIONS —

The New English Bible

By H. CUTNER

argument, Christian apologists will quote Moffatt's or Weymouth's translations, but I have only rarely heard any Christian on the radio or on TV quote them, and never Dr. Robert Young's *Literal Translation of the Bible*. Why?

It is in two volumes, the second packed with notes and "explanations". He gives for instance, "For thine is the power, etc.", in the text, but carefully explains in his notes that "Many MSS, Versions, and Critics omit this" as does the RV. And yet it has been taught for centuries as the way Jesus himself ended his own prayer. (Incidentally, Robert Taylor always claimed that the Father in "Our Father which art in heaven", really refers to Father Abraham, "the Father of many nations", as the Old Testament says, and not at all to the Father of Jesus.)

The Septuagint Enigma

Robert Young's version was too accurate, and therefore too little reverent to suit the Churches, and it is very difficult to obtain—just as a good English translation of the Septuagint with full notes is also almost impossible to buy. Yet not only was the Septuagint the Bible of the Christian Church for centuries, but nearly all the quotations from the Old Testament in the New were taken from it. What is known as the Vulgate in the Roman Church was actually, in the first centuries, a revised Latin translation of the Greek Old Testament; and though the

Vulgate may well have been edited afresh since with an eye to the Hebrew, its basis is still the Septuagint. It need hardly be said that the Jewish scholars responsible for the Hebrew text contemptuously reject the Septuagint. Yet it is by no means improbable that the Old Testament first appeared in Greek, and what we have in Hebrew is a much revised translation from the Greek and not vice versa.

200 English Translations

We were told on TV that there are something like two hundred translations of the New Testament. It is certainly curious, to say the least, that God Almighty should have done his best to write his own Precious Word in such bad Greek that it has taken all these translators to try to put down clearly what they think He said or meant and completely failed. For in spite of the New English Bible, there are dozens of passages, particularly in the Epistles (or Letters) of Paul completely obscure. And this goes for Revelation too. Our modern translators deplore the difficulties in telling us clearly what the particular fanatic who wrote it in bad Greek really meant.

Whether the New English Bible will survive, not being a prophet, I cannot say. It might as a literary curiosity, just as does the Authorised Version of the Bible these days. But not for so long. The Bible, except as a repository of Oriental tales and myths, is on the way out.

A Question of Ethics

By G. I. BENNETT

THERE WAS PERHAPS never greater need than today of positive, rationally-based ethics. It is not good that people should parrot ideas of right and wrong accepted without thought from a tradition-grounded society. There is no virtue and may be a great deal of harm in this. But equally it is unfortunate that they should be *without* ideas of right and wrong. Much present-day culture (films, theatre, and literature) encourages this.

Nihilism was once the affectation of a few eccentric intellectuals. It is now (notably in sexual matters) becoming the fashionable creed of a much larger number. Those who do not conform to what might almost be called the new orthodoxy are regarded as "stuffy", puritanic, and strait-laced. But because the old religious moralising was repressive and pernicious, this is no reason for adopting the opposite extreme of unqualified nihilism—surely one of the absurdities of our modern thought-stunted age. Civilisation was cradled in community life. It is bound up with it inextricably. And communities do not and cannot exist upon a foundation of moral anarchy. Inherent in the social fabric is common respect for the rights and well-being of individual men and women, which includes respect for human personality. To reject Christian and other supernaturally-based moralism is one thing. But you cannot, except by the complete abandonment of civilised values, reject the Golden Rule of conduct. To treat other people as you would want them to treat you is the true ethical yard-stick of communal man.

Much of life is necessarily grounded in compromise. Had our progenitors not eliminated various species of life in order to survive we should not ourselves now be living. We prey upon other life in order to live. We cannot live without killing, injuring, crushing, or starving out other living forms. Competition is woven into the very nature of things. Our success in business and life is often at the expense of others. It is sometimes inevitable that our urge to self-fulfilment will frustrate someone's expectations or hopes. But the important thing is that we abide by the

rules of the game. That we do not cheat. That we do not steal an unfair advantage of the other man. That we do not gain our ends by dishonesty, deceit, and humbug. That we do not snatch from another the happiness that belongs to him (or her) by prior claim.

Now in reviewing the current *Rationalist Annual* for THE FREETHINKER I see that Mr. Jack Gordon voices the now popular humanist idea of the relativism and subjectivism of ethics. And he writes of Professor Nowell-Smith's making "short work of sententious Christian pronouncements on so-called 'sins' like adultery". Well, we know how sententious and moralising some Christians can be, and how psychologically purblind. But because they condemn adultery unequivocally, is that good reason why we should treat adultery as much ado about nothing? This is what Mr. Gordon, with his "so-called 'sins' like adultery", seems to imply. Anyway, why the inverted commas round *sin*? Sin is one of the undeniable facts of human existence, call it by what name you will. A man who pretends it doesn't exist forfeits his claim to being a thinker of any profundity.

Now I have a friend who has established a sexual relationship with a married man in the temporary absence of his young wife with whom, I gathered, he was much in love. There are circumstances where adultery is the understandable consequence of want of affection between the spouses. Very truly has it been said, "Where there's marriage without love there will be love without marriage". But the situation in which my friend is involved is not such a case. She has violated the Golden Rule of conduct, and so has he. There may well be no point of return now; and an innocent person (the man's wife) who has had no part in this will almost certainly suffer. It is all very sad. When, earlier, I remonstrated with my friend reminding her, "There are, as you know, ethics in this thing", she replied, "But are ethics absolute?", thus echoing the "emancipated" attitude now so much in vogue by which most things are excused, justified, and understood.

Portugal—A Medieval Dictatorship

By F. A. RIDLEY

AT A PUBLIC MEETING held recently in London, I was very interested to hear the case of the Portuguese Democratic Opposition which was very ably put by two Portuguese speakers, a lawyer and a woman university graduate. Between them they covered most effectively the whole Portuguese scene as it affects both Portugal itself and its still fairly important Colonial Empire in India and Africa. It emerged quite clearly from the often shocking facts revealed by the speakers, what indeed the bizarre seizure of the *Santa Maria* in the Caribbean had already spectacularly revealed to the world at large; that the Portugal of Dr. Salazar is simultaneously a Fascist dictatorship, an atavistic Colonial Imperialism totally impervious to any "winds of change" and a clericalist regime.

Under the benevolent eye of that former pupil of the Jesuits, Dr. Salazar, political Catholicism is perhaps more powerful than in any other contemporary land, not excluding even those citadels of militant Catholicism, Franco Spain and the present-day Irish Republic. It seems, indeed, scarcely even a verbal exaggeration to describe Salazar's Portugal along with that of its closely associated neighbour, Fascist Spain, as a medieval dictatorship in the modern world. But in the case of Portugal, one can add that this is not only in the Iberian Peninsula itself, but in Africa and India. By a rather ironic circumstance, Portugal, which began the modern era of Colonial Imperialism by its maritime invasion of Africa and India at the end of the 15th century, is nowadays the last Colonial power to hold territory on Indian soil, besides remaining, along with the neighbouring Union of South Africa, the last champion of the old Colonialism upon African soil. In brief, nine millions of Portuguese, along with their thirteen millions of African and Indian serfs, are still in, but not of the modern world.

The above sorry state of things has not always been the case in Portugal. For in 1911, a Liberal revolution overthrew the Portuguese monarchy and despatched the last Lusitanian King, Dom Manuel, into exile where, incidentally, he was a regular visitor to the Wimbledon tennis tournaments. In his absence, Portugal proclaimed a Republic, denounced by the Catholic press throughout the world as a Secularist and Masonic State. Church and State were separated, and a beginning was made in combatting the medieval conditions of life, replete with illiteracy, ignorance and disease which Portugal had inherited from her glorious past!

Unfortunately, however, the Portuguese reformers appear to have moved too fast and too far; an illiterate and superstitious peasantry were obviously far from ready for any drastic modernisation. The forces of reaction with the Catholic Church at their head, took heart again and began to fight back. Nor did Heaven fail to come to their assistance. The Virgin Mary, who had owed so much glory in earlier ages to Portuguese crusades, intervened in person on Portuguese soil. From the time of her successive appearances at Fatima (then an unknown hamlet, but now a world-famous sanctuary), the Portuguese reaction steadily gathered strength.

Finally, in 1920, a military *coup d'état* overthrew the "Masonic" republic and installed a military dictatorship. A few years later—1932—that most astute of clerical-fascist politicians, Dr. Salazar, previously a professor in the Jesuit-controlled University of Coimbra, became Prime Minister (and, in effect dictator), a position that he still

occupies with apparently unshaken power. The combined forces of the celestial Virgin of Fatima and the terrestrial cunning of the astute Salazar had, between them, triumphantly liquidated the Portuguese Revolution, and the Portuguese secular State along with that of Franco (which Salazar actively assisted; the original *coup d'état* against the Spanish Democratic Republic in July 1936, began originally in Lisbon). It was one of the most successful counter-revolutions in modern European history. Incidentally, whilst the Virgin is alleged to have predicted the Russian Revolution, her apparition at Fatima belongs actually to the Portuguese Counter-Revolution. After all, it was Portugal, not Russia, that she converted.

During his now generation-long rule, Dr. Salazar has effectively created a Portuguese corporative state on the model of that of Mussolini. More crafty, or more fortunate than the latter, both he and his corporative state have so far succeeded in keeping their enemies at bay. This, Salazar has accomplished, not only by the aid given him by our Lady of Fatima (an aid terrestrial as well as celestial, since pilgrims now represent one of Portugal's few valuable economic assets along with port wine and sardines) but also by efficient use of the methods which proved so successful in the case of his German and Italian prototypes: open terror, concentration camps and most important of all a ubiquitous and efficient political police. It may be added that the imitation is not accidental; the Portuguese political police were trained by agents of the Gestapo including Himmler himself, the most ruthless and dreaded of all the Nazi terrorists.

With such mentors, it is not difficult to visualise the methods used in Portugal, and still more in the colonies, by the Portuguese political police, many examples of which can be found in the literature published by the Portuguese Opposition. This last exists today mainly underground or in exile, a fact vividly broadcast recently by the dramatic seizure of the *Santa Maria* which appears to have been originally intended as the first step towards a *coup d'état* against the Salazar regime in both Portugal and her African colonies. Prior to 1958, Presidential elections were still held openly, but in that year the Opposition, General Delgado, got so many votes that the Government (having first falsified the returns, according to the Opposition) promptly proceeded to suppress popular elections. As is common knowledge since the *Santa Maria* episode, Delgado and most of his supporters are now in exile. So ruthless in recent years has become the regime of Salazar and of "the eleven families" who between them own most of Portugal's oligarchic economy, that even that worldly-wise organisation the Vatican, has become alarmed. Bishops have publicly criticised the miserable conditions of the landless peasantry (who make up the bulk of Portugal's population) and even the hand-picked Catholic Conferences have protested. Needless to say, independent (i.e. genuine) Trade Unions vanished long ago with Opposition political parties.

Such, in brief, is the Salazar set-up. But it has another, still quite significant role in the modern world. Portugal remains Europe's last Imperialist power, a vestigial relic of bygone centuries. In Africa, Portugal rules (on Herren-volk lines) regions several times as large as Great Britain, where forced labour is common, police violence a normal routine and African illiteracy is 99% as against even South Africa's 55%. The Portuguese colonies are also the least

(Concluded on page 103)

This Believing World

The Bishop of Southwark while welcoming the new English Bible is, like most people of his age and over, "reluctant" to part with the Authorised Version on which he was brought up. But it is curious to note that he thinks the translation by J. B. Phillips—it can be had for 8s.—is better than the new one. In any case, Dr. Stockwood prefers the "archaic language" of the AV, though he dodges telling us why. The fact is that the AV is reverent and religious, and none of the modern ones can avoid being pedestrian. They have little of the stuff of poetry in them and the AV is packed with poetry. Which, be it remarked, does not guarantee its truth.

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A picture of a Hindu gentleman has been gracing the Underground as a poster—and we cannot help wondering if he and scores like him who never have their hair cut or who never shave really believe that long hair and a long beard are symbols of great holiness? His name is Maharishi (it means the Great Seer), and he has come to England to gather disciples for "the spiritual regeneration of mankind". He wants particularly "to unfold the latent spiritual faculties in man". Whether this laudable object can be achieved here we do not know, but why wasn't the Great Seer content to try his hand about it with his own 400 million countrymen? After all, they are used to long beards and hair and no doubt also to long disquisitions on "spiritual regeneration". Most people here are bored to death by this kind of humbug—for that is what it really is.

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Nothing succeeds like a good miracle carefully engineered either by the Roman Church or for it. For seven years, backed up by the faith of thousands of sick people, a statue of St. Anne, the mother of the Virgin Mary, has been curing the sick, the lame, and the devout—and now, alas, it is heartbreaking to say so, we learn that it was all

a cheap, vulgar fake. The statue had a broken finger and its owner, Jean Salvade, put a few drops of his own blood on it, and the Miracle occurred. All he had to do was to say that it was the statue which shed the blood, and all the sick fools and others in France who believe in miracles came to the "shrine" to be cured. It became for M. Salvade a most paying game.

★

The most intriguing part about this huge imposture was that, just as happened at Lourdes, numbers of people suffering from quite incurable diseases were immediately cured; and even "unbelievers" were silenced by all kinds of positive evidence. In the end, Salvade confessed that the whole thing was a sheer delusion. The writer in the *Sunday Dispatch* which gives particulars of the fraud also tells us that Salvade is now asking who will forgive him "Perhaps," answers the writer, "only the gentle St. Anne." Only! Isn't St. Anne as big a fraud as her statue?

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According to the "Sunday Dispatch" (March 12) five faith-healers are praying in a doctor's house for £50,000 to make Winchester into "another Lourdes". It appears that the plan comes from the Winchester Healing Fellowship which has a world-wide membership of 25,000, and which wants to build "a sanctuary for the sick". If this is done, then "people will flock here from all over the world to be cured". This shows what the all-believing Fellowship thinks of doctors and the free medical services we get in our Welfare State.

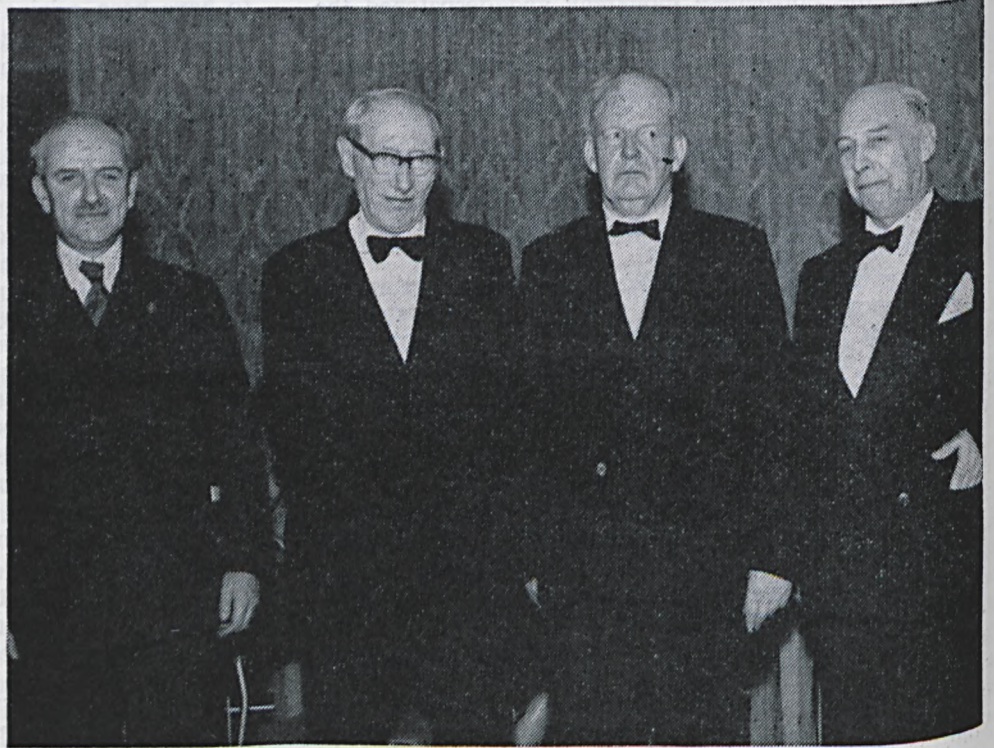
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In any case, one of the "healers" tells us that, "Prayer cured a Camberley woman who had been blind for 14 years"; and a deaf woman after 25 years is now "able to hear". All that is necessary is "inspirational prayer", which no doubt will also rope in the needed £50,000. When it comes to prayer, religion, God, and healing the sick, people are always ready to pour in money for the asking. But have any of the cures been investigated?

MR CUTNER'S 80th BIRTHDAY DINNER



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THE FREETHINKER

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Orders for literature should be sent to the Business Manager of the Pioneer Press, 103 Borough High Street, London, S.E.1

Details of membership of the National Secular Society may be obtained from the General Secretary, 103 Borough High Street, S.E.1. Members and visitors are welcome during normal office hours. Inquiries regarding Secular Funeral Services should also be made to the General Secretary, N.S.S.

Lecture Notices, Etc.

OUTDOOR

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

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

Manchester Branch N.S.S. (Thursday lunchtimes, THE FREETHINKER on sale, Piccadilly, near Queen Victoria Statue.)

Marble Arch Branch N.S.S. (Marble Arch).—Meetings every Sunday, from 4 p.m.; MESSRS. L. EBURY, J. W. BARKER, C. E. WOOD, D. TRIBE and J. P. MURACCIOLE.

Merseside Branch N.S.S. (Pierhead).—Meetings: Wednesdays, 1 p.m.; Sundays, 7.30 p.m.

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, Nottingham).—Every Friday, 1 p.m., Every Sunday, 6.30 p.m.: T. M. MOSLEY.

INDOOR

Marble Arch Branch N.S.S. (The Carpenters' Arms, Seymour Place, W.1), Sunday, April 2nd, 7.15 p.m.: A Lecture.

Notes and News

HAVE YOU GOT your new Bible? Were you one of the thousands who bought up stocks at Smith's on the first day? It would be interesting to know how many Free-thinkers were among the early customers for what Mr. V. S. Pritchett (in the *New Statesman*, 17/3/61) called the "Finalised Version", because of its lapses into "commercialese". In Views and Opinions this week, Mr. Cutner puts this much-publicised translation into something like perspective. One of the claims for it is that it is more intelligible than the Authorised Version. No doubt it is in many cases (e.g. the Pauline Epistles) but nonsense remains nonsense, modernised or no. Turn then to the opening of John, familiar in the AV as: "In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God". We now find: "When all things began, the Word already was, The Word dwelt with God and what God was, the Word was". For our comment we skipped a few pages and found: "This is more than we can stomach! Why listen to such words" (John 6, 60).

★
ROMAN CATHOLIC ARROGANCE has reached such a pitch in England today (encouraged by Protestant timidity) that one is prepared for almost anything. But we must confess surprise on hearing that a priest had come into the Pioneer Press bookshop the other Saturday morning and asked for the removal of anti-Catholic literature from the window because it was offensive to his parishioners. Did he really think he would have the same success with us as with the British Transport Commission? That we would hastily remove *Freedom's Foe: The Vatican* (with its telling photographs of Catholic-Fascist collaboration) from display? If he did he was wrong. On the contrary, a few more copies—and one more picture—were put on show.

THE BRITISH TRANSPORT COMMISSION will now have received reassurances of support in its decision to ban the Family Planning Association advertisement—if readers of *The Universe* heed the advice of the Editor, that is. "It is reprehensible," he wrote in connection with the National Secular Society petition (3/3/61), "that the Commission should be subjected to this sort of pressure for simply adhering to their policy of refusing religiously controversial advertisements". "It is an eminently sensible policy", he went on, "in full conformity with general public opinion and one that we believe has always been implemented fairly and impartially. Family planning is a subject of acute religious controversy and it would be intolerable if a secularist-sponsored petition, through names collected in such a way as this, were allowed to influence the authorities". We are quite sure that British Transport Advertising will find no indication that the writer of any of the letters of reassurance was a member of the Roman Catholic Church.

★

The Universe wondered, by the by, whether the signatories of the National Secular Society petitions "appreciated" that the sponsors were "a body of atheists, agnostics and others whose aims . . . include the abolition of the Blasphemy Laws and of religious teaching and worship in State-supported schools". We don't know, of course. What we do know is that the Society's name and address were given on all petitions. A fortnight later, the *Catholic Times* (17/3/61), contained the alarming news that, "A student selling the *Catholic Times* outside the Albert Hall before the annual *Daily Worker* Rally, noticed names and addresses being collected for a petition against the removal of the poster".

★

RATHER IRONICALLY, in the *Financial Times* (16/3/61), British Transport Advertising offered to "plan your strategy" in advertising. Featuring a half-tone of a pretty girl, it declared, "Whoever she is—whatever her age, class, tastes, opinions, views or preferences—she has to travel . . . And when she travels, she sees advertisements on British Transport Advertising sites. How can she help it? There's no getaway from them".

★

MR. FELIX F. CORBIE of Trinidad, wrote to us recently that the *Trinidad Guardian* seemed to be reporting "the most absurd things" from England, and he instanced (5/2/61): "A Jesuit priest is to appear on Welsh and Western England television later this month in an investigation of black magic and witchcraft". The priest was Father Joseph Christie, who "has made a close study of the occult for 25 years", and the seven programmes resulted from "a year's research throughout most of Britain". Fr. Christie had "no doubt witchcraft still exists" and said he had "come across a verifiable report of black magic". Readers will agree with Mr. Corbie's comment on such news.

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American Secularist Leader Interviewed on TV

EDITOR'S NOTE: The Paul Coates TV programmes, originating in Los Angeles, present interviews with outstanding personalities. This was the third time in the past three years Governor Olson has been invited for an interview on this popular programme, and we print it in its entirety from the paper of the United Secularists of America, *Progressive World* (February, 1961).

COATES: This man became governor of the State of California despite the fact that he never took the full oath of office. He refused to utter the words "So help me God". He believed and still believes that God is a myth. And you will meet this extremely influential atheist in just a moment.

The subject of this report is perhaps one of the most sensitive topics in our society. We are going to discuss atheism—disbelief in God. In previous programmes we focused on a number of religions, especially those little known to the average man. Now we are going to focus on the least known of all creeds—the philosophy of the non-believer. We are going to learn something of the often under-estimated influence of atheism, an influence exercised in some cases by very highly placed men. I guess this covers Culbert L. Olson, president of a nationwide organisation, the United Secularists of America, and formerly governor of the state of California. Governor Olson, were you born here in the state of California?

OLSON: No, I was born in the town of Filmore in Utah.

COATES: That is a Mormon community, isn't it?

OLSON: Yes, a Mormon community.

COATES: Were your parents atheists?

OLSON: No, they — particularly my mother — followed her ancestors' beliefs, those of the Mormons.

COATES: You say particularly your mother. What about your father?

OLSON: Well, he certainly wasn't orthodox in religion, and was not very much dedicated to religious activities.

COATES: Were you trained in the Mormon faith?

OLSON: Well, in my youth I didn't hear anything but that in Sunday schools.

COATES: Did you accept the Mormon faith?

OLSON: I never accepted it when I began to think about it, when I commenced to exercise freethought and reason.

COATES: At what age would you say that you began to exercise freethought and reason?

OLSON: I began quite early. I was sceptical of the emotionalism and the preaching and teaching of religion by the heads of the church and the teachers in the schools and those dedicated to the Mormon church.

COATES: Now, you've been quoted as saying that when you were a very young child—I think at about the age of ten—you were criticised by your teachers because other children in your class would report they had seen visions of angels and you would say that you had never seen such a thing.

OLSON: Well, it was a Mormon school and the principal in his sermons to the children would arouse emotionalism and the children would become so emotional that they would declare they saw angels. Of course I did not see any angels and therefore did not join in the emotionalism stirred up by the preacher. I was called into the principal's office by him. He said that he noticed that I didn't participate in the spirit of the occasion. I told him that I didn't see any angels and I didn't believe that the other children did.

COATES: How did your scepticism affect your mother? You told me that she was a religious woman.

OLSON: My scepticism didn't affect her while I was in my youth—that is up to about my eighth year, or even up to the time when I began to analyse religious beliefs. I began first to disbelieve in the church of my mother and later I visited other churches to find out what their teachings were. I didn't get any satisfaction in any of their preachings.

COATES: Did you eventually tell your mother that you thought you were an atheist?

OLSON: I eventually did, but I waited a long time before I let her know it. I did not like to disturb her because she was the most humane, the most kind, and the most self-sacrificing person I have ever known and I didn't want to hurt her, so I did not disclose my unbelief to her for a long time.

COATES: As a boy did you have a brother or a sister or a close friend who shared your beliefs or disbelief?

OLSON: Yes, I had an older brother who shared it. In fact he became an atheist himself, and my other brothers and sisters were not very orthodox.

COATES: You once wrote that you became a confirmed atheist after hearing a speech by the famous Robert Ingersoll. How did just one speech affect you this way?

OLSON: It affected me in this way. It was in Washington, D.C., where I had been going to law school and doing secretarial work for congressional members. I learned that Robert Ingersoll was going to speak on a Sunday evening, so I went and heard him. I had felt so much alone in my beliefs. I didn't believe in any of the religions and I had come to the point where I didn't believe in the existence of a God. When I heard Ingersoll's bold and reasonable address, I felt that I wasn't quite alone and that there must be many others who were disbelievers too.

COATES: What about your wife? Was she an atheist?

OLSON: Well, I can't say that she was entirely an atheist. She was a Mormon as was her family. I knew that she was aware of my disbelief and she was not critical of it. She was not a church attendant. She was what I would call a freethinker who didn't take religious beliefs seriously.

COATES: Now, as I recall you went to Washington at the age of nineteen as secretary to a congressman and graduated from law school there in 1901 and then you got involved in Utah politics. When did you come to California?

OLSON: I came to live in California in 1920 after serving four years in the Utah state senate.

COATES: At that time you had your family?

OLSON: Yes, my wife and two sons.

COATES: And then you rose to a high-ranking post in the Democratic party and became the chairman of the state central committee. Is that correct?

OLSON: It is. I became active in supporting President Roosevelt and other liberals.

COATES: You were the governor of California from 1939 to 1942. Is that right?

OLSON: To 1943.

COATES: Now, how well known were your atheist views when you ran for governor of California?

OLSON: Well, I can't say how well known they were.

COATES: Isn't it true that only your close associates knew about that?

OLSON: My close associates and other people knew about it, but I don't think that most people did because—well, there were too many.

COATES: Wouldn't you doubt that your political opponents knew about your atheism?

OLSON: I doubt that they did. However, I didn't care whether they did or not.

COATES: Or if they had known they would probably have made political use of it.

OLSON: They did make use of this against Upton Sinclair who was a well known atheist and writer and who supported atheism for years. But he was nominated on the Democratic ticket for governor of California.

COATES: That was before you, wasn't it?

OLSON: That was in 1934. I was nominated in 1938.

(To be concluded)

"A Most Remarkable Woman"

By C. BRADLAUGH BONNER

TO MEMBERS of the National Secular Society, Annie Besant must always be of interest. A very good biography by an American, Mr. Arthur H. Nethercot, has recently been published in this country by Rupert Hart-Davis under the title *The First Five Lives of Annie Besant*, price 42s. The title would suggest that Mr. Nethercot finds something cattish in his subject. Freethinkers and Radicals have said many hard things of this lady, but I do not recall just that one, though she could be cattish towards Eleanor Marx. What I think he has in mind is her "mutability", rather than her felinity; and the "lives" mark rather the influences under which she came, Scott, Bradlaugh, Aveling, the Fabians and Blavatsky. As W. E. Adams in his *Memoirs of a Social Atom* noted, "strong-minded as she appeared to be, she was yet a very creature of circumstance", a chameleon taking her colour from the dominating personality of the moment. She had a genius for adsorbing rather than absorbing these personalities; she could assume them and their ways of thinking better almost than they could express themselves. From each she borrowed "the mantle of Elijah" and wore it with brilliant distinction till it was cast aside for a new vestment.

Mr. Nethercot has delved into libraries and sought knowledge among the Theosophists in America and India. If he had taken the same pains to meet British Secularists he might have avoided one or two minor errors. Such as the frequent reference to the *National Reformer* as the *Reformer*, which he would have discovered was a later journal edited by my mother. As Mr. Nethercot likes initials he could have called the paper, as it was commonly called by its editors and publishers, the *NR*. He would also have known that Joseph Gurney nominated Bradlaugh to be Radical candidate for Parliament at Northampton, and was not a "Conservative voter" (p. 196). He would have known that the illness which attacked Bradlaugh at the end of 1889 was Bright's disease, which finally killed him in 1891 (p. 294); and he might have discovered that "the mysterious 'D'" (p. 194) was J. H. Levy.

These are all small matters. So is the eversight, in referring to the meeting of the International Freethought Council at Amsterdam in 1883. Mr. Nethercot writes (p. 197) that Mrs. Besant was "seated at President Roorda's right hand with famous men like Büchner and Müller further down the table. Where Bradlaugh sat, she did not say in the story she sent to the [*National Reformer*]. But she did; if Mr. Nethercot had read carefully the report, he would have found that Bradlaugh was the first man on Roorda's left.

In an autobiography or in a biography written during or shortly after the life concerned, the reader expects to meet with abundant day-to-day detail which will enable him to relive the life described much as it appeared to the subject of the biography. It will be difficult to see the wood for the trees. As the interval between the death of the subject and the date of the biography lengthens so should the wood take shape and the trees fall into their proper

places. It will soon be three-quarters of a century since Annie Besant deserted Freethought and died to Rationalism. That she lived a further forty odd years—and odd they were to the thinking of her former friends—in a country and company remote from those of her earlier years should not prevent us from gaining a picture of the "wood" of seventy to eighty years ago. I think Mr. Nethercot has been helpful here. That he was drawn to study Mrs. Besant through his interest in Shaw has given a certain slant to this biography. Just as Shaw the dramatist tended to dramatise himself (sometimes as the romantic hero to the ladies), Mrs. Besant "as a narrative writer never failed to take full advantage of her dramatic opportunities" (p. 146). She herself in her Autobiography refers (p. 138) to her "fatal facility of speech". Mr. Nethercot overlooks occasionally Mrs. Besant's tendency to embroider the facts, as when she refers to her attack of rheumatic fever in 1878. Actually the attack lasted only a week followed by three weeks of convalescence. She was nursed during the whole period by Alice and Hypatia Bradlaugh who went with her to North Wales for the last week. She was away from work only a month all told and during this time Bradlaugh was, as usual very busy, giving a round of lectures in Lancashire, Nottingham, etc., as well as being involved in three lawsuits. The story she told of Bradlaugh feeding her with ice and milk was, I fancy, largely what Goethe would have called *Dichtung* and not *Wahrheit*.

I have read Mr. Nethercot's book with great interest, and found it easy to read, for it is written easily and presents a lively, and to my judgment, fair picture of its subject and the times in which she lived. Only once do I remember meeting Mrs. Besant; when my mother took me to hear her speak—I forget on what subject—and presented me beforehand. I can however see her clearly, dressed in a sack-like tussore garment of much the same colour as her grey hair and greyish yellow face; remote, uninterested. I doubt if I shall read Mr. Nethercot's subsequent volume on Mrs. Besant's "four lives" in India with so much interest. She had become too remote, uninteresting and somewhat absurd.

PORTUGAL—A MEDIEVAL DICTATORSHIP

(Concluded from page 99)

industrialised in Africa. In India, Portugal, India's first colonial invader is now her last. She still hangs on to Goa (population about 600,000), in defiance of all Indian aspirations, and it looks very much at present as if only either violence on India's part—which so far she has resolutely declined to use—or a revolution in Portugal herself will cut this Gordian Knot. Certainly upon the facts revealed by the Democratic Opposition in Portugal such a revolution is long overdue, for as currently conducted, the Salazar regime, clerical, Fascist and colonialist, stands out the proverbial mile as perhaps the blackest of all Europe's black spots.

The Christian Miracle

UNLIKE THE LOCAL CHRISTIANS, I read every word of the parish magazine. Whilst fellow freethinkers are retrieving their eyebrows let me hasten to explain that I find the illustrious journal mentioned above a mine of unconscious humour, unsurpassed in contemporary journalism. I don't hesitate to class the parish rag with *Tiger Tim*, *The Rainbow* and *Comic Cuts*—of forty years ago—for sheer readability.

For instance, his reverence has devoted a whole quarto page to the correct handling of the chalice. Now I ask you, chaps: Here we are, well over 2,000 million of us, black, white, red, yellow and indeterminate, clinging to this sorry globe, living in hourly—more precisely, four-minutely—peril of instantaneous combustion, and the Rev. Mr. Ramsbottom can find nothing better to occupy his brilliant mind than the correct handling of the holy vessel.

His reverence, obviously a pedant of 19th century vintage, is, nevertheless, a genius of no mean order when it comes to the let's-get-together-and-have-fun department. Even the unbeliever can sympathise with the men in black when they are obliged to organise and foster fatuous social frivolities to attract their dim-witted flocks to Holy Church. But when the parson refers in the magazine to a being he calls "Very God of Very God" and expects the common herd to follow his line of country, I for one, lose my not inconsiderable sympathy for the parish priest. The latter has, after all, a pretty unenviable task, flogging a dead horse, and coping with the petty spites, jealousies and intrigues of his loving flock.

As for the parish rag, I recently came across an item which, I suggest, ought really to be brought to the attention of the Star Chamber. Considering the Church's stern uncompromising attitude to sex and its many murky ramifications, I was pained to read that the local females have actually been given organised demonstrations on making their bodies more than naturally attractive to the prowling male—as if the female figure was not already more than sufficiently "taking". I refer to an item reporting that a demonstration of "making up" the female visage was given in the village hall. Mrs. Fluffy Feathers kindly acted as model, and the whole affair had the blessing of Holy Church—apparently—otherwise it would not have been reported in the PM.

That the ladies of the church should lend themselves to such goings-on is a matter I can only suppose has some vague connection with the beauty of holiness.

In conclusion, I imagine that the parish magazine of the Church of the Ascension will shortly make instructive reading. Surely a classic example of "whodunit"?

A. O. SNOOK.

CORRESPONDENCE

"RUSTICUS"

May I say I am sincerely sorry to read of the passing of "Rusticus". His bright and well written descriptions of country life and enlightened sympathy with its inhabitants were a pleasant break in the often rather heavy going of other articles, and the many twice-told (or multi-told) tales of other contributors, and were enjoyed by house-bound country lovers like myself. Surely a little lightness now and then may be relished by the wisest men, even by serious Freethinkers. Well, he has been voted down *Frater salve atque vale*.
(MRS.) G. MATSON.

TRAVELLER'S TALES

I travel a good deal, including twice a year to Spain and Italy, and there are many stories I can recall of priests in various places. I am just leaving for my second visit to Sicily. On my first I booked at Palma for a tour, and our guide, a young woman, spoke some French and English in addition to her native tongue. She told us that when after an early marriage her husband died and left her with two small children in poor

circumstances, she approached her parish priest for help. This could only be given he said if the children were given to the Church. As for herself, he said, trying to put his hand down inside her blouse, that depended upon how she co-operated with him. The priestly hand movement was demonstrated upon my wife in full view of the coach full of people, as we were in the front seats. Once in Madrid my wife noticed how, after a fat priest came up from an underground lavatory, several boys kissed his fingers. My wife remarked that for the sake of hygiene, she hoped that he had washed his hands. But I do know that he had not, because there were no facilities for that purpose in the lavatory. Early in 1960 a decree was sent from Rome to Erin banning all priests from being seen drinking in pubs. Well in August last I saw several young priests propping up the bar in Alghero airport, drinking Italian beer.

J. GAFFNEY.

BTC PROTEST

All praise to THE FREETHINKER for drawing attention to the interference of the Roman Catholic Church in our internal affairs, notably in the case of the Family Planning Association posters.

This latest piece of impudence is only a sample of what to expect, if they are allowed to get away with it.

I have written to MPs about it, but most seem afraid to discuss it. They seem only to want to put off the fateful day when someone will have to do more than discuss it. Our freedoms are slowly disappearing, and unless this Alien church is curbed, we shall awaken one day to find that it is too late. Good luck, keep it up.
LEONARD GILBERT.

OBITUARY

Elizabeth ("Poppy") Ridley, the beloved and loving wife of our President, was buried on Saturday, March 25th in Highgate Cemetery, within a few yards of Karl Marx and Herbert Spencer. At her request, a group of personal friends stood in silence at the graveside to bid her farewell. Dr. Warrell and Mr. J. O'Hare then spoke in simple and moving words of the sweet, kind and sunny nature of the lady who had left us, so voicing the feeling of all of us there, and of all who knew her. The sunlight danced on the hillside as she was laid to rest, an appropriate setting for one who had danced on many stages, before English, Continental and New World audiences, and who loved, with all the passion of her being; light, colour, song and rhythm.
E.E.

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